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AFRICAN PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC UNION  
OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

*The Interests Of The Workers And Landless Peasants Shall Be Paramount*

## A SEASON OF MILITANT WORKERS' STRIKES

Two strikes captured media headlines from early December 2009 until settlements were reached in late January 2010. In the hotel and gaming industry, workers at Sun International South Africa stopped working on 4 December. These workers are members of the South African Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Unions (SACCAWU), an affiliate of the COSATU federation. In the soft drinks and beer industry, workers managed to shutdown factories of the Amalgamated Beverages Industries (ABI produce for Coca Cola and SA Breweries). This strike started on 22 December. Workers at ABI are members of the Food and Allied Workers Unions, also affiliated to COSATU. Despite minor differences between these two strikes, it is worth underscoring a few major similarities: how the bosses tried to undermine the strike; the nature of union leadership support; and the workers' demands.

The bosses of ABI and Sun International responded to the strikes according to their expected routine. They launched a ruthless campaign to intimidate, insult and harass workers. What these tactics always set out to accomplish is to break strikes and crush the resolve and morale of workers. But the callous stratagems of the bosses evidently failed to produce the intended outcomes. The Financial Mail, a weekly business magazine that voices the interests of the capitalists, tried to offer this balanced assessment of the ABI strike:

"The strike is significant in that it has straddled 2009 and the new year, with observers saying it could offer insight into trade union action this year." (*Financial Mail*, 8 Jan 2010)

COSATU engaged in what could be described as low-intensity solidarity activities. It issued its normal press releases: "The federation endorses the support which our provincial structures in the North West and Eastern Cape provinces have already given to the strikers and pledges to mobilise solidarity action if the employers do not reach a settlement." (COSATU Press Statement, Dec 2009). The FAWU leadership invested efforts in globalising its solidarity campaign, through the International Union of Food and Allied Workers Associations (IUF).

Included in its calls for solidarity, FAWU appealed for a selective consumer boycott of Coca-Cola and SAB products. This indirect method to rally broad community support for the striking workers went unheeded. But the union leadership also promised to mobilize mass local solidarity. Yet they did not clarify how to translate this into practice. How, for instance, could community movements and progressive political organizations be drawn into united action around the demands of striking workers? If this 'holiday season' of strikes is indeed a harbinger of a mass revival of trade union militancy, then the task to construct such dynamic united fronts must be a top priority.

Workers' demands are a window into the ways in which the capitalist system depresses the working and living conditions of workers. The demand for higher wages, for instance, is basically a barometer of hardships working families face to keep pace with the skyrocketing cost of living.

The bosses pegged their wage offer slightly above the economy-wide inflation rate, complaining that other input costs (transportation, electricity, fuel, etc.) are significantly squeezing their profit margins. Yet working people confront inflation rates that are much further above the average inflation rate - usually double! Workers must expose the real driving forces behind inflation and formulate stronger demands against the bosses. Capitalist profits, fictitious credit, speculative finance and the extravagant consumption of the rich are the main drivers of inflation.

Sun International, for instance, was particularly happy about the 2-year wage agreement, which is to be renegotiated in 2011. They welcomed the ➔

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➡ “period of stability without the pressure and potential conflict of annual wage negotiations” (*Mail & Guardian 25 Jan 2010*). But capitalism is inherently unstable as the ongoing worldwide recession so vividly illustrates. Most top-notch bourgeois economists and politicians failed, unsurprisingly, to accurately forecast recent crises (be it massive food inflation or general slumps) despite boasting of all their state-of-the-art models and brainpower. They get rewarded to mystify economic realities and talk-up crisis-ravaged economies. Working people always pay the total costs of crises which are downloaded onto them in form of higher unemployment, wage cuts, social service cutbacks, etc. Wages have to automatically rise with the real cost of living the labouring classes confront and this is bound to occur more frequently than once every 12 months.

Trade unions recognize that they are locked in a titanic battle against increasingly temporary and uncertain job arrangements. Two demands of the SACCAWU workers reflect this: “The extension of the bargaining unit to cover Union members who do not benefit from collective agreements” and “An increase in the proportion of core employees”. This is related to the demand of FAWU for a “moratorium on the use of labour brokers”. Workers correctly attack labour brokers as modern traffickers

of slave labour. The boom in outsourced and part-time jobs has its source in capitalist strategies to cut their ‘labour costs’. It flows from constant competition to restructure the capital-labour (or profits-wages) relationship to extract more profits from workers. It involves reversing the rights workers gained through an entire history of resistance. It sabotages the ability of workers to build democratic trade unions and engage in collective bargaining. ABI workers contracted through labour brokers have been openly threatened with dismissal! It splinters the working class so that workers compete among themselves for increasingly inhumane conditions of work. This is not merely a legal issue to be resolved in courtroom battles, but opens the debate on political power as the battle is being fought in parliament.

Workers at ABI demanded to “work only weekdays”. This is fundamentally a demand for a shorter working week and a better quality or more dignified family life. It is indeed a powerful and vital demand in the context of massive unemployment, poverty and generalized economic crises. A fairly basic demand, such as a 35 hour working week without a loss in wages, needs to feature boldly on the agenda of the trade union movement. ●

## ***ANC NATIONAL SPOKESPERSON SPEAKS AGAINST SELF-ORGANISED PROTEST MOVEMENT***

Jackson Mthembu is the national spokesperson of the African National Congress (ANC). He rose to prominence during the mass revolts of the 1980s in what was then called Eastern Transvaal. Back in that era, he rapidly evolved into a versatile activist who engaged in battles on several fronts. As an education activist, he participated in the Witbank Education Crisis Committee. As a trade unionist, he involved himself in the Metal and Allied Workers Union. As a civic activist, he threw himself into the single-issue protests of the United Democratic Front (UDF). Steeped in this populist *ad hocism*, Mthembu took the logical step to join the ANC. After 1994, he served stints in the Mpumalanga provincial cabinet and eventually gained permission to enter the inner-circles of the governing party’s top leadership.

In October 2009, the *Sunday Independent* published a long interview with Mr Mthembu. This interview took place in the midst of mounting resistance against the deepening slump in the living standards of the labouring majority. Strikes and community protests have been growing in size, scale and militancy. And these self-organized movements for a better life have become a thorn in the flesh of the ANC. It was thus impossible for the governing party’s chief spin-doctor not to offer a diagnosis of the surrounding turmoil and how to resolve it.

The following words express the irate party spokesperson’s viewpoint on the ongoing protests:

*“The people have every right to protest, but the violence is uncalled for. Particularly since there is a presidential hotline. And they can call Sicelo Siceka, the minister of co-operative governance, and they have the numbers of the branches. They can call me today or bring their problems to the attention of relevant authorities. Why do they have to burn down their schools and clinics?”* (*Sunday Independent*, 4 October 2009, page 11)

What is the logic of this loyal party servant’s reasoning? Stripped of its patronising insults and disgusting tone, the essence of his argument is clear: Channel grievances via phones, call centres and the internet! Stop organized and programmatic mass action! It promotes individual rather than purposeful collective action. Appealing to state bureaucrats to attend to an isolated complaint, which in turn rests on how much money the complainant commands, is typical liberalism. This evil plot to silence protest and eliminate collective grassroots participation in politics runs counter to genuine workers’ democracy. It is consistent with the top-down campaigns of the UDF advice offices which helped to demobilize self-organized grassroots ➡

➔ movements in the 1980s. UDF leaders forcefully obstructed the radicalisation of mass anti-apartheid anger into a revolutionary anti-capitalist political movement. Their actions helped to prepare the ground for donor-driven NGOs to gain a firm and dominant foothold in post-1994 struggles.

Spin-doctor Mthembu's passionate touting of bureaucratic rule and individualism is unlikely to gain mass appeal. For example, despite all the initial fanfare about this useless presidential hotline, it has

proven to be an embarrassing failure for its zealous promoters. President Zuma could not even answer a tiny fraction of the calls and in any case cannot be bothered about visible betterment in the living conditions of the poor majority. Thus Jackson Mthembu has exposed himself as a fierce opponent of self-organized mass action to advance the interests of the working class and landless peasantry. ●

## EDUCATION CRISIS DEEPENS

The educational authorities in South Africa have been keeping up the illusion that they are serious about solving the education crisis. At best they'll manage the crisis. Since the start of the GEAR inspired rationalization / privatisation programme in education and billions of rands later, there has not been much of a difference. Through a devious system of introducing their new education for barbarism by stealth, the educational departments have consistently been implementing a system aimed at robbing South African youth of a progressive and meaningful education.

Over and above the poor matric results other facts and figures make equally nightmarish reading. According to City Press (21/2/2010) 576 public schools have been closed in five provinces - Limpopo, Mpumalanga, North West, Eastern Cape and Gauteng. The reasons, as put forward by education department officials, range from students in townships leaving township schools and opting for enrolment in former model C schools; some closed due to migration of families from rural to urban areas, etc. A report released by the South African Institute of Race Relations in 2009 concluded that parents are opting out of the state education system and prefer their children to attend independent schools. What ever the merits or demerits of these figures and conclusions drawn, it represents an inexcusable state of affairs. On top of this the report found that between 2000 and 2008 the number of children attending public schools declined in four provinces – ranging from 4.3% in Eastern Cape to 15.1% in Northwest Province. Though these figures do not apply nationally it is true that in South Africa, a reduced number of pupils translate into fewer teachers at a school. Fewer teachers translate into fewer subject offerings, a bigger workload, higher failure rates and the inevitable downward spiral towards dysfunctionality.

Many so-called experts have been commenting on this situation suggesting that teacher training is what is lacking. Teacher unions blame government for lack of support regarding infrastructure and requisite professional training and guidance. The president of the country has suggested that the old

apartheid inspector system be reintroduced. Parents are criticized for not being sufficiently involved in the running of schools and the education of their children. Parents in turn say that it is the job of the government to provide decent education for their children. And right in the middle, students find themselves caught up in this glorious educational mess. For close to two decades the focus has been on syllabus changes, Outcomes based Education (OBE) and the like. The consistent introduction – by stealth and other means – of a policy of private-public partnerships, in short, privatised education, has been shifted from the agenda. The destructive effects of this system are plain for all to see.

The program of government to 'rationalise' education in accordance with its GEAR policies has meant the following for a township school in the Western Cape which cannot pay for governing body teachers: In 2008 the school had 40 teachers for 1150 pupils (29 : 1); in 2009 there were 36 teachers for 1124 pupils (31:1) in 2010 there will be 32 teachers for 1300 pupils (41:1). Teacher numbers are continuously cut while there is a huge uproar about quality of education and the need for decisive 'interventions' in education. Education ministers are quick to say that there is no short-term solution to the crisis. But when looking at their non-solutions and the nasty habit they have of always coming up with targets to be achieved by such and such a year (usually 5 years or more, knowing they'll probably not be around to account for their earlier promises), their "solutions" amount to no solutions at all.

One solution offered is the vocational training students can do (at their own expense) at FET colleges. This means students can exit the school system after grade 9. An out of the blue announcement was made by Mr Zozo Siyengo, Chief Director, FET Colleges, in the second week of December 2009 that iKapa bursaries that were available to such students before, were no longer available for 2010; and if they were, it would be much reduced. The reason offered was the old, tired 'financial constraints' chorus line. As with e.g. the proposed Eskom price increases, the financial burden is shifted full square onto the backs of working class parents and their families. ➔

➔ Having to face up to all these pressures and demands predicated on having money to move ahead in life, working class communities are forced into situations where fighting back becomes the only strategy for survival. Battles on the education front must be combined with struggles for decent housing and affordable electricity and water. Local councils, provincial and national parliaments are only really interested in passing laws to keep the rich in power and the working class out of power. Building organizations of the workers and landless peasants for the purpose of forming their own councils and assemblies is what needs to be tackled head-on. ●

### **SOCCER WORLD CUP 2010: ANYTHING TO SHOUT ABOUT?**

Small Traders in Johannesburg and Cape Town have been told that they will have to close shop for three months, either apply for trading licenses in one of the fan parks or get lost. This all is bound to happen in the name of the soccer world cup tournament to be held in South Africa mid-2010. So much for job creation. What this amounts to is job destruction.

## ***THE NECESSITY OF A POLITICAL PROGRAMME***

When in 2002, organisations such as the Anti-Privatisation Forum, the Landless People's Movement, Jubilee South, etc, came together to establish the Social Movements Indaba, it signalled the recognition of the fact that a broad united front was needed to take up the struggle of the masses in the new environment that had come into being with the negotiated settlement. At the time and unfortunately, still today, there were conflicting views on the role that political organisations could play. A sense of betrayal by the major political organisations purporting to represent the masses in the negotiated settlement and the subsequent parliament, left many believing that all political organisations are inherently self-seeking and that none could represent the suffering masses who now needed to conduct the struggle on their own terms. Political organisations could be tolerated only if they conceded to assist and support the people's struggles without attempting to impose their own ideas.

An attempt was then made to construct unity around economic and not political demands. Ever since, there has been an emphasis on privatisation, and the government policy - GEAR, summed up in neo-liberalism as a global phenomenon, being the prime problem. Instead of progressing and growing in strength the SMI suffered various setbacks – the virtual collapse of the Landless People's Movement (LPM), the establishment of Abahalali base-Mjondolo as a body with a different perspective and the tribulations of the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign which subsequently withdrew from the SMI and has joined an alliance with Abahlali, what remains of the Gauteng LPM and the KZN based Rural Network. This front is known as the Poor People's Alliance, which is firmly anti-political.

It must by now be recognised that it is difficult to base the struggle on opposition to neo-liberalism alone without a positive, unifying political demand. Those engaged in separate struggles around housing, unemployment, health and education see no real basis for uniting their struggles as opposition to neo-liberalism by itself does not tell them how their

respective problems could be solved. Vague propaganda about socialism also does not help. There is an urgent need to show that our struggle is indeed a political one, as indeed, it was in the past when the central political demand was for non-racial democracy. But that demand was subverted by the negotiated settlement in which a new constitution, determining how democracy would work, was drafted behind the people's backs. Although it is touted as the best in the world this constitution presents us with serious problems. In the first place it protects private property rights. This means that the minority who owned the mines, farms and factories in the past have had their ownership defended and protected by law. Nor did the constitution do away with the welter of laws on the statute books which were derived from Roman-Dutch law, protecting these private property rights. The policy of Black Economic Empowerment has hardly changed things. It has simply enabled a few Blacks to enrich themselves and then enjoy the same protection of the law for their riches.

A second problem with the constitution is that it only guarantees a person with the right to look for work anywhere in the country but it does not guarantee the right to work. What use is it to be able to look for work if you cannot find work? Thirdly, the constitution entrenches the outmoded rule of tribal chiefs, headmen and traditional leaders. It is not just a preservation of cultural traditions. These persons are not elected democratically. They are elevated above the ordinary masses, they are paid salaries out of tax payers money and they have been given extensive powers over land in the rural areas, working to keep people divided along tribal lines. It is the exact opposite of nation building!

These few examples show that the South African constitution was drafted to protect and serve the interests of a minority and that is not democracy. We must therefore demand a new constituent assembly which is fully represented by the labouring masses and which is charged with the task of drafting a new constitution in the interests of the majority and ➔

➔ not the minority. This should be the central demand in a political programme in which all other demands such as the right to work, health care, housing and free education are linked. Its achievement would mean the end of neo-liberalism and the special powers of the rich minority in society and the beginning of the political power of the people. New initiatives such as the Conference for A Democratic Left and the Truth Conference would do

well to bear in mind that without a clear-cut political programme, which does not rely on vague demands for socialism alone, building unity will be a most arduous task. It is time to move away from a dependency on economic struggle alone. Nor can we only campaign to force a reactionary ruling class to change its policies while continuing to rule. We have to rule ourselves. ●

## THE NATIONALISATION WRANGLE

Ever since the issue was raised in June last year Julius Malema and the ANC Youth League have relentlessly been demanding the nationalisation of the mines. This has caused a bit of a stir in tripartite alliance circles. One of the first responses was from ANC Secretary-General and SACP Chairman, Gwede Mantashe who stated that nationalisation was not on the ANC agenda and was not likely. He was followed by SACP deputy secretary general, Jeremy Cronin, who crafted two carefully considered replies, questioning the validity of Malema's call. This only caused him to be labelled a reactionary and a white political messiah belonging to the fake left. Later on, Minister of Mineral Resources, Suzan Shabangu, sought to allay the concerns of mining business leaders at a conference of the Mining Indaba by stating that nationalisation was not government policy and it would not happen in her lifetime. In any case, she added that state participation in the mining sector was nothing new. It already owned diamond mining concern Alexkor and had a stake in Anglo American. (*The Times* 2/02/2010). For this she also earned the ire of Julius Malema who accused her of "trying to impress imperialists". (*Cape Times* 03/02/2010). Finally, in a radio interview president Zuma stated that nationalisation of mines is not ANC policy. The issue had to be debated by the ANC before it could become ANC policy. On Shabangu, Zuma said: "When the Minister says there is no policy on this issue, there is no policy" (*Tim Modise SABC Interview* 14/02/2010). But Malema continues with his call.

What is the essence of Malema's demand? It turns out that he asks for no more than the state owning at least 60% of mining shares. So "nationalisation" means that the state must own

shares in a mining business enterprise! Indeed, in attempting to rebut arguments against his demand he said "This (nationalised mining) is happening in Botswana, where De Beers are in partnership with the state. The state owns 60 percent of its minerals and De Beers even pays tax." But even if the state took charge of 100% of mining shares how could this benefit the labouring masses? With its neo-liberal policy of privatisation, state owned enterprises such as ESKOM, Transnet and SA Airways are run as private business concerns. Moreover while paying their directors super salaries, these enterprises are chronically in debt, requiring regular government bail-outs. There is little hope that we could expect anything better if the mines were nationalised according to Malema's terms.

What of Cronin's wise counsel that nationalisation under capitalism cannot be a fundamental gain for the working class and what is needed is socialisation rather than loosely defined nationalisation? This, according to Cronin, can only happen once we have had a socialist revolution. But in the meantime, according to the SACP ideologues, we have to complete the (never ending) National Democratic Revolution within the bounds of the current, national constitution at that!

The real answer is the call for nationalisation of the mines and placing them under workers' control, nationalisation of the land without forced collectivisation, for the benefit of the peasantry and all South Africans. Indeed we look forward to a society where private property is an anathema. Our immediate demand is for a new constituent assembly, fully representative of the masses where these questions can be fully addressed. ●



# *From Around the World*

## **NO WAY FORWARD AT COPENHAGEN**

For 30 years the developed capitalist countries have succeeded in preventing effective action on global warming. At the Copenhagen assembly of 192 nations of the world, once again they succeeded in thwarting the plans for tackling climate change. The recommendations of the IPCC, the authoritative scientific body on climate change set up by the UN, could hardly have been clearer and were cast aside. The room for manoeuvre to save the climate becomes narrower with each passing year, which magnifies the failure of Copenhagen.

The IPCC recommended that in recognition of common and differentiated responsibilities, developed capitalist countries in the North, which are responsible for 70% of climate change, reduce their CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 80-95% by 2050. The countries of the South, whose accumulated historic and current emissions on a per person basis were far lower than in the North were expected to significantly cut their emissions but proportionately less than the countries of the North. Realisation of the fundamental right of the South to social and economic development requires a massive transfer of clean technologies so that they can escape economic development based on fossil fuels.

The so-called solutions to climate change proposed by the developed capitalist countries do not work. This applies to their carbon trading scheme, setting up a market for trading emission rights and credits. Companies which have reached the limit of CO<sub>2</sub> that they are allowed to emit, have to pay other companies which have not used up their quota for the equivalent CO<sub>2</sub> emissions they require. Companies can also avoid cutting their own emissions, if they invest in equivalent emission reduction projects in the South. Studies have shown that many carbon trading transactions do not produce any reductions in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Carbon trading has created massive profits for capital. It has established the foundation for carbon neo-colonialism involving distribution of emission quotas between countries on the basis of the volume of CO<sub>2</sub> emitted in 1990, locking in unequal North-South development. It has also opened up a new field of activity for the IMF and World Bank.

The global increase in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions underlines the failure of the carbon trading system and the refusal of the big capitalist countries in the North to tackle the issue at source. To do so, they would have to radically reduce fossil fuels and replace them with

renewable forms of energy, as well as consuming less energy. Campaign groups have recently exposed the lending practices of big banks, whose appetite for funding environmentally damaging energy and infrastructure projects such as super sized dams, huge mining projects, oil and gas pipelines and coal power plants, is large. These practices continue despite the agreement they reached seven years ago that was meant to prevent such abuses. As for consuming less energy, capitalism is propelled forward by its insatiable desire for profits. The process of increased accumulation requires growth in production of goods and energy use. This includes the production of huge numbers of socially and environmentally harmful products such as military weapons, which will continue as long it serves the needs of capital.

The big capitalist countries of the North at Copenhagen, and in particular the USA, were mainly responsible for an accord, which does not include any binding targets for CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. They ignored the demands of the countries in the South, whose populations are now enduring the brunt of the harsh effects of climate change. The countries of the South were furious at the secretive way in which the accord was arrived at, the Venezuelan representative fuming "International agreements cannot be imposed by a small exclusive group. You are endorsing a coup d'état against the United Nations". Pablo Oroza of Bolivia pinpointed the real issues, which the conference failed to tackle, "We are asking first to discuss the main issue, which is Mother Earth. Second, we are asking for a goal that will save all of humanity. We think the goal they have put on the table is going to save only half of humanity, because a 2 degree increase and a rise in carbon levels to 450ppmv means a 50% chance that there will be severe ecological failure. Thirdly, we want climate debt to be paid...\$10 billion! When you compare it to what they have spent in terms of military budgets, or to save Wall Street, they spent trillions of dollars. But to save the future of mankind they are saying only \$10 billion!"

The IPCC recommended the transfer of clean technologies to the countries of the South and the financing of adaptation to the effects of climate change in these countries. This requires the establishment of special funds. For this purpose, the proposed \$10 billion yearly funding from 2010-12 to the countries of the South and \$100 billion a year ➡

➔ after 2020, promised at Copenhagen is seen by the South as far lower than is needed. The rich capitalist countries in the North do not have concrete proposals as to how the money for the fund on offer is to be raised. Based on past experience, there is all round scepticism that the inadequate funding promised, will ever be raised.

There were big protests in Copenhagen against the policies of the big capitalist powers in the North on climate change. 100,000 protesters sent a message to the leaders of these countries that they must listen to the demands of the South. While a large proportion of demonstrators came from

Europe, this was truly an international demonstration. Women's organisations, peasant movements, trade unions and global justice movements were all there and slogans such as "There is no planet B" and "Change the Politics not the Climate" were conspicuous. These slogans were amplified in the summit by the radical leaders of the South. Klimaforum09, the global civil society counterpart of the Copenhagen conference issued its own statement at the end of the conference. Its approach to climate change is shown by its title "System change-not climate change". ●

## THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN ESCALATES

Over 8 years ago US and British troops attacked and occupied Afghanistan. This ongoing war is almost equal in duration to the combined length of the first and second world wars in the last century. This war of the new century against one of the poorest countries in the world, led by the only superpower in the world, is being waged using the deadliest weapons. The aggressors have failed to subdue the resistance to their occupation and it has become deeply unpopular at home.

The US invasion of Afghanistan took place following the blowing up of the twin towers in New York and the Pentagon building in Washington. This was carried out by disaffected Muslim young men, mainly Saudi nationals living in Europe and inspired by Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda. The pretext Bush used to justify the invasion of Afghanistan was that Osama Bin Laden was based there. The US and Britain were invading a country, which had nothing to do with the bombing of the twin towers, carried out by a group of individuals based in Europe.

The war in Afghanistan in which up to 100,000 US and NATO troops are engaged, has laid waste to the country. The regular aerial bombing raids and the attacks on villages have killed thousands of civilians, displaced hundreds of thousands and led to an exodus of refugees from the country. Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world. It stands at 174 out of the 178 countries on the UN's world development index. Only two countries in the world have worse child poverty rates. Life expectancy is 44, health care is non-existent for the majority of Afghans and the country has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world. The authoritative Senlis report blames the situation in the country on the war NATO forces are conducting against anti-government groups, which has "rendered reconstruction efforts in the area obsolete".

The majority of people in Afghanistan are against the occupation. The government under Karzai is beholden to US imperialism and its remit does not extend beyond the capital, Kabul. The guerrilla tactics adopted by the resistance fighters are inflicting a heavy toll on the occupying army. The resistance to the occupation does not only come

from the Taliban, who derive their support mainly from the Pashtuns living in the south and comprising 42% of the population, but from nationalists throughout the country. Every bombing attack on Afghan villages, killing women and children leads to further resistance.

There is universal agreement that the so-called recent election for the presidency was rigged. Only 5% of people in the south of the country voted. The discredited, mainly Northern warlord ministers under Karzai are corrupt, run rackets from drug smuggling to obtaining lucrative government contracts and enrich themselves. The US army are soon to be reinforced by 30,000 more US troops, sanctioned by President Obama and 7000 NATO troops. Before the invasion, the Taliban government had been engaged in a civil war with the Northern warlords, from the Tajik, Uzbek and Hazeera ethnic groups. The US and NATO invasion has turned a civil war into a war of resistance against an occupying army. The US, by involving Pakistan in the war against the Taliban, is destabilising the country. Now it threatens to spread the war to Yemen as well.

Imperialism is fighting an unwinnable war in Afghanistan. Obama's top military advisers are telling him that if the tide has not turned decisively 12 months from now, it will be time to admit defeat and come home. As the toll of dead and wounded US and NATO soldiers rise, the opposition to the war in the US and NATO countries does not only affect civilians and military families but serving soldiers as well. In Britain, a serving soldier, Lance Corporal Glenton is being court-martialled for refusing to fight in Afghanistan.

Obama in announcing a so-called exit strategy from Afghanistan by mid-2011, also outlined a plan to train 100,000 new Afghan soldiers and 100,000 new policemen over the next three years, emulating the failed Vietnamisation policy of the US in the Vietnam war. Given the high desertion rate, the combat strength of the Afghan army is 46,000 troops in a country larger than France. The majority of the population perceive the Karzai government as stooges of the US, and their armed forces are constantly attacked by the resistance fighters.

What will the US do next? It will not at this stage allow the Karzai government to engage in a ➔

➡ negotiated settlement with the Taliban, because of the latter's demand for the withdrawal of US and NATO forces from Afghanistan as a condition of the settlement. The strategic interests of the US require that it has a substantial presence in the country. The country borders Iran and US special forces are reported to be sending in special forces from there to try and destabilise Iran. The country is also adjacent to Central Asian republics of the former Soviet Union, where it has important investments in their oil and gas industry as well as a base. The

country borders Pakistan and is near to China and Russia. The war is a drain on the US economy and has contributed to a decline of the world's only superpower. It has raised the hostility of people to the US throughout the region and the Middle East. It has strengthened the hand of Islamic fundamentalism and increased the likelihood of further terrorist attacks on its own soil. A beast is most dangerous when it is wounded. Is the US now planning to attack Iran and set the whole of the Middle East alight? ●

## THE BATTLE OF MEXICO'S ELECTRICAL WORKERS UNION

In October last year, 44,000 electrical workers in Mexico City lost their jobs when the state president forcibly liquidated Central Mexico's publicly owned power distributor. They worked for the Central Light and Power Company (or *Luz y Fuerza del Centro - LyFC*), which has distributed electricity across Central Mexico and surrounding states for several decades. They are members of the Mexican Electrical Workers Union (or SME- *Sindicato Mexicano de Electricistas*), one of a handful of Mexico's genuinely democratic unions which operates independently of capitalist control.

When President Felipe Calderon signed the executive decree which shut down this power distributor, it ignited a series of countervailing actions on the part of SME. Early in the resistance, it staged marches, mass public demonstrations, road blockades and meetings in the famous City square, the Zócalo. For instance, on October 16th, around 500,000 people marched in the capital in protest. Then at a meeting of the National Assembly of Popular Resistance, a front of around 400 unions, student, rural workers, and indigenous movements,

women and gay rights organisations and left and revolutionary political parties from across the country, a decision on a nationwide strike on November 11th in solidarity with SME was adopted. It is estimated that 200,000 people participated in this Mexico City demonstration. On the legal front, however, SME suffered a setback. Its efforts to challenge the constitutionality of the decree and the act that it violates the country's labour laws failed.

The leadership of SME views the liquidation of this company as the first step in a sinister plot to auction the energy sector to local and foreign investors. Indeed, large sections of Mexico's billionaires made their initial fortunes off state privatisations under scandalous terms. The state-owned oil company (PEMEX) and the education system are some of the most lucrative targets of which capitalists want to seize control. More importantly, this forms part of the ongoing war to undermine the construction of trade unions under workers' control and fighting in the interests of workers. ●

## Letters

Comrade Editor

### FORWARD TO "LEFT-WING" CONSOLIDATION & COOPERATION!

In his article, "Civil society helps in delivery of services", which appeared in the Daily Dispatch of Tuesday the 24<sup>th</sup> of November 2009, William Gumede writes: "In the 1980s South African civil society developed a large cadre of organic intellectuals, whether in the trade union movement, alternative think-tanks or the universities. However, after 1994 many progressive intellectuals in South Africa were 'demobilised', by being offered jobs in government, often on condition they did not speak against the government or the party". Indeed we have seen how, after 1994, the petit bourgeois intellectuals have streamlined into the 'Gravy Train' and, how through programmes such as the Black Economic Empowerment, Outright Corruption, etc, they have fattened their bellies without shame. In the light of this feast, the ruling clique enforced table

manners: 'You cannot talk whilst you are eating!'

This exodus left a huge vacuum in the leadership of people's organisations. Mr Gumede noted however that "A new generation of intellectuals based in civil society has more recently emerged on the wave of grassroots and community protests and agitation for greater government accountability, better service delivery and an end to official corruption". How did this come about?

We have to go back to 1994 when the national struggle gave birth to a bourgeois democratic republic. This republic is a product of a negotiated political settlement. Like the 'Lancaster House' agreement in Zimbabwe - which settled matters between liberation movements and the Ian Smith's racist regime - the South African negotiated political settlement carried in itself all the birth marks of 'a compromise on fundamental issues' (as Mr Mandela put it) which militated against the democratic demands and aspirations of the workers and landless peasants. ➡



➡ The rise of the civic movement, from 2000 onward, was an awakening of a people to this betrayal and a clear indication that the pre 1994 compromises have come back to haunt the 1994 political settlement. The response by the ANC leadership to these developments attests to this, Mr Gumede again: "... many critical civil society groups in South Africa have been demonised, in the case of the Treatment Action Campaign as being in the pay of 'imperialists' or multinational business interests. The National Land Committee (NLC) member and Landless People's Movement (LPM) activist Andile Mngxitama was suspended by the NLC board for making 'anti-government' statements. So, too, was the NLC's director, Zakes Hlatshwayo, for 'failing' to reprimand Mngxitama. Moreover, some intelligence agents – whether rogue or legitimate is still unclear – were sent to offices of the LPM for good measure. Similarly, when the Anti-Privatisation Forum embarked on a series of marches, the spymaster Vusi Mavimbela demanded an interview with one of its leaders, Trevor Ngwane ... to warn him of the consequences of embarking on protest action." Mr. Gumede goes on: "In Spring 2005, Mbeki launched a tough attack on non-governmental organisations, claiming they were manipulated by foreign donors. ... Mbeki's statements came after local civil society groups, ahead of the African Union's peer review of South Africa, demanded greater representation on the panel reviewing the country's state of governance."

This massive attack on civil society organisations cannot be underestimated. It is an indication of a fear by the petit bourgeois intellectuals that their betrayal has steadily been replaced by the Left-wing intelligentsia. What alarms them the most is that this development has created a platform for the Left-wing intelligentsia to converge, regroup, close ranks and re-direct the struggle out of the cul de sac the petit bourgeoisie has landed it in.

Indeed, over the last couple of years we have witnessed the cooperation of a number of leftwing political groupings in the Social Movement Indaba (SMI) and its affiliates. We have further witnessed, the strengthening of this cooperation through such initiatives as the Radical Left Network. Recently, the 'Conference of the Democratic Left' (CDL) initiative has taken off. In its article "Left-wing groups in Eastern Cape backs Democratic Left", 'www.dispatch.co.za', reported, "One of the CDL conveners, Mazibuko Jara, said ... It was hoped the conference would 'build solidarity' in the Left."

These developments may not be making headlines in the bourgeois press but they are sufficient enough to create serious concerns in the ruling class circles as noted in their responses before. Furthermore, the very fact that the bourgeois press is not reporting these developments is in itself a form of suppression. Why? There is a sharp contrast between these healthy signs of progress from the "Left" and the political leadership crisis within the bourgeois fraternity. We are witness to:

- Rampant factionalism within the ANC which has led to the emergence of the Congress of the People (COPE); the SACP's aggressive contestations of ANC structures sparking off ideological debates; the talk of a conversion amongst the neo-liberal parties - the Democratic Alliance, The United Democratic Movement, The Independent Democrats, COPE, etc – in the light of the upcoming municipal elections.
  - Simmering problems within the bourgeois state apparatus as exemplified by Judges at each others throat on a matter involving the head of state (President Zuma), the political impact and implications of the police shooting at *unionised soldiers on strike!*, when the police themselves do go on strike against the very state!
  - The intensity of discontent by the workers and peasants which expresses itself in organized militant labour strikes and service delivery protests, etc.
  - The steady indication that in spite of what appears to be a strong ANC, it is constantly embroiled in corruption, careerism, factionalism; its woes do not seem to have an end in sight irrespective of which faction is in the leadership be it Mbeki's or Zuma's; and above all, its inability to resolve basic grievances of the people.

What should be the main focus of the Left-wing consolidation? It is to pay attention to the plight of the struggle, viz., the political quagmire the petit bourgeois intellectuals have led it into. We must do this by exposing the inescapable constraints of bourgeois democracy as spelt out in its cardinal principle: 'ONE MAN ONE VOTE'. We must point out to the workers and landless peasants that this electoral principle is a fraud! It bases parliamentary elections on geographic areas (e.g. wards). In so doing it clouds the class character of these elections. This is observed, for instance, in that as soon as these elections are over, workers and peasants revert to their own organisations to protest against empty promises and/or to defend whatever gains they are about to lose. Therefore, instead of these geographic wards we ought to put forward the demand that PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS should be based on PEOPLE'S ORGANISATIONS!

And, instead of "RECALLING" parliamentarians AFTER 5 YEARS we put a demand for a RECALL AT ANY TIME! - which is steadily becoming a popular demand in many protests. By so doing we will be contrasting 'ONE MAN ONE VOTE' with 'PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY, meaning that the workers and peasants must participate AS CLASSES NOT AS INDIVIDUALS in a democracy.

**SUCH IS THE WAY FORWARD!  
ALUTA CONTINUA!**

**Tamis**

## *From The Archives*

*On Socialism. From "The Iranian Situation Poses the Question: Bourgeois Democracy or Socialist Democracy"*  
I.B. Tabata, 1979

Socialism has to take a leaf from the system from which it emerges. If it aims at attaining stability, it must put as its first priority the creation of a climate for the growth of a thoroughgoing Socialist Democracy such as has never been known in history before. There is nothing contradictory between the Dictatorship of the Proletariat and Socialist Democracy any more than there was between the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and bourgeois democracy. The concepts may appear formally to be the same. But in content, the former is infinitely superior to the latter. In the minds of the bourgeoisie, the concept carried with it the intent of advancing the interests of their class and moreover, of permanently maintaining its existence. Proletarian democracy aims at advancing the welfare of all the classes contributing to the well being of society. And most important, it aims at the abolition of all classes including the working-class as a class.

# 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*

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