

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS INDABA

PRESS RELEASE

HISTORIC UNITED SOCIAL MOVEMENTS MASS MARCH TO W\$\$D SENDS CLEAR MESSAGE – THE PEOPLE WILL BE HEARD!

25 000 ‘TAKE’ SANDTON IN MILITANT, PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATION

In a historic show of ‘people’s power’, over 25 000 marched on Sandton, Johannesburg yesterday (Saturday 31st August) to reject the neo-liberal policies of the W\$\$D and the South African government. Under the banner of the ‘United Social Movements’ (consisting of the Social Movements Indaba, the Landless People’s Movement and La Via Campesino), the marchers made their way from the poverty-stricken township of Alexandra to the ultra-wealthy suburb of Sandton to send a peaceful, yet militant message that ‘enough is enough’.

Anchored by thousands who had come from across South Africa’s urban and rural poor communities, and joined by activists from various communities and movements from around the world, the march represented the largest and most popular rejection of the corporate and anti-poor policies of the South African government since 1994. It also represented a continuation and strengthening of the growing global rejection of the capitalist neo-liberal ‘developmental’ framework that has wreaked so much devastation on the poor majority of humanity.

Despite the attempts at suppression, outright lies, the sowing of confusion and the constant beating of war drums by the South African government (and sections of the mainstream press) in the days leading up to the march, the multitudes who took over Sandton yesterday showed that disciplined and organised mass action can overcome even the most blatant attempts at disruption and caricature. Even the presence of thousands of heavily armed police and army troops did nothing to deter the spirit or content of the people’s voices and message. The march was a resounding victory for those who continue to be marginalised and treated with contempt by the rich and powerful.

For South Africa in particular, the march marked a turning point in the country’s political landscape. A new movement is being built that for the first time since 1994, poses the potential of a serious challenge to the South African government amongst it’s historic core constituency – the broad working class. This was more than apparent by the extremely poor response to the government-sponsored rally and march in Alexandra, where President Mbeki spoke to a stadium that was not even half-full. Such was the desperation of the ANC and its allies that they even resorted to diverting busloads of people destined for the United Social Movements

Rally to the stadium. Likewise, the attempts by elements within the 'Global People's Forum' to organise a separate march failed miserably.

The disingenuous attempts by the mainstream South African press to grossly underestimate the numbers of marchers and to ignore their militant message are not going to fool anyone except those that continue to live in a world of self-fulfilling illusions. The tide is turning against the barbarities of capitalist neo-liberalism and no amount of counter-propaganda, opportunistic populism, sweet-talking and pious resolution-making are going to stop that tide.

The W\$\$D has been exposed for the charade that it is, the South African government has been forced to face the realities of its own unpopularity and the voice of the poor and marginalised is growing stronger by the day. The struggles that inform those voices are going to intensify and those that continue to oppose them will find themselves on the wrong side of history.

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