



from below

Number 69 April/may 2009

Against capitalism and racism, for workers' power

R1

Seize profits to save jobs



Free water and electricity for all
Stop all evictions

***DA won't do it, COPE won't do it
- will Zuma?*** - see page 2

KEEP LEFT!  MAGAZINE

Affiliated to Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) and
the Coalition against Xenophobia (CAX)

Socialism

Build a socialist
alternative

WE NEED THESE NOW:
universal food subsidy * no
more borders no-one is
illegal * free water,
education, houses, living
wages for every living
human including
unemployed * REVERSE
privatisation, evictions,
cutoffs and price increases

Will the ANC keep its promises this time?

by Alan Goatley

South African elections are just around the corner. Although the ANC will win there is much more uncertainty this time around. This follows severe turmoil in the ANC, which culminated in sweeping Mbeki out of office with most of his cabinet loyalists.

The active layer here, working for an election victory, are buoyant at having pushed back Mbeki and brought to the front president elect Jacob Zuma.

For the majority of this base, the defeat of Mbeki represents the bringing back of the ANC home to its working class and poor base. Extended social grants are on the cards. More houses, jobs and a government responsive to the demands of the unions are expected.

But Mbeki loyalists have not taken matters sitting down. With COPE now in the picture this election is the most contested we have experienced. It is also more than ever before divided on class lines. COPE and the DA are collecting a distinctly more up-market base than the ANCs' rural and city poor support. For most COPE leaders, the years of Mbeki's neo-liberal economic plan GEAR suited them down to the ground.

The economy saw its longest uphill drive for increased profits. "Government policies such as black economic empowerment and affirmative action have contributed to the growth of SA middle class by 2.6 mill. by 2007" reads the ANC manifesto. But other side of the coin is also highlighted in the manifesto; this is the side that Jacob Zuma predominantly bases his support on:

"Unemployment is unacceptably high among our people, there has been a growth of casualised, low wage and outsourced jobs, contributing to the rise of the working poor.", and "Inequality has persisted and increased in our society. Workers share of national income has continued to decline"

The popular support base of Jacob Zuma amongst COSATU workers and major sections of the poor, and a sizable portion of newly registered voters rests on the hope that he will turn back the tide of the Mbeki years.

These forces were deeply critical of Thabo Mbeki. Some were uneasy with his economic policy GEAR, the snubbing of worker leaders, his dismissal of the SACP or his autocratic style of leadership and partisan patronage in the party.

But will president elect Jacob Zuma and the new ANC walk the talk?



When visiting the platinum areas on the election trail, he chastised the platinum bosses for their lack of investment in improving the lives of communities around the mines. He even hinted at the possibility of taking back mines and putting them under government control.

When visiting business heads overseas or locally he tells them there will be no change, that there will be a continuance of current and past ANC economic policies.

On other occasions he has lambasted workers in the public sector for being part of the problem for lack of delivery. They needed to pull up their socks, be more helpful, be prepared to keep the office open longer to pay attention to a person who has travelled far, and so on. He failed to however take notice of the complaints by public workers, that many posts are not filled to ease the workload nor that their pay increases were way below their demands.

The enthusiastic support shown by many for Jacob Zuma must be turned towards action to ensure he meets his promises, otherwise we face yet another era of broken promises and cover-ups over lack of delivery.

Whilst he may have dusted out the cupboard, many of the Mbeki era ministers remain. Trevor Manuel found himself unchallenged and secure at the helm of the economy. This is the economy which continued to entrench inequality, rather than reverse it.

It is no secret to all that the world economy is in severe stress. Over the past twenty odd years those that are in charge of society have rammed down everyone's throats their message that capitalism works. That if all follow the rules of the free market, then all would soon enter the heaven of prosperity. This is now proved the great lie of the century.

Their message of "neo liberalism", everything for sale, everything to make a profit out of and open borders for their financial speculation and products has been exposed for what it is, rubbish.

Their own hypocrisy is shown by the rush to nationalise banks in order to try and save their system.

But with all the money thrown in by governments, it continues out of control in a downward spiral.

From America the downturn into recession jumped to Europe, then onto the Middle East and with it China. Russia is also now in trouble.

In Africa mines supplying the booms of Europe and China with raw materials have been closed overnight. Everywhere the confidence of only a year ago has fallen flat on its face.

Private firms do not invest unless they make profits, so they are all running for one shelter or another. The people, who will be paying for the roof over the bosses' heads, are the world's workers and their poor cousins, the unemployed and pensioners of the cities and rural peasantry across the world.

Jobs are being cut everywhere, manufacturing cut back, new investments halted, pension funds are being raided and exports from poorer economies to the richer centers of the world have been slashed.

We now all face an uncertain economic future, this aside from the dangers of global warming the planet is experiencing as a result of the slash and burn drive for profit by companies.

When things started to go wrong, Finance Minister Trevor Manuel, the darling of the World Bank, the IMF and South African capital was boasting that it would hardly affect us. He argued that he had tighter controls in place and our bankers were not of the irresponsible international type.

Hardly said, then with the release of the latest budget he added the warning, "What started off as a financial crisis may well become a second great depression".

Director General Tshediso Matona of trade and industry now reports, "We're in deep trouble, and we're heading for a very deep recession".

Now we see the motor industry in crisis, mines closing shafts, the cutting back on productions hours and noises been made for government bailouts. It is reported "more than 1.2 million South Africans are expected to be in crisis by year end as each job loss affects an entire family."

But already complaints are coming out from business that the social grants are eating up too much of government income. They are against taxes being increased to fund more social security for people. They want the bail outs for themselves.

We stand with those who are supporting ANC to demand that the needs of the poor are met first and foremost.

But we argue that the tactic of changing things from above, the tactic of replacing Mbeki with Zuma and a few other heads will fall far short of the mark in challenging the root cause of the existing inequality we live with.

At the same time we stand with those who out of genuine frustration will be giving up their right to vote and are boycotting as a show of protest, of just how far the past ANC government has let them down.

Their protest, "No delivery! No vote!" comes out of the real distress of their living conditions remaining in the squalor of Apartheid tin shanties, muddy roads and festering sanitation. It with out a doubt the service delivery uprisings and the massive public sector strikes that were at the heart of increasing the stakes which led to the downfall of Mbeki.

But now all our attention and energy is being focused at a change in leadership at the top. This is put forward as the solution.

But to win the demand for a better life, we need a direct attack on business to ensure that workers and the poor do not end up paying for the mess the bosses system of capitalism has once again landed us in.

Trade unions need to up the struggle to protect jobs by demanding that the profits of companies made in their years of cream and honey are seized before they gamble them away on one or other avenue of speculation or hide them from the public eye to ensure they don't pay the price for the mess.

Industries must be re-nationalised by workers occupying those factories that are threatening closures or are siphoning off huge sums of money on the quiet.

There must be a moratorium on evictions, on retrenchments. Industries must be retooled for our immediate needs and the huge layer of unemployed must be brought in on decent wages to rapidly solve the housing crisis. Services like lights, water and sanitation must be delivered free.

Unemployment insurance benefits must be open to all those in need of.

We are in the midst of a life threatening environmental crisis. Energy generation has to be changed to non-destructive systems. Public transport systems must be built to halt the pollution by the millions of cars on the roads. River systems have to be cleaned up. Factories must be cleaned up to stop the dumping of waste into the environment. This can provide work for millions.

We need the activity and demands of organised workers and their relatives in the informal settlements standing together facing capitalism and its hangers on. Within this we need extreme democracy, a democracy where representatives of communities and the workplace are at the head of all decision making, with the power to carry out their plans. We need the democracy from below that can come out of the struggle to win the needs of the majority. We need a democracy in which community or workplace representatives are not on a gravy train and can be recalled by their base at any moment.

We need socialism! Not another period of are attempts from above at tinkering with a system it is now plain to see is bankrupt.

Social Justice coalition

by Ashley Fataar

The SJC was formed in response to the xenophobic riots that shook South Africa in the first half of last year. Activists who were involved around the Treatment Action Campaign provided relief to refugees and immigrants in and around Cape Town.

As a result of their involvement they became exposed to the total lack of co-ordination between the DA led Cape Town council and the ANC dominated Provincial government. This resulted in council and province failing to assist poor people in their hour of need. Poor people from both inside and from outside South Africa.

Realising the need to go beyond party politics, the activists formally set up the SJC on Youth Day 2008.

Since then the SJC has developed four main branches – Khaleyitsha, Kraaifontein, City Centre and University of Cape. The first two are working class branches while UCT is student based. The City Centre comprises the middle classes. Khaleyitsha is currently the largest branch.

Keep Left has shifted its focus onto the SJC as it provides a wider audience for revolutionary politics. The membership of the SJC is also free from the restrictions of political party membership and therefore currently provides flexibility that other established political structures do not have. Hence activists from across political party divides can organise.

As Zackie Achmat argued correctly when the SJC was being formed, the process must be led and driven by the ordinary person and not the middle classes. Keep Left agrees with this approach.

Like the MDC in Zimbabwe or the "old" Labour Party in the UK, the SJC is a "broad church". It is comprised of workers, liberal middle class members and investors with an apparent social democracy leaning.

Now the investors and their middle class allies have interests that vary from those at the bottom of society. Investors seek to make South African capitalism stable. A stable capitalist society provides investors and their allies with the setting to maximise profits while keeping the ordinary person living in a shack.

Workers on the other hand want an end to shacks and a lack of hygienic living conditions.

Some members of the group want to take up the theme of "Defending the Constitution". It assumes, wrongly, that poverty is caused by political mismanagement. Yet it is the anarchy of the bosses system that causes poverty.

At a meeting of the Khaleyitsha branch the topic of safety and security was discussed. The meeting became explosive when worker youth pointed out that they handed in a weapon seized from a gangster. The weapon was turned into the local police station. The very next day it was used in an armed robbery. So the call for safety and security runs very hollow in working class areas where the police protect gangsters. Clearly class differences cannot be smoothed over.

For revolutionary socialists and working class activists such a pool of people united across artificial and political divides presents them with the chance to push forward the struggle of the ordinary person in the township and unite them around service delivery and poverty. In an organisation free from political sectarianism it begins to address the real social issues affecting workers. The SJC can become this.

For us in Keep Left, small in number as we are, our ideas are being received with enthusiasm in both the working class branches. A number of students have launched the UCT Students and Workers Alliance. For those of us with the experience in building such alliances elsewhere this project is a step in the right direction.

Given the disillusionment that seems to be creeping into reformist political parties, the SJC and UCT project presents socialists free, from the poison of sectarianism that seems rife amongst the left, with the chance to build real organisations with the centrality of workers as it pillar.

What causes unemployment?

By Tebza Mokgope

Everyday seems to bring new announcements of huge job losses at factories, shops and offices around the world. Long queues at the labour offices are becoming a common sight lately while job adverts in newspapers are decreasing quickly.

Finance, motor, manufacturing and mining are the hardest hit but other sectors will soon be affected because of their link to the rest of the economy. For a car to be in the street it has to be assembled at a motor factory, but most of the parts, made from steel, plastic, rubber and other parts are bought somewhere. Then after the car is assembled, the last leg becomes your finance sector - like your bank and motor vehicle financiers who will lend you the money to own the car.

Therefore if the banks in this current case are faced with a crisis of more bad debts because they were profit chasing, then the car factory profits will be also be affected. More cars will be repossessed thus decreasing the demand for new cars. The steel factory that used to supply the steel for assembling the car will get fewer orders.

Faced with the threats of declining profits, the bosses sacrifice the workers and retrench them.

What this will do is to increase the level of unemployment. The affected families will now have to buy less grocery than they used to, therefore the demand for maize will go down and the greedy Shoprite faced with less buying power for their stock will cut down on buying maize and cut down on staff. The farmer where the maize was first produced will also cut on farmworkers' wages to make sure that he still gets his profit as expected. All is done to protect the profits of business and make sure they continue making business. No thought is given to people's needs.

Marx explains slumps as existing alongside the more or less regular boom-recession cycle caused by the



lack of coordination of investment decisions through the system.

Accumulation, Marx argued, proceeds faster than the growth of the productively employed labour force. But labour is the source of value. Therefore, the ratio of surplus value to investment - the rate of profit- tend to fall. As it falls the spur to investment diminishes, leading to a slowdown in accumulation. The result is that the recession will get deeper as the system gets older. What becomes clear here is that recessions, slumps or meltdown are inevitable, because of the way capitalism is organised. They are built into the capitalist system.

Some South African economists have argued that South Africa will not be affected by this economic recession. One reason that has been put forward is the credit act that was passed three years ago. Some South African economists say this act protected the South African banks and the economy against

credit crunch. The act argued for better credit assessment of any person who wanted to borrow money.

What these economists miss is the chain of the capitalist economy. What is happening in a factory to factory situation applies also to country to country economic co-ordination. Going back to the example again, when the motor industry gets affected in the whole world the demand for South African exports also decreases, the demand for raw materials like platinum and steel goes down.

As the demand goes down the prices for this raw materials also goes down thus taking shares with it. The result is less profits for the companies affected.

So economists who thought the crisis will hit first world countries only failed to understand the basics of capitalism. In fact developing countries and others will be more affected as they have not been doing that well without the crisis, their economic growth were nothing compared to first world countries.



Will unemployment be with us forever ?

Under capitalism unemployment will always be with us - as the system itself breeds unemployment, and when unemployment is high capitalists try to benefit from it by cutting wages of workers with a threat of take it or leave it.

To get rid of unemployment and other miseries that are bred by capitalism, we need to have a different way of organising production - one that put interest and needs of people before profit.

However we also cannot wait for socialism to fight back for our interest. The recession will lead to a huge ideological battle between left and right. What socialists do on the ground makes a huge difference in these circumstances. The space and opportunity to argue for an alternative to capitalism has never been so obvious.

History also provides us with events where people have been radicalised and fought very hard in times of recessions. The 1930's saw the biggest slump the world has yet seen. But this was also a decade of militancy. Across the globe workers took part in mass strikes, riots and demonstrations in response to the crisis. Working class organisation grew and became stronger at the end 1930's than it had been before. It grew through struggles. In Britain unemployment had risen to 2.5 million by the end of 1930. The National Unemployed Workers Movement organised demonstrations of 250,000 people. Unemployed workers followed this by rioting for several days until they forced the councils to increase their benefits.

Here at home, struggles like the 1976 uprising and townships uprisings of the 1980's took place during bad economic times. So people do fight back in times of recession. It is important for socialist to put forward the radical solutions to retrenchments and climate change.

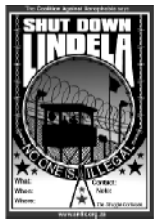
WE THEREFORE ARE SAYING:

- Companies planning to axe jobs should be taken over and run in the interests of the workers and the wider society. This will save millions of jobs. It is testament to the madness of capitalism that whenever the system goes into crisis, millions are thrown out of their work and their vital skills get wasted. A point need to be made that just because Shoprite will not be making enough profit as the buying power falls, does not mean that people don't need groceries, clothes and everything.
- We need to produce for need, not profit. 500 000 decent houses need to built every year. Schools and clinics are needed to address the imbalances of the past. With climate change more jobs need to be created to produce wind turbines and other green energy sources needed to tackle climate change.
- Implement a 35 hour working week with no loss of pay. This will create more jobs and give working people enough time to spend on other activities.

All this solutions can be implemented, but will need a strong massive struggle by ordinary people to ensure that it is the capitalist and their system that are swept away by the economic hurricane rather than our own livelihoods. The world needs a permanent end to a world of recession, unemployment, poverty and war. - Tebza Mokgope



Photo Story:



No-one is illegal

24-hour protest at Lindela deportation center

Several hundred protestors found their way to the Lindela detention centre, hidden in the veld outside Krugersdorp, for an all night vigil against the place. People are held at the detention centre for weeks or months before being deported. It is run by a private company, Bosasa, for profit. That's a recipe for treating the people inside badly. So in November, people came from the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee and the Soweto Concerned Residents, from Central Methodist Church and all around Johannesburg, youth from as far as the Vaal, some people from Yeoville, the universities and Samwu, the municipal workers' union....



Above: Arriving with blankets ready to spend the night.



Main picture: toyi toying at the entrance to the detention centre.

Below: food tent, fires and preparing the stage for speeches and music





Dancing and singing around a police van bringing people into the centre



People kept the gates busy until long after sunset. No-one could enter or leave without seeing the protest



“Bosasa, somnyagazisa malele” Late at night, a smart BMW, maybe carrying a Bosasa director tries to sneak out but meets protestors at the gate



Who causes job losses?

In March, the Sun newspaper carried a disgusting story on its front page that Zwelinzima Vavi had said that we need to 'guard our borders' to defend jobs.

Dangerous reporting and factually ridiculous. After all Cosatu recognises that the real threat to jobs is the corporation.

“The Congress of South African Trade Unions is shocked that South Africa’s manufacturing output dropped by 11.1% over the year from January 2008 to January 2009....The biggest decreases in output were in iron and steel, metal products and machinery, motor vehicles, parts and accessories and other transport equipment, and petroleum, chemical products, rubber and plastic products. The only sector which recorded an increase in production, of 2.5%, was food and beverages.”

The decision to cut output doesn't make too much sense, because it's not like we all have everything we need already.

These decisions are made by CEOs and directors. They are not made by some young mum who crosses the border with great difficulty because life is barely lived in Zimbabwe, who then takes a low-end job as a waitress to guarantee a merely uncertain future. They are not made by the guy from Mozambique preferred by the construction industry because he can be hired and fired more easily and paid less.

CEOs and directors made the decision to expand South African textile operations in Zimbabwe years back. They crossed the border easily, destroyed Zimbabwean textile industries and shoved that country closer towards its current ongoing crisis. Then the decisions of Chinese CEOs and directors destroyed SA textiles.

Profiteers like us divided. Trade unions have to organise without this kind of regard to borders. If Zimbabweans are a majority of waiters, then Cosatu needs to be working out the special problems Zimbabwean waiters face when they try to organise together with locals to defend the future of all.

The fact is there would be plenty for everyone if production was organised around actually existing humans rather than profit and borders.

We are waiting either to hear Vavi demanding a retraction from the Sun, or to hear his abject apology - soonest.

No-one is illegal...!

Battles to create socialist society

In the last part of this series MATTHEW COOKSON explains how Marx's ideas were shaped by his experience of workers' struggle.

The ruling class attempts to portray Karl Marx simply as a thinker – someone who analysed capitalism but did little to bring about revolution.

But Marx's activity in the International Working Men's Association (IWMA) in the 1860s and 1870s shows how false this picture is.

In 1864 a number of prominent trade union leaders in London called for an international meeting of workers' representatives to explore the possibility of united campaigns across borders.

These same union leaders held a mass rally in London in 1863 in support of the Northern states fighting to abolish slavery in the American Civil War.

They invited Marx to attend the new meeting and he readily accepted.

Emancipation

Marx became the leading figure in the IWMA, writing its opening statement. It declared, "The emancipation of the working class must be conquered by the working classes themselves."

This expressed Marx's desire to ensure that the IWMA was an organisation devoted to the overthrow of the capitalist system from the bottom up.

With Marx at the fore, the IWMA raised money for strikes across Europe, supported the Irish struggle for freedom and the fight for women's rights, and raised international solidarity among working people.

This activity led to its rapid growth in a number of countries, frightening the ruling classes.

The IWMA's biggest test came in 1870 and 1871. Louis Bonaparte, France's ruler, declared war on Prussia in July 1870 in an attempt to crush a new rival to France's dominance on the European stage.

France was defeated, and by Sep-



Who was Karl Marx?

tember Bonaparte was captive and a government of national defence had declared a republic. This government, led by reactionaries such as Adolphe Thiers, set out to negotiate peace with Prussia.

The new government and the city's wealthy abandoned Paris and camped to Versailles. The Prussians laid siege to the capital, which was defended only by the National Guard, a militia composed mainly of workers.

The French government's attempt to seize the National Guard's cannons on 18 March 1871 provoked a revolt.

A new government of workers and the poor was declared – the Commune. It held power for two months in the face of the deep hostility of the French, Prussian and other ruling classes.

The Commune was an inspiration to workers everywhere. Marx and the IWMA flung themselves into defending it.

But the French government brutally crushed the Commune, slaughtering tens of thousands of Communards.

Marx wrote *The Civil War in France* to analyse the Commune's achievements. The Commune's very existence

proved Marx correct – workers could take power and organise society in a new way.

Workers created their own institutions, such as a people's army and a ruling committee composed of directly elected, instantly recallable delegates.

Following the defeat of the Commune, a debate broke out over the direction of the IWMA.

Trade union leaders believed the IWMA's radicalism hurt their chances of getting elected to parliament, while anarchists such as Mikhail Bakunin were opposed to the IWMA's open way of organising.

Marx opposed both these groups. He believed that only a revolution involving the majority of workers could liberate humanity.

The IWMA, with Marx's support, voted to transfer its headquarters from London to New York to protect it from the "disintegrating elements". This was effectively its end.

Marx spent the remainder of his life attempting to complete his study of capitalism. He continued to be involved in building socialist organisations, particularly in Russia and his native Germany.

He died in 1883, admired by millions of workers around the world for his contribution to their struggle.

As Marx's lifelong collaborator Frederick Engels said at his funeral, "Marx was before all else a revolutionist.

"His real mission in life was to contribute, in one way or another, to the overthrow of capitalist society and of the state institutions which it had brought into being, to contribute to the liberation of the modern proletariat."

Karl Marx's analysis of capitalism and his belief in the power of ordinary people continue to give inspiration to people fighting back today.

From Socialist Worker 2123, 18 October 2008 www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=16174

Zimbabwe: beyond the deal

by Shone Igeny

2009 is hailed as a historical year in Zimbabwean politics. ZANU-PF believes that the MDC has come home, whilst the MDC feels that it has managed to press ZANU-PF to the negotiating table. Independent observers including the South Africa government thinks Zimbabwean politicians have matured. Essential before a concrete analysis of the negotiated settlement can be undertaken, we need to trace the road of the Zimbabweans' opposition struggle especially in the last few years.

Firstly the MDC has adopted the politics of buying-time at the expense of the millions of suffering Zimbabweans. A commonly held feeling was that ageing Mugabe could in a few years die from natural causes. Secondly the traditional MDC militant structures and allies had been heavily decimated by state machinery, poverty and disease, whilst the party lacked the capacity to fight.

We can see three issues that have driven the MDC into the current Government of National Unity impasse. The lack of ideological clarity which directly connected the hierarchy of the party with the broader movement. Whilst the MDC embraced a spaghetti mix of



groups it fundamentally sidelined the key movements of the working class and poor, this had the result of relegating its supporters to passivity with programs orchestrated from the top. Thirdly the MDC as a party did not have a precise program of struggle on which to tackle the regime.

Tragically the party failed to transform the militancy of its youthful cadreship into a force that could confront Mugabe's rule. The weakest link is the lack of ideological clarity that informed the processes and programs of the movement. Hence the process that subsequently inspired the movement was informed by the middle cases, occupying decision making positions in the party.

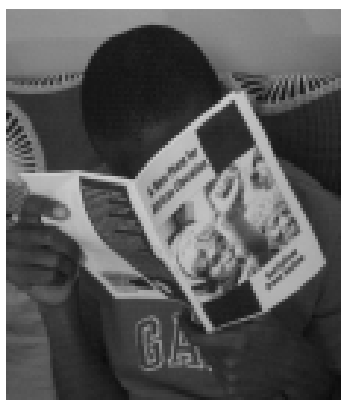
Having failed to effectively fight and deliver Zimbabwe from dictatorship, the MDC finds itself in unfamiliar territory. It has assumed power in Zimbabwe as a partner in government with ZANU-PF. The International Socialist Organization believed the talks were necessary and destructive to the struggle for democracy and emancipation of the working people, The MNC, ISO argued, betrayed the objectives on which the MDC was

built. Based on principle and consistency why should the MDC agree to negotiate power with a regime that has butchered thousands of its supporters.

Barely a week after joining the government the MDC leadership has already madder shocking statements about possible attacks on working people. The MDC new Finance Minister Tendai Biti has already echoed his desire to cut government expenditure by reducing the size of the civil service. But the government of Zimbabwe has spend next to nothing over the last five years on social services, let alone salaries. The MDC since it took a pro-Western line years ago, shows us what the future holds. The party's policy document suggests a desire to please imperialism and the local bourgeoisie at the expense of the working people. The people of Zimbabwe not expect much from this new government but prepare for a much bigger fight for resources. Further the MDC has promised a 'sharp and sustained reduction in government expenditure' and a comprehensive program of privatization. Revenue raised through privatization will not be used to finance recurrent expenditure instead the money will be used to provide new opportunities for Zimbabwean entrepreneurs.

In an attempt to appease the working class the MDC is to promote 'employee share ownership' and trade union involvement by buying stakes of privatized companies. In South Africa the Mine Workers Union and COSATU control stakes in some major corporations but no realistic economic gains have been made by the working class.

The GNU is not the solution for those who have fought in Zimbabwe for equality, justice and an end to dictatorship.



A new phase of African Liberation: Socialism from Below

5 rand/5 pula/1 dollar/1 pound



Weekly meetings

Keep Left has weekly meetings. Joburg Tues 6.30pm, Wits University 082-332-9874 email socialismfrombelow@gmail.com Tsakane Thursdays 6pm. Call 082-401-9185 Cape Town phone 074 148 4948, write to P.O. Box 356, Newlands 7725 or e-mail keepleftct@gmail.com

By Ourselves

Police try to block demo against Gaza massacre



My name is Diana. I am Zimbabwean and I am also part of Cosatu. So what brought me here is the killings that are happening in Palestine. I am so angry because of little children who are being killed in Palestine. That's why I am here, to protest, to show my anger, to say that what is happening in Palestine is not allowed, its inhumanity.

I think as far as I am concerned, the police here were out of control, because this is not Israel. Us as Zimbabweans we are not allowed to demonstrate in Zimbabwe, but here in South Africa - even the police who have been stopping the busses - I don't think that is allowed.



My name is Petunia. I'm the coordinator of women and water, coalition against water privatisation, and what brings me here is to support the struggle of the palestinians. We think its very unfair for people to be killed for their land - I believe US has something to do with it, they can't seem to solve anything. I think its unfair for some people to just go in and take what they want. In this whole wide world we're supposed to be free and with harmony and peace, not for other people to take what they want. So its very unfair.

When the police stopped the busses, I felt we are not yet there. I felt this whole apartheid thing is still there. I felt the Gaza and Palestinian world around us, I think its unfair for the police to stop us and say this is an illegal march.

Those people are human beings, fellow brothers and sisters. Never mind the colour and where do they come from. Those people are our comrades. I can just add that maybe the minister of safety must look at this what happened today, because this is very unfair. It's unfair. Because here are the mighty people, then all the police were here from all the police stations.

What brings me here is the savage massacre of Palestinian children, women and elderly in Gaza and the occupation by Israel of land that's not theirs. Basically we protesting to end this occupation, to end this assault and savageness.

We're supposed to be in a free South Africa and it's just disappointing that Palestine stood by South Africa in South Africa's time of apartheid, and Palestinians are not getting support from South Africa. We should boycott, divest and impose sanctions - cripple Israel so they don't exist any more, and so they don't occupy and they don't kill.



I'm Taskeen. We were on our way to the protest to support the boycotting of Palestine and we were stopped by cops on the way and they wouldn't let us get off the bus, they wouldn't let the bus drive to the venue, and it was so unfair because there were a lot of people at the venue and they wouldn't let a bunch of students go - I mean we were unarmed, all we had was t-shirts and badges, yet they wouldn't let us even get off the bus. So we said we're going to sit in the bus until 4pm when the protest ended. Then they were going to arrest us for just sitting in the bus! And then after that, they put armed cops on the bus and escorted us home. We all had to squash up in the back of the bus. We were on our way to a peaceful protest. And so when we got back here we decided to protest here.



Ok this is Bafana from Sasco branch at wits university. I am part of the struggle because we see parallels with our own struggles, we feel solidarity with the students that are in Palestine, we feel that the Gaza strip will be deprived of its intellectual capacity, and the future is at stake, since the children of that country are targets. We feel strongly against the action of Israel.



My name is Mboyiso, convenor of African national congress youth league wits university branch. We were, as our rights allow us, going to join a march and in that march we were going to stand in solidarity with the people of Palestine that have been oppressed in all systematic ways possible, and ways that remind us of our own apartheid state, by Israel. And then the police force came in their numbers, they claim to be on strike but they came with huuge guns, and many ammunition, telling us they were going to take our rights away. They got in without even paying the fee of the bus, and they escorted us back to campus. But we decided that,

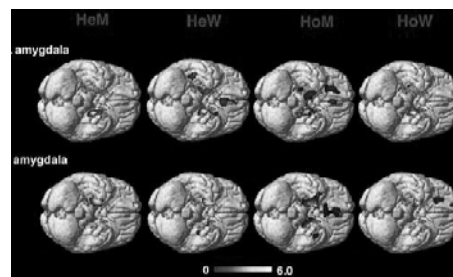


no, this thing is possible and came back to the empire and the M1 and decided that no, the people of Palestine must, particularly Gaza, feel the energies that we have expressed here, and they know that they got some solidarity from the people of South Africa because Israel reminds us of Apartheid. Sho!

Natasha. I think students were really angry. I feel frustrated, dehumanised...we were treated as if we were criminals. But I also feel like energy is still up with all these students here - people still had energy and we've been toyi-toying for about two hours. For the future - I think people should support the dockworkers who refused ot unload the ship from Is-rael, stand in solidarity with Palestine, and look out for more protests in the future.



Do women have different brains?



by Claire Ceruti

I was long ago convinced that we are not born knowing in our bodies how girls and boys 'naturally' act. We unconsciously learn these roles from birth, because we are born amongst people who were also born amongst people who believe that men and women are totally different.

Lately, that revolutionary idea is being battered by a rash of studies that claim to have found proof of a male brain and a female brain. The latest of these came with pictures showing scans of a lesbian brain, a straight man's brain, a straight woman's brain and a gay man's brain. "The right hemisphere was found to be slightly larger than the left in heterosexual males and lesbians" explains a reporter, "whereas those of gay men and straight women were symmetrical".

This is less a statement of scientific fact than a reflection of how science gets distorted by the idea that all of humanity must be reduced to two kinds of people. Then the very many people who aren't one of those two kinds of people will have to be squeezed and squashed until they fit uncomfortably into one of two shapes.

In the 'gay brain' study, the researchers reported averages. We use averages to simplify a complex picture. There would definitely have been people in the study who fitted neither category. If you work backward from the averages and the total variation reported by the researchers, you can get a picture of the possible variation within groups, (See <http://languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=256> if you like statistics) which shows that these averages could have come from this group of people:

"The researchers found four categories when they looked at the connection be-

tween sexual preference and brain symmetry. The biggest group, about 35 people, liked women and their brain scans showed that the right hemisphere was bigger than the left. This group included most of the straight men in the study (18 out of 25) and most of the lesbians (17 out of 20). The second group of 24 people had symmetrical brains and liked men. This group included the majority of the straight women (14 out of 25) and half of the 20 gay men in the study. Another group, almost as large as the second, contained 21 people who liked men and had a larger right side - half the gay men in the study and 11 of the straight women. Finally, 10 people - 7 men and 3 women - liked women and had symmetric brains".

This is a long way from proving that sexual preference, or 'manliness' and 'womanliness', is after all built into our brains rather than our societies and our experiences. At best, it tells us that there may be, sometimes but not always, a connection between brain sym-

metry and sexual preference. It does not tell us why or how the connection develops, when it develops, or which way it flows. It does not even confirm that the one causes the other. (You might notice that ice-cream sales rise with the murder rate, yet ice cream has nothing to do with murder. Each is aggravated by hot weather.)

It would be strange if there were not all sorts of complicated connections between my physical brain and the way I do things, what I'm good at, how I think. I am my body, no more and no less.

The mistake people make is assuming that brain structure determines behaviour, when there is plenty of evidence that this is a two-way street. We build our brains as we go about our lives. For example, a region of the brain usually involved in sight often gets 'co-opted' to sharpen hearing amongst people who go blind early in life. Drugs, hormones and chemicals in our environment also affect the brain. Nicotine, for example, makes a more or less permanent change to the pathways in the brain involved in feeling rewarded, and ecstasy seems to make neurons shorter and bushier. Doing boring repetitive work has been shown to shorten neurons, which decreases the number of connections that can be made.

Our brains are particularly plastic in early life. We are born with a brain that is really only partially formed. In a person's first five years, millions of new connections between neurons are made and broken as we interact with our world. These networks are, in a sense, the pathways of our thinking and learning. There is another growth spurt in the front of the brain when we are teenagers. In the 70s, a sociologist took her baby around dressed in blue one day, ("What a big strong boy!" people said) and in pink the next ("Oh, isn't she adorable!"). If boys and girls are treated differently from such an early age, wouldn't this show up





in our brains?

Another study about 'brain sex' was released at the same time as the 'gay brain' study, with much less publicity. Mommy rats spend more time

grooming and licking their male babies, probably to help their testicles descend. In this study, researchers took newborn female rats and stroked them in the same way for a few hours a day. Those females developed fewer oestrogen receptors in the hypothalamus, a certain part of the brain, similar to the hypothalamus of male rats. (<http://www.newscientist.com/article/mg20126903.300-mums-behaviour-may-make-young-rats-more-butch.html>).

We hear repeatedly about studies that found more men than women scored high in tests where people were asked to rotate shapes in their imagination. And the hippocampus, a part of the brain involved in thinking about space and finding your way around, is reported to be different in men and women.

But few mention the study in Anne Fausto-Sterling's book which found that Eskimo women navigate just as well as Eskimo men, whereas Temne women and Temne men show marked differences in this skill. Eskimo girls are allowed a lot of independence but Temne girls are strictly controlled.

Human brains are all about adaption anyway. People who are not good at rotating shapes in their imagination can still give good directions, for example by using landmarks rather than distances.

Unfortunately scientists are so immersed in a society that takes gender differences as natural that few researchers ask the kind of questions that the rat researchers asked.

Science is never neutral. The brain sex studies fit neatly with a world where the privatisation of anything has shifted a huge amount of responsibility back onto the family. The conservative ideas that women and men are

naturally suited to different roles fits with conveniently substituting women's work for state and society taking responsibility for all its children.



Obama: new hope?

by Mosa Phadi

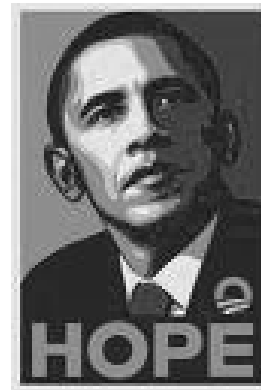
When Obama won the election even my mother called me to inform me the greatest news of the decade. She expressed excitement and disbelief that a black man finally will lead America, that it was the end of Bush and a sign of new possibilities. My Kenyan friend shouted across the road, "have you heard? Obama won! He is exactly what America needed! By the way he is my cousin...his father is from Kenya you know, therefore he is African. An African is ruling America!"

All over the world, the topic was Obama. Every news commentator, newspaper, television and internet site went on about the man who will bring change, the new Jesus who will transform the world and who has brought hope. For others his election symbolises that America has become a deracialised country and for others he is the hero who signifies that every thing is possible-"if Obama can do it, I can too!"

The question that is stuck in my mind is, what does Obama mean to the working class? Can he bring the change that has the imagination of people across the world, especially the working class in this era of global economic crisis?

The first question is who actually voted for Obama. About 96 percent of black American registered, and they were a backbone of campaigning and voting for Obama. An average of 67 percent of Latinos voted and more interesting is that a third of young Americans of all races voted for him. Obama clearly won the working class vote. It is important to note that amongst those who voted for Obama three quarters of the voters were white, which indicates that 'ordinary' America has slightly progressed when it comes to race issues.

But furthermore Obama was a preferred candidate of important sections of the ruling class. In his campaign, he made more money than any candidate did ever and he was sponsored by big banks such as Goldman, Sachs and Merrill Lynch. The ruling class hopes



Obama can rebuild the empire and rescue it from the global crisis.

Obama chose his words carefully. He promised to remove troops from

Iraq within 16 months if circumstances allows. Moreover, he promised to speed action on jobs, education, climate and the economy.

However, I looked at his economic policy that aims at bailing out banks from the housing bubbles deals that lead to the economic crisis. He plans to raise 3.3 trillion dollars to bail out the banks from their crisis. To do such he appointed former executive of firms such as Goldman Sachs; who was not only part of housing bubble but also benefitted greatly from it. Moreover, Obama selected Paul Volcker and Robert Rubin; these individuals were the master-minds behind the housing bubble that led to this crisis.

This illustrates Obama's contradiction as a man of change. Maybe we should ask what change he is bringing. Obama economic team selection illustrates he prefers to listen to people who were the catalysts of the crisis and benefitted from it. It just shows even with the crisis that was caused by the capitalists, life moves on for them without any sort of punishment. People like Paul Volcker can be appointed on giving advice on the problem they have created. While the working class under this crisis have to face retrenchments, food price increase, homelessness, as they are told to fasten their belts, as these are troublesome times for the world.

Unfortunately it looks like Obama aims to bail out banks and the capitalists who own them, in order for them to get to their old ways of accumulating profits and exploiting the workers. He is there not to change the conditions of the working class and bring possibilities for them but to protect and promote the new agenda of capitalists in this new era.

LPM calls for solidarity and advice

On the 1st March 2009, Maureen Msisi and 7 others were arrested and charged with public violence, assault Grevious Bodily Harm, intimidation, and unlawful gathering, and it will soon be made clear to the public that they are innocent of all charges. The Landless People's Movement in Protea South views these arrests as a method by the local government councilor to suppress any activism that undermines the government's plans to remove all informal settlements from Protea South to a far away place called Doorenkop.

Now that the comrades are going to court on the 25th March, the people in the bond houses in Protea South, the middle-class, are signing a petition to say that she must be removed from her community because she is promoting violence, "only represents foreigners", and is "blocking development in the area". The petition will be submitted on the 25th March at Protea Magistrate Court as a piece of evidence to ensure that she is proven guilty. It is believed that this will assist the middle-class bond house owners because the informal settlements will go away, the bond houses will remain, and their property values will go up. The people in the bond houses seem to think that if our leader no longer lives in Protea South, the demands of the people to remain there will disappear and that people will live peacefully in Protea South.

But this will not stop the people from organising and fighting for their right to choose whether or not they want to stay or go to Doorenkop and it will not stop the government from neglecting other basic demands that are made by the poor in Protea South. If Maureen is forced to leave, the government, the police, and the community, including those who own bond houses, will be in danger because chaos and aggression will win our people over.

The truth of the matter is that Maureen has been at the forefront of

Kajola, Maureen, Lekhtho & Maas

maintaining peace and stability at a time when Protea South has been bordering on the edge of war. Maureen was responsible for stopping community members from attacking each other and burning each other's shacks after a conflict on the 1st March when Community Policing Forum (CPF) members started to sing with the local government councilor while the LPM community were reading their memorandum. She convinced the community members that fighting another poor person weakens the struggle and strengthens the government's system. After this, members of the community left Protea South to destroy the transit shack camps across the road, which are intended to accommodate people before they move to houses in Doorenkop. When the local government councilor of Protea South learned about this, even she acknowledged Maureen's power to maintain peace in her community by calling Maureen, who was in her home at the time and did not know about the incident, to stop this destruction.

This past Wednesday, we had an urgent executive LPM meeting in Protea South to address the petition that was being made by the people living in the bond houses. Some members suggested that we call a mass meeting in Protea South to explain the truth that lies behind the petition against Maureen. But Maureen felt that if we call a mass meeting, it will create further divisions and also a war between the informal settlement and bond houses of Protea South. While the people living in the bond houses want the informal settlement to be removed, those in the informal settlements have actually been living there since the 1980s. The people living in bond houses are now claiming the land as their own,



based on the fact that they own property, when in fact we arrived here first. Like our current government, they have made it a matter of who has money and who doesn't because the informal settlement, those who are poor and landless, are now being asked to leave.

To achieve our demands without spilling blood in Protea South, the LPM has begun to create a counter petition which depicts the truth. The truth is that since 1995, Maureen has risked her life, and even been attacked, in order to represent the interests of the people living in Protea South. She continues to do so up until today as she remains committed to her people's futures, despite the threats that she, and her family, are faced with. Her commitments, both as an activist and as a single parent of five children, have placed her in a situation that puts great pressure on her as an individual, and it is taking all of her strength to keep her morale high. She is calling upon all comrades to display solidarity with the Protea South 8 if possible and wants to know if there is some advice or assistance she can get from comrades to make them more encouraged in this tough time.

Written by Bongani Xezwi, youth organiser of LPM Protea South Branch and eldest son of Maureen Msisi, With Luke Sinwell, Researcher and Activist, University of Johannesburg

Words of advice or solidarity can be sent to: Maureen at: 082-337-4514 Or emailed to: LSinwell@yahoo.com



KEEP LEFT!

KEEP LEFT! is an organisation for everyone who wants to fight capitalism. We want workers' power. *meeting details inside*

Our website <http://socialismfrombelow.googlepages.com>

East rand and rest of SA 082-401-9185
Joburg 082-332-9874
Cape Town 074-148-4948
socialismfrombelow@gmail.com