

When the revolutionary African National Congress (ANC) overthrew apartheid and brought democracy to South Africa, activists around the world celebrated the victory. Since then, through bitter experience, South African activists and social movements have come to understand that the ANC made a Faustian pact with international finance: you can take power, the bankers said, but leave the economy to us. By 1996 the promises of redistributing wealth were forgotten. In the new South Africa, half of all rural black children go hungry every day, and it now has the greatest divide between rich and poor of any nation on earth. Once again, power betrayed the people it had promised to free.

While unemployment grows and public services and housing projects are privatized, more and more people are being pushed to the margins. Since 1994, when the ANC came into power, ten million South Africans have had their water and electricity cut off as they cannot pay the new rates, while two million have been evicted from their homes. Resistance to these policies are met with tear gas, mass arrests, and live bullets.

Feeling utterly betrayed by the ANC's assault on the poor, people are challenging state power, developing new strategies, rejecting neoliberalism, merging subsistence struggle with the language and tactics of the global movement, and championing locally-based direct action. A new coalition of landless, anti-AIDS, anti-eviction, and anti-privatization activists launched a common struggle against what they call 'global apartheid' through the Durban Social Forum. The DSF was created to highlight issues not on the agenda as South Africa hosted the United Nations' World Conference Against Racism. The following declaration was adopted at a mass meeting, held in the township of Mpumalanga, and is a message of solidarity with oppressed people around the world.

Durban Social Forum Declaration

28 August 2001

It has been seven years since apartheid ended in the country where we live. It has been seven years since the open wound of colonialism was finally stitched closed on the continent of Africa. The defeat of political systems, which for over 350 years created so much human degradation and racial violence against Africans, brought a moment of hope and a moment of rest for many of us who live below the Limpopo River. By 1994 the tireless exertions of the workers, the militance of the people in the townships, as well as the sacrifices of the gallant youth during the 1980s, finally had brought down the white-minority Government. In the process, we had built strong, democratic organizations, and elected individuals to lead us whom we trusted as honest and principled people. Of course, we still had to start building a new society ourselves. But we looked to our leaders for policies that would make this possible by redistributing the wealth held by a tiny group of families and corporations in South Africa. Who could blame us for wanting to beat our swords into ploughshares?

For a while we really hoped things would get better, even though we kept being told of delays and compromises and new economic plans to satisfy the West. We thought, "If not for us, then for our children." But things started to

go wrong. The important people – increasingly just appointed to lead us – we knew them not. Before elections they spoke many fine words, but by their deeds we saw that they no longer cared about us. When we looked around, we saw that many of our leaders had not struggled for freedom with us or suffered like we had. And even those who had been with us started keeping their distance. We read the soft words they spoke to the rich men in our country, and soon we heard the harsh words they began speaking to us.

We were told to pay money or be thrown out of our homes, to pay school-fees or have our children prevented from learning. We were told that without money we would be given no water or lights, and minimal medical care. They gave this an indigenous name, Masakhane, to pretend that they acted for our own good. But all the while, jobs were being cut by the hundred-thousands and there was no money coming into our communities anymore. One day we woke up to learn that it was now the Government's actual policy to lose jobs, to cut off the water of the indigent, to reduce child-care grants by half, and to evict with violence those who could not pay for a piece of land

or a roof over their heads. Most shocking, as hospitals and clinics were closed down all over the countryside, we were told that 'our' Government would refuse us medicine for HIV/AIDS, even when it could prevent babies being infected by this terrible plague.

The leaders became unrecognizable to us. Even physically. They became bloated with gravy and their faces distorted behind the dark glass of their luxury cars. They seemed to be much happier overseas grovelling in front of world leaders when, not long ago, we had all shared an understanding that it was the powerful in the West and the North that had an interest in our exploitation.

We are sad to report that since 1999 things have become very bad in this country for Black people and the poor. The policies this regime is pursuing have caused outbreaks of serious diseases like cholera. Half of all Black children in rural areas go hungry every day and, although a few Black people in the upper echelons of the ANC have become fantastically wealthy, South Africa now has the greatest divide between rich and poor of any country in the world. Our president's arrogance and cowardice has caused



>> **November 26** >> Thousands of workers rally in Seoul, South Korea, demanding shorter working hours and the release of Dan Byong-Ho, leader of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, who was arrested for organizing "illegal" protests in October.

>> **December 2** >> Activists in various capital cities sabotage what newspapers describe as "the most idiotic protest ever," the Walk for Capitalism, or D2, as the

organizers call it. No protest draws more than around 25 attendees and in many places protesting capitalists are outnumbered by global justice activists, who dress in thrift store suits and carry signs saying, "Child labor=huge profits," "The more efficiently you work, the more of you we can lay off," and "Our stock is more important than your family."

>> **December 10** >> The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan holds a demonstration in honour of

thousands of preventable AIDS deaths. The police shoot students dead again who protest against unaffordable fees and the closing down of unprofitable departments. Instead of a solution to the land hunger of our people, we have evictions of families living on land stolen from their forefathers, carried out with a brutality we never thought we would live to see again.

And so, reluctantly at first but now with a deepening fury, communities have started to resist. In Chatsworth and Mpumalanga in KwaZulu Natal, bloody battles have been fought against evictions and water cutoffs. The same has happened in Tafelsig on the Cape Flats. And in Bredell

“South Africa is in the hands of global capital. That's why it can't meet the legitimate demands of its people.”

– George Soros, financial speculator

in Gauteng, landless people seized their birthright. They were defeated, but will always be remembered as the beginning of a movement for radical redistribution of land, away from those who do not need it and towards those who are desperate for any piece they can get. In Isipingo, the community has voted out of office all political parties, and elected instead a local council member directly accountable to them. In Soweto, people are trained to reconnect electricity and water and occupy the smart offices of the companies that urge service cut-offs. In Johannesburg, an anti-privatization group, which unites comrades from many different traditions of activism, is growing from strength to strength.

These local community struggles have shone a light not only by their courage in the face of the enemy, but also courage in the face of our own prejudices. It is supremely ironic, and tragic, that this Government's policies continue to barricade the poor into racial ghettos to fight over neoliberalism's crumbs while a few of the rulers share out the loot. The result, increasingly, is the creation of race hate. Nonetheless, our courage can free us. For example, in this city of Durban where colonial rulers encouraged divisions between Indian, coloured, and African people, a



Anti-eviction action. Johannesburg, South Africa

sense of non-racialism is defiantly entrenched in the community organizations as we confront our common lot, not as separate races, but as *the* *poors*.

Recently, we have come to understand more about the 'global village', and are ashamed about the role our Government has chosen to play as an *induna* of the West. We wish to apologize to the people of Palestine, Harlem, East Timor, Congo, Chiapas, Algeria, Burma, Sudan, Iraq, the Dalits of India, the workers in Asian sweatshops, the women downtrodden in Afghanistan, the street-children in São Paulo, the political prisoners in the United States, the villagers in the Maluti Mountain Valley, the Aborigines in Australia, the immigrants of Europe and North America, and every other place in our world where injustice is perpetuated while the leaders of our country keep conveniently quiet, or even support your oppressors. We are learning about economic globalization too. We realize that while some wounds from the past have been sewn shut, many others have been torn open – on the body of the earth and on the bodies of human beings. Colonialism is dead but new overlords impose themselves: the World Bank,

WEF, G8, IMF, and WTO. They are supported, not only by lackey governments like our own, but also by a legion of other forked-tongue abbreviations: NGOs, UNOs, USAIDs, and WCARs, of which we are all deeply suspicious, despite their pretence at caring for us.

But we don't despair. We are encouraged by what we have read, heard on the radio, or seen on TV, about how our brothers and sisters in the North are bravely struggling to determine the character of the new world economy. Their ways of struggling are at once so different and so similar to ours. As our struggles merge, we are going to learn better and stronger ways of fighting against those who hurt us. We will not make the mistakes of the past, when all too often we trusted leaders or parties or nations or races to save us. We know now that only the freedom and justice we the people build together has the strength to resist oppression.

International Human Rights Day in Peshawar, Afghanistan. Two hundred people gather and condemn the Northern Alliance for their continued patriarchy and lack of democracy, while calling for the participation of women in the political process of building a secular democratic state.
>> **December 11-13** >> Moroccan teachers' unions stage a three day strike with nearly 100 per cent participation by the 215,500 teachers in the public school system. Teachers

stage sit-ins in front of the Ministry of Education and the university president's offices, demanding adherence to commitments to raise wages and improve conditions.

>> **December 12** >> In Zambia, over 2,000 Lusaka City Council workers go on strike against the nonpayment of over three months' salary.

>> **December 14** >> In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 3,000 students of the University of Kinshasa take

to the streets demanding a reduction in tuition fees. Earlier in the week, tuition fees in Lubumbashi were reduced following demonstrations in which two students were killed by police.

>> **December 18** >> Workers at the Brukman textile factory in Argentina take control of their workplace when its owners abandon it. The action serves as an inspiration to workers across the country, and countless other