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AFRICAN PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC UNION  
OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

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

## *The Thembisa Discussion Forum*

### **A NEW WORKING CLASS INITIATIVE**

On Sunday 7 September workers from various Cosatu and non-Cosatu unions, as well as political activists came together in Thembisa, Gauteng to discuss their political problems. Since this was their second meeting and there were new workers present it was decided that they should be informed about the idea of the "Forum". A speaker explained:

"There has been some talk in the last 6-7 months about the need for 'like-minded' comrades to come together and share views and experiences. Two weeks ago we met. One of the issues raised was that the union leadership has become so 'Right-wing' that it is no longer interested in the education of shopstewards. It is therefore no longer possible to meet within Cosatu structures or offices to study and have a healthy debate on progressive politics ...

The forum is not the exclusivity of Cosatu workers. It is a place where militants come together and have discussions ... While this is not a secret forum, we must be careful as to who comes into the forum. While we are free to invite other comrades it must be shared within the forum first. We must ensure that those who come here have the same thinking as ourselves. The forum is not only a discussion forum but will also act on political conclusions of its discussions".

On the proposal for a discussion programme the speaker went on:

"At the first meeting, a suggestion was made that we discuss the present state of the trade union movement in South Africa.

The comrade who motivated this discussion wanted us to discuss whether the existing movement can still play a progressive role, or whether it is time to build a new labour movement.

A political understanding of the role of the trade union movement within broader working class struggle is important for all working class militants. Given that most the members of the discussion forum are in fact Cosatu trade unionists this task becomes even more important.

A proper political understanding of the role of Cosatu will clarify whether space still exists within the federation for progressive politics, or whether it is indeed time for working class militants within

Cosatu to look outside it for new sites of militant struggle.

The purpose of such a discussion, of course, is not merely to draw certain conclusions and then to leave matters there. If for example, our discussions lead us to the conclusion that Cosatu has become thoroughly reactionary, that would pose very real practical questions for the Discussion Forum to consider: if we cannot practice practical progressive politics in Cosatu, where should we practice such politics?

It is for this reason that it would be incomplete to attempt merely to discuss the state of Cosatu. What we propose is that we discuss the state of the working class movement more broadly. Concretely, we should discuss the full range of working class organisations, from Cosatu, the ANC and SACP through the APF, the Landless People's Movement and so on.

This will give us a fuller sense of where the most militant working class struggles are currently being waged, and by whom. It will also lay the basis for later, more practical questions as to what our political tasks are as militants in this period, and where we should be implementing those tasks.

When looking at working class struggle and organisation it is equally important that we look at the current strategies of the capitalist class and the state. This will assist in giving us a fuller grasp of how the different classes are relating to each other at this point - which class may be stronger than the other and what the tactical and strategic options are open to the working class, and so on.

Last but not least, the South African working class is also part of an international working class movement, large sections of which are increasingly engaged in anti-capitalist struggle the world over. It would be necessary for us to also look at the nature of this international movement, and to see what lessons can be learnt from it for local struggles".

The speaker then outlined the proposed discussion programme on the State of the Trade Unions. While some organisational details and the name of the forum still has to be settled, three persons were selected to act as conveners for the next meeting.

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➡ Apdusa supports this initiative. Our approach is that all different arenas of the class struggle, as represented by various formations, from trade unions, peasants, civics to political, youth, women or environmental groups, must be brought together organisationally under a common and principled political programme. This should also be the guiding objective of all left wing forces, leading to their unity and the synchronisation of their efforts in the struggle today. To this end we believe that the democratic demands and aspirations of the workers and landless peasants must be accepted as paramount. We must look at the class struggle here

not from a narrow South African base, but rather from a Southern African view and indeed, an international perspective. We must further adopt and prosecute a transitional programme - a programme of demands which serve as a bridge between the immediate demands of trade unions and civics, such as wage increase and an end to evictions, and our long-term demands such as those for nationalisation of the means of production under worker control, the right to recall elected representatives, etc, and all that makes for a socialist society.

*ALUTA CONTINUA.*

## **THE UGLY FACE OF PRIVATISATION**

### ***No Care For Super Care Workers at UCT***

A few years ago the University of Cape Town decided that it would be cheaper and simpler if it contracted out its cleaning requirements to a private company. But UCT, a supposed bastion of liberal humanitarian values did not think it necessary to demand or enforce any safeguards for its cleaning staff who were now to become employees of this private company which calls itself "Super Care". Workers suddenly found their wages cut in half, besides which they had to take up a fight for unpaid back pay. When they

finally resorted to industrial action to get their back pay Super Care retaliated by dismissing 9 of the workers.

A Support Committee has been established to assist these workers in their struggle. But despite the combined efforts of the workers and the Support Committee the UCT Administration shows absolutely no interest in the plight of these workers who provide the institution with their essential services. As for the company Super Care - its main concern is to take super care of its profits

and minimum care for the workers who are required to work harder for less money.

This case is another example of how the government-backed policy of privatisation only benefits the rich minority, business class and its hangers-on, at the most extreme costs to the workers. And we are still asked to believe that privatisation is a wonderful thing!

The workers have welcomed the support and solidarity they have received from the Cape Town Anti-Privatisation Forum. While this support is still limited much more needs to be done. ●

## **FROM CEPPWAWU TO GIWUSA – A POLITICAL SPLIT**

*The events and circumstances that led to thousands of workers breaking away from Ceppwawu to join the independent union Giwusa, have evoked a great deal of interest nation-wide. The statement published here represents the views and perceptions of some of those who were directly involved.*

Workers are fast realising that their interests are not accommodated in the new South Africa. The unions have failed to combat the effects of the ANC's Gear policy, viz privatisation, outsourcing, labour brokers, EPZ's etc. Besides this failure we see the involvement of the top leadership in Cosatu in government tenders and union investment companies. This same leadership is taking a hostile attitude to any opposition which they label as 'toyitoyists', 'ultra-lefts' and so on.

The split in the Wits region of Ceppawu, with thousands leaving to join Giwusa, is a revolt by the advanced workers against this state of affairs. From the very outset, the whole struggle was political. At the centre was the complaint by Wits against political suppression and witch-hunting. To crown it all, the antagonists referred to each other as 'bureaucrats' – a reference to the national leadership and 'ultra-lefts' – referring to the 'dissidents'. When

the battlefield shifted from union structures to the factories, the class outlook of the antagonists was exposed. The bureaucrats relied on management assistance and the 'left' appealed to the rank and file workers.

This was no ordinary trade union battle. In closing ranks with the petit-bourgeois union bureaucrats, the bourgeois management did not disappoint and cracked the whip on the factory floor. In those factories in which workers showed the bureaucrats the door, the bureaucrats suspended the shopstewards from Ceppawu. When workers defied this, management summarily suspended or dismissed the shopstewards.

**Could the split have been avoided?**

**By the Wits region?:**

Amongst other things it would have meant the following:

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- ➔ 1. to agree to the unconstitutional and bureaucratic dismissal of their mandated leadership
- 2. to stop questioning the mismanagement of the union by the bureaucracy
- 3. to stop the battle against the Tripartite Alliance and its Gear program
- 4. to agree to stem the simmering militancy on the factory floor and channel it, firstly, not against the government, because it would 'undermine the democratically elected government' and secondly, not against the companies, because 'it is bad for business'.
- 5. to stop any exercise that leads to the raising of class consciousness of the workers because such activities 'are things of the past'.

The Wits region believed that this battle could not have been avoided. If they had a choice they would have preferred to postpone the battle to more favourable times. But they could not capitulate on the above.

#### **By the petit bourgeoisie in and out of Cosatu?:**

The Right wing destroyed the unity of the organisation. They engineered a forcible removal of the Regional Office Bearers; the Local Office Bearers, militant shop stewards and officials. They created a situation where different political views could no longer co-exist within the union. Cosatu took sides with the national office bearers of Ceppwawu because the call for the referendum was

also directed against them.

#### **By the Left-wing in and outside Ceppwawu?:**

The response of the left wing was quite interesting. The entire left supported the struggle of the Wits Region. But some opposed the split arguing that it would divide the workers. They further argued that everything should have been done to continue the fight within Cosatu. This raises another question. Since leftwing forces are unanimous in a call for a split of Cosatu from the tripartite alliance, can one say in advance what form will this split take? Can we imagine the petit bourgeois elements at the helm of Cosatu voluntarily forfeiting the green pastures that goes with the ANC in power and withdraw from the Tripartite Alliance? Or, will they opt for the Ceppwawu route – 'get rid of few individuals' even it means splitting the union.

#### **How Should We Proceed From Here?**

Central to the way forward is the unity of the left on a principled and programmatic basis. It must also be accepted that there are left wing groupings in many worker organisations which are dominated by petit bourgeoisie nationalists. Their struggles against this leadership are mostly isolated and uncoordinated. The split in Ceppawu may well be a forerunner of what is to come in Cosatu. Already there are similar problems being experienced by workers in Numsa Western Transvaal. The situation cries out for a coordinated and united struggle of all forces on the left. That is the only way forward.●

## **EMBATTLED WORKERS APPEAL TO COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS**

The International Health Distributors (IHD) is a company that distributes pharmaceutical products of many companies such as Roche, Abbott, MSD Bayers etc. The workers of this company were part of those victimised by Ceppwawu. When their management and the Ceppwawu national office closed ranks against them they headed for community organisations.

A meeting was held on 20 August. Six IHD delegates, led by Philip Zwane, poured their hearts to the attentive ears of representatives of APF affiliates from Tembalihle and Orange Farm. Here are some of the questions that these representatives posed and the answers given by the IHD workers

*What is a relationship between the company and the union?*

The union is supposed to represent worker interests against the company. We were all puzzled as to how the union can instruct the company to dismiss us. This collaboration between Ceppwawu and management so angered workers that it strengthened their resolve to join Giwusa.

*Is Ceppwawu still operating?*

No. we have all joined Giwusa. This, however, has not stopped Ceppwawu from collaborating with

management behind closed doors and without workers' knowledge.

*Are workers still paying subscriptions to Ceppwawu?*

Yes but against their will. When this battle with the union bureaucracy started, we instructed the company to withhold our subscriptions until further notice. The company defied workers. Ceppwawu wrote a letter stating that all those who have suspended their subs are no longer union members. We then resigned from Ceppwawu and joined Giwusa. As from the 14<sup>th</sup> of July management refused to recognise Giwusa. Instead the company started dismissing us.

*What was your role in the union?*

In Ceppwawu I, Phillip Zwane was a shopsteward, a member of the Regional Executive Committee and National Executive Committee member representing the Wits region. The union first suspended me as part of the regional leadership of the Wits region. It was from this suspension that the company laid the basis for dismissing me, viz, that I was not supposed to speak or to attend a general meeting at the factory even if workers demanded of me to explain the problem in the union to them.

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➡ *What was the workers reaction to your dismissal?*

I was suspended on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of August the workers demanded that the HR officer come and address them on my whereabouts. In his address he intimidated them by saying: "No one can go against IHD. All previous cases have been won by IHD". On the 6<sup>th</sup> of August management suspended 10 workers and the shopsteward. On the 7<sup>th</sup> August I was dismissed. Those suspended are thought of as being in the position to lead the resistance in my absence. We had a general meeting last Sunday and workers were visibly shaken by intimidation. But they are still with Giwusa.

*How many workers have joined Giwusa?*

In most branches, Johannesburg, Durban, Pinetown, Bellville (in the Western Cape), Port Elizabeth, Bloemfontein - workers have joined.

*After dismissal is there any action being taken by yourselves?*

Other than general meetings with workers we have embarked on a process of marching to the company on the 26<sup>th</sup> of August at Number 9, Galaxy Avenue Limbro Park. It is for this reason that we need your support and be part of the march.

*It is your choice which union to join. How can the company interfere with this?*

When Phillip Zwane was suspended I (David

Vilakazi) was the only shopsteward left. When we resigned from Ceppwawu and joined Giwusa I went to management to inform them of this. I have since been suspended for organising for Giwusa. Management claims that we have stabbed the company in the back. We do not know what this means as you correctly point it out it is our choice to join any union. This company is distributing medicines that are consumed by yourselves. I know that you know better how to deal with this issue.

*Resolution of the meeting*

The meeting noted the arrogance of the IHD management and its bossy attitude and reminded itself that proper preparations are needed to deal with big companies. It further noted that the issue of union recognition is a problem. It is a tool in the hands of management to use against workers. The meeting resolved that the only way out is to defy this system of things. To do this we must return to the struggles of the 1970's.

On immediate action it resolved that a pamphlet be issued describing the horrible environment created by management on the shop floor where workers are monitored by cameras wherever they go. This pamphlet is to be distributed in the factories and communities. Representatives would report back to their respective organisations and approach the APF for assistance to participate in the march. ●

## ZUMA AND THE SCORPIONS

### *The Corruption Smoke Screen*

The allegations of corruption in the arms deal by Deputy President Jacob Zuma and the counter allegation that the head of the Scorpion Investigative Unit, Bulelani Ngcuka was an apartheid regime spy, has left many people befuddled by what it all means and what we can expect. In the past there have been allegations from various sources that some senior members of the ANC had in fact been agents of the apartheid regime. The ANC chose to ignore these allegations, whether it was in the so-called spirit of reconciliation or whatever. But now it is prepared to have a limited investigation only into Ngcuka's alleged role as an apartheid agent.

Must we believe that the ANC is really serious about stamping out corruption and eliminating traitors of the past in the government and state and in its own ranks? Or is the whole affair just a smoke screen for a tussle between careerists in the ANC to safeguard their highly paid positions and opportunities of even better ones in future?

We all know that the President is the one who picks cabinet ministers and together they appoint the most senior state officials. It is also a fact that the Deputy President that is elected next year will hold a major advantage over anyone else in the race for the Presidency when Mbeki's second and final term of

office ends in 2009. The ANC will say that all this is empty speculation and we must wait for justice to take its course and then the ANC will do what is necessary. But we have a right to raise questions about the truth and we would be committing a serious mistake if we are only going to be prepared to accept what the ANC tells us is correct and proper.

The labouring classes of South Africa, whose suffering has only grown worse under the ANC's pro-capitalist policies, must nevertheless steer clear of being drawn into taking sides in a battle that has nothing to do with them. It is a soap opera that acts as a distraction from the major problems of our society that must be avoided at all costs. Whether Zuma is found guilty of corruption or whether he is going to be the next state president will make very little difference in the lives of the millions of unemployed, the underpaid workers who must support extended families while suffering under additional burdens of deteriorating social services, and the youth with no economic future. The leaders of the ANC, whoever they are now or in future are all committed to policies which only benefit foreign imperialists and a local rich minority at the expense of the labouring masses. ●

## Abraham Petrus Fortuin - A Tribute

A.P. Fortuin (better known as Abie by all those who knew him), passed away on Friday 10 October 2003. He was at once a teacher, a father, a civic activist and a politician. He was a prominent member of the Teacher's League of South Africa which took up the struggle for a progressive system of education during the years of white minority rule. At the time of his passing he held the position of president of the New Unity Movement.

Abie was a committed and dedicated teacher and a fighter for the liberation of the people of South Africa. Although he belonged to an organisation with which the APDUSA has had longstanding political differences, members of both organisations on many occasions found themselves side by side in struggles against the powers that be. Abie always championed the cause of the oppressed and exploited in his characteristically energetic and combative manner.

He was a teacher of high repute and principle. He brought many of his students to an awareness of the history of the liberatory struggle in South Africa. His involvement in SACOS and the Federation of Cape Civics saw him propagating views that ran counter to the UDF/MDM populist chorus during the 1980's. Through the popularisation of slogans such as 'No sport in an abnormal society' the link between sport and true liberation was propagated by progressive organisations at that time. More recently, Abie was centrally involved in the Anti-war Coalition which has campaigned against the American-British invasion and occupation of Iraq.

Today, the dawn of "democracy" has not resulted in the freedom many have fought and died for. Comrade Abie fully realised that the struggle for true liberation revolves around more than the right to vote, that it also means being willing to learn the lessons of our liberation struggle in the past and on that basis, contribute to the world-wide struggle of the oppressed and exploited to free themselves.

Apdusa salutes another one of South Africa's fallen heroes. Aluta Continua



## From Around the World

### BLAIR POLICY ON IRAQ UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT

The pretext used by Blair to drag Britain into war against Iraq was that the threat of Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction programme was "serious and current" and that it could only be stopped by military force. At the time, neither British nor US intelligence could provide evidence to the UN weapons inspectors in Iraq to back up their claims. The very attack on Iraq by the US and Britain was in the view of many proof in itself that Iraq did possess weapons of mass destruction.

Six months into the occupation of Iraq the US and British invaders have been unable to lay their hands on any of these weapons to show the world. In spite of his failure to provide any evidence, Blair continues to insist that the weapons of mass destruction (WMD) will be found in Iraq. Recently however he has toned down his claim to one that programmes for producing these weapons will be found. The difficulties he is facing have now been compounded by the suicide of Dr David Kelly, a senior scientific advisor to the Ministry of Defence. Dr Kelly had told a BBC correspondent that a government dossier in September '02 claiming

that Iraq could launch chemical and biological weapons "within 45 minutes" had been transformed by Downing St" to make it sexier". This, he said had taken place in the week before it was published, against the wishes of its intelligence personnel.

The dossier also claimed that Iraq had sought to buy uranium from an African country, Niger to develop nuclear weapons. Many lies in the dossier have been exposed including the claim of Iraq's attempt to buy uranium. This was based on forged documents brought to light by the IAEA, the official nuclear inspectorate.

Blair has been forced to deny that he or his staff at Downing St had anything to do with the transformation of the dossier. Having resisted demands that he set up a judicial enquiry into his decision to go to war against Iraq, he has now ordered one which is restricted to finding out the circumstances surrounding Dr Kelly's death. Blair hopes that his appointment of the judicial enquiry into Dr Kelly's death will help to bridge the credibility gap which has developed between him and his electorate over the war

against Iraq. However, the problems the invasion armies are facing in Iraq threaten to widen that gap.

The continuing resistance of the Iraqi people to occupation, the killing and wounding of many civilians and the casualties inflicted on the invaders, raises the spectre of another Vietnam situation being created by Bush and Blair. The former US central command chief General Tommy Franks admitted that troops could still be in Iraq for four years. The commitment of British forces to Iraq is open ended and they could also still be there at their present levels in four years time.

The question now being increasingly asked in Britain is what the cost of the war will be. Present estimates are that the cost of the war and occupation of Iraq will be far in excess of £5 billion, far greater than the £3 billion set aside by the chancellor, Gordon Brown. If there is a long occupation of Iraq as envisaged by the military, the further costs will lead to a drain on scarce resources at a time when the government is under mounting pressure to prove that public services

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➡ are improving.

Blair's policy on Iraq is facing a testing time. His and Bush's failure to bring on board key states such as France, Germany, Russia and China into the "willing coalition" and obtaining the backing of the UN have proved costly. Although there has

been some back-tracking by the governments of these states to provide legal cover at the UN for Bush and Blair's occupation of Iraq, this in itself is not sufficient. Bush and Blair require much more political, economic and military assistance in the face of the resistance

of the Iraqi people as well as millions of people all over the world, who opposed the war and now the occupation. The question in Britain is whether the credibility gap between Blair and the British people develops into a credibility crisis. ●

## WTO AGENDA UNDER FIRE

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) is supposed to promote trade between the nations of the world in a manner that benefits the human race as a whole. This has been exposed for the ridiculous myth that it is a long time ago, but never in a more telling way than by the massive demonstrations in Seattle, November 1999. It brought about the total collapse of the much vaunted meeting of the WTO that was supposed to have taken place there at the time. As could be expected, thereafter steps were taken to avoid this happening again. So it should have been no surprise that the venue for the 2003 "Meeting of Ministers" of nations belonging to the WTO was located in Cancun, a city in the extreme tip of the Yucatan peninsula in Southern Mexico. Presumably, this was to make it easier for the organisers to keep the protesters at bay. This growing fear of demonstrators and protestors shows that the rulers of capitalism are not at all as confident of the almighty and all pervading power of their system that they want us to believe.

It can be recalled that with the promotion of the economic policies that came to be known as Thatcherism and Reaganomics in the 70s, the poor and underdeveloped countries of the world were told that they must open themselves up to FREE TRADE as the only path to progress. It has taken the governments of the third world, almost all of whom assiduously embrace capitalism, a very long time to finally raise their voices and ask their imperialist masters (who guarantee their pay packets) whether free trade in fact does not mean free trade?

The truth is that while the Imperialist nations, of Europe and North America in particular, demand free trade, they do the direct opposite by subsidising their own agricultural industries by enormous amounts to protect them from competition from other countries. These subsidies allow the imperialist nations to control the international market. The poorer and underdeveloped nations whose economies rely heavily on agriculture, find their economic growth stifled. Since their agriculture cannot compete with that of the rich nations they are compelled to import food. The net result is that they are pushed deeper into debt.

At the Cancun meeting a bloc of 22 third world countries, led by China, India and Brazil, finally took a stand against the rich imperialist nation, demanding a phasing out of these anti-free trade

subsidies. As was to be expected, Europe and America refused to budge and the WTO talks collapsed in ignominy. Of course, they cannot relent, which makes the growing level of protest against the inhuman machinations of the WTO all the more justified and necessary.

The second major issue of free trade that was high on the agenda was the one of trade related intellectual property rights (trips), which is used by multi-national corporations to stop any would-be competitors in their tracks. Here the question revolved around the right of poorer countries to manufacture their own medical drugs (generics) in the battle against HIV/Aids, at much lower cost than that demanded by the major pharmaceutical corporations, who arrogantly claim sole ownership of the knowledge and techniques for manufacturing these drugs. A concession had been won earlier that allowed poorer nations to manufacture generic drugs, specifically in the fight against HIV/Aids. The problem is that many countries do not have the facilities to do this and their only hope is to import cheaper drugs from elsewhere.

After much argument and haranguing in the lobbying that went on before the Cancun meeting, the imperialist countries that are home to the major pharmaceutical corporations, agreed that such countries would be allowed to import the cheaper drugs. The problem is that the stringent and bureaucratic conditions attached means that it will still be very difficult for poor countries to buy these cheaper drugs. Millions more will die of Aids while the pharmaceutical corporations continue to rake in exorbitant profits out the misery of the ill.

In the run up to the Cancun meeting it finally dawned on our President, Mr Mbeki, that the imperialist powers were not the least bit impressed or interested in finding meaningful solutions by means of negotiation with sweet reasonableness and cultured arguments. At one point he suggested that the governments of the poorer nations should consider joining hands with the Anti-WTO protest movement! This pathetic attempt of his to appear as a champion of the poor was never going anywhere and needless to say, nothing like this occurred. The protestors moved ahead to make their demands in the only way – outside and against the imperialist controlled chambers of world domination. ●

# THE FIGHT FOR WORKERS' SELF-MANAGEMENT IN ARGENTINA

In Argentina, the economic crisis that erupted in 1999 became the catalyst for a mass rebellion against neo-liberalism. In the course of the ensuing social ferment two gains stand out: the neighbourhood assemblies and 'workers control' of factories. Neighbourhood assemblies are modelled along the lines of 'participatory local government' as practiced in Porto Alegre in southern Brazil. The main force in these assemblies is the *piqueteros* - the unemployed engaging in the pickets and road blockades. While the neighbourhood assembly is a giant step towards genuine democracy, workers self-management introduces a weapon to break the control of the capitalists over the economy.

## Crippling economic slump

Workers self-management arose as a reaction to the impact of the 3-year recession on jobs, poverty and the production and distribution of goods and services. During the early 1990s, the Menem regime implemented the neo-liberal package dictated by the IMF, the World Bank and the US Treasury. The over-production and over-investment that these policies encouraged throughout the economy rested on a rapid accumulation of debt by the state and private sector. Financial speculation was rife. Total public debt, for instance, now stands at \$142 billion of which more than 70% is owed to foreign creditors. When Argentina had to repay \$77 billion of its debt in 2001, the country was forced to engage in the 'largest default in financial history' (The Economist, 7/8/03).

The economic slump followed its typical pattern: the cost of living skyrocketed, productive capacity had to be slashed and hundreds of businesses shutdown. Unemployment rose to above 25% of the workforce coupled with deep cuts in real wages. Current estimates indicate that 60% of the population live in poverty - in other words, 22 million out of 37 million Argentines. In 1998, the wealthiest 10% of the population earned 18% more than the poorest 10%. Now the richest 10% earn 178% more than the poorest 10%. Economic growth fell by 11% and the

value of the national currency (the peso) has dropped by 70% against the US-dollar!

## Workers self-management

Since 2001 workers started reopening and operating abandoned factories. According to recent reports, as many as 200 factories throughout the country are under workers self-management. Workers usually fight for some court ruling to gain control over the operations of the factory while the building and equipment become the property of the local or federal government - a kind of 'anti-privatisation'. When workers start occupying a workplace or the bosses threaten to evict them, social movements and militant leftwing parties always rally to support their allies.

A strong alliance has been forged between each plant under workers management and unemployed workers movement (MTD). As these factories raise the levels of production, they tend to hire more hands from the MTD in addition to reducing working day to six hours. Since the start of this occupation movement, two well-attended *Conferences of Plants and Factories Occupied in Struggle* have taken place.

Working people are facing an uphill battle to revive production at factories that the capitalists had left idle and under huge burdens of debt. The battles at three factories epitomises the mood and demands of the workers:

- **Brukman** is a small textile factory in the centre of the capital city, Buenos Aires. The bosses abandoned the factory in December 2001 without paying the workers. For how much longer Brukman will remain under workers management is uncertain because the bosses already won a court order to evict them. Of course the newly elected regime and Federal Police are giving the Brukman bosses all the support.

- **Sasetru** is a giant pasta factory in the same district that has been closed for about 20 years. When 400 workers, inspired by the milieu, took over this factory in January this year, they expressed a determination to raise production levels in order to

directly employ 2,000 workers and indirectly 20,000. High priorities for the Sasetru self-management committee include a housing subsidy plan for workers and the funding of social development programmes.

- The most modern porcelain factory in South America, Zanon Ceramics in the Neuquen industrial park, is another plant under 'workers control'. In October 2001, more than 300 workers initiated their struggle to restart production under their control. This factory produced limited editions of ceramic products dedicated to their allies, the unemployed workers, and the Mapuche indigenous people that supply clay to the factory. The workers at Zanon ceramics have been relatively successful in withstanding the retaliation by the capitalists and the state. Assemblies at plant level reflect a higher degree of class solidarity and class-consciousness. Support from technical and administrative professionals has accelerated the 'learning-by-doing' process. It has successfully combined "productive activities with political mobilization in solidarity with other oppressed groups". (Monthly Review, 9/03, pp22-33)

In Argentina there are many cooperatives - mainly under the auspices of the Church. But these differ in many ways from factories under 'workers control'. The cooperatives often pay wages below subsistence level while prioritising the repayment of debt that was accumulated by the bosses. Moreover, when the cooperatives employ new workers, they do not become members of the cooperative, but employees. The cooperatives are far from breaking with the logic of capitalism (International Viewpoint, 10/02, pp31-32).

Factories under workers' management are being challenged by the cooperative model and are under enormous pressures from the bosses. This concrete application of a core transitional demand today must be defended through the solidarity of the international working class movement. ●

# BRAZIL'S MST AND THE GLOBAL FIGHT FOR LAND

Brazil's land-war has sharpened since the victory of the Workers' Party (PT) candidate, Lula da Silva, in the presidential elections last year. Hired gunmen of the landowners have killed more than 30 comrades of the landless workers movement (better known as the MST) up to the end of August 2003. This unprecedented murder rate has, without doubt, fuelled tensions. But it has bolstered the resolve of the MST to press ahead with its fight for radical agrarian change.

When Lula came to power millions of peasants expected accelerated land delivery and production support. The MST voted for President Lula for two reasons: because of the longstanding collaboration with the Workers Party (PT) and Lula's pro-poor agrarian platform. However, Lula's promise to transfer plots averaging 50 acres each to 60,000 families in the first year remains unrealised. Instead of land expropriation, the Lula government is committed to a market-led model of land purchases. But debt repayments and a recession have been squeezing the national budget from which land has to be bought. As a result, 90% of arable land remains in the hands of the wealthiest 20% of Brazilians, while the poorest 40% live on 1% of the land.

Everywhere across the globe where such stark land-ownership inequalities and rural misery persists, the name, and the demands and tactics of the MST are resonating. In Latin America for instance, where 80% of the 16 million peasant families (75 million people) eke out a living on marginal lands, the MST invigorated movements of the landless. In Bolivia, where 4.5 % of the landowners own 70% of farmland, a *Movimiento Sin Tierra* (MST) was born in 2000. It is particularly active in Bolivia's eastern lowlands. The names of the two movements are identical as well as the tactic of settling on vacant and under-utilised land. In their agrarian platforms peasants in Bolivia and Brazil included demands for investment in water, roads, schools and health services. It is unclear what links exist

between the Bolivian MST and the anti-privatisation movement in the cities. Another factor in the fight of the Bolivian MST is the American-backed war on drugs, which is eradicating coca and other crops on which peasant livelihoods depend.

Further, in both *campesino* movements thousands of the urban unemployed have returned to rural localities and joined the ranks of the MST. Since the end of last year, Brazil's landless squatters increased by 98 000 families, with nearly half of these families coming from urban areas. Of the 12 000 families waiting for the transfer of unused land, 80% are from urban areas. (Washington Post 5/9/03, pA12). Assimilating the lessons from these struggles can make our understanding of the agrarian question richer and more dynamic, particularly around the complex unity between cities and rural areas.

Several movements of the landless in the region went to Venezuela in early September to attend one of President Chavez's land redistribution ceremonies. The Brazilian MST declared their support for the Venezuelan agrarian reform plan. The adoption of this radical 'land law' precipitated the failed attempt to overthrow President Hugo Chavez. The agrarian component of Chavez's "Bolivarian Revolution" aims to settle 500,000 families on 10 million hectares in 5 years. Chavez has already distributed a million hectares of vacant land to 41,000 families in 7 months and has delivered affordable credit and tractors to peasants. This experience demonstrates that pro-poor governments can do more than merely pay lip-service to 'land reform'. However, a genuine agrarian revolution today requires getting rid of the main barrier to progress: the capitalist economic system. It is therefore essential to strengthen independent and militant movements of the landless that unite with their allies in the cities for the overthrow of capitalism. ●



## Letters

### SMI: A THREAT OR AN OPENING?

Comrade Editor

An article in the last issue of the *Apdusan* correctly indicated that the efforts to establish a broad anti-capitalist front under the name of the Social Movement Indaba was facing a number of obstacles. This is becoming more evident in the efforts to convene a national meeting of the SMI. Now there is also opposition from some voices on the extreme left who see the SMI as something that can only turn out to be a South African version of the Zimbabwean MDC - a tool of the bourgeoisie in its struggle against the working class. This is rather like arguing that we should never even think of opening up a new piece of land for agriculture, no matter how well suited it may be, because we will be helping all sorts of unwanted weeds to flourish besides creating wonderful conditions of all kinds of harmful insects.

It is unfortunate that there are those who believe that one can draw a rigid line between the different classes

that make up society. They appear to be unable to see the

that the class struggle unfolds dynamically according to its own historical logic rather than mechanistically, according to the desires of any individual. Their approach presupposes that there is a strong class consciousness amongst the workers, which cannot be said to be true in present conditions. Workers today are a thousand times more disposed to be drawn into a broad front such as what the SMI aims to be, rather than a revolutionary Marxist party and this is a situation similar to what has emerged in the struggles of the labouring masses across the world. Everyone who is pledged to the struggle for socialism must join the task of raising the political consciousness of workers from the position that they are at rather than where you may wish them to be.

Rather than fear and opposition to the SMI, what is needed now is that the largest number of voices must be raised to ensure that its aims and objectives shall primarily be governed by the fundamental interests of the working class. Organisations that aspire to the leadership of the working class must firstly learn to be its servant.

Janus