

## *The socialist alternative*

**T**he Workers' Organisation for Socialist Action (WOSA) of South Africa and Socialismo Revolucionario of Italy hosted an international conference of socialists from 4 to 8 December.

The purpose of the conference, which was held at the Western Cape College of Education, was to discuss alternatives to the globalized system of capitalism.

Messages of support were received from around the globe. Delegations from 17 countries, including Brazil, New Zealand, France, the US, Mauritius, Namibia, Germany and Nigeria participated in the conference proceedings. Others could not make it due to a lack of funds. Not a single cent was sought for or donated by any local or foreign funding agency. Each participating organisation paid its own way. This, in itself, marked the conference as a significant event.

### **Themes**

Under the general heading 'Stop capitalist barbarism: prepare the socialist alternative', the conference considered the ravages of the present phase of capitalist development, broadly referred to as 'globalisation', and the political and organisational crisis of socialism as an alternative to the prevailing system.

The main themes were:

- the destructiveness of the dominant system;
- new forms of class struggle and the struggle for socialist alternatives;
- women's rights;
- Marxism as a theory and practical tool;

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- the construction of a new internationalism and solidarity in a changing world,
- structures for networking at international and regional levels.

Workshops were held on:

- trade unions and the working class;
- unemployment;
- racism and migration;
- land and rural struggles;
- African recolonisation and globalisation;
- child abuse;
- sexual violence;
- women and work;
- solidarity with Cuba, Palestine, Chiapas, East Timor and Nigeria.

Two well-attended public meetings were also held.

### **Decisions**

Underlying all the decisions taken at the conference was an agreement that, in an era dominated by greed, aggression, competition and individualism, the ethical component of Marxism must be developed.

The current system cannot deliver even the most basic of necessities, such as food, clothing, shelter, education, health and welfare. In this sense, the programme of revolutionary socialism is almost biblical in its simplicity. It demands jobs for the jobless, that the hungry be fed, the homeless be housed and that land is restored to the landless.

Delegates agreed to launch international campaigns against racism and for the renewal of working class organisation.

### **Network**

Perhaps the most important decision was an agreement to set up an international socialist network. This will promote co-operation, joint action, campaigns and research to promote a socialist future. The conference decided that a network between left groupings is preferable to 'hub and spokes' party structures, which have invariably meant a centre in a European capital and 'franchises' in the rest of the world.

### **Worker organisation**

Noting that transnational companies and organisations such as the IMF and the World Bank have perpetuated neo-colonial relations throughout Africa, delegates resolved to:

- support the struggle for worker rights;
- promote accountability and democracy in the unions;
- build solidarity through encouraging women's participation;
- link the struggles of the unemployed with employed workers.

It was also agreed to campaign for a 35-hour week and the rights of casual and seasonal workers in export processing zones.

International solidarity action will be launched in support of workers in Nigeria, Indonesia, East Timor, South Korea, Palestine, the Amazon and China. An international campaign against privatisation was also agreed upon.

### **Child abuse**

Capitalism has had a marked effect on the lives of the children of the world. Child abuse, child labour, child soldiers, and high rates of illness and illiteracy amongst children are features of this system. It was agreed that campaigns will be launched

against child labour and all other forms of child abuse.

### **Amazon forest**

The rapid decimation of the Amazon forests in Brazil is not only a threat to the survival of the people who live in the forests. The struggle of these people is a struggle for the survival of the human species itself. The rain forests of the Amazon are the lungs of our planet, lungs which are being cut out by capitalist greed.

One of the highlights of the conference was a public meeting addressed by Osmarino Rodriguez, a worker leader of the rubber planters of the Amazon forests. He has been at the forefront of the struggle against the privatisation and destruction of the forests and has been the object of several assassination attempts.

Delegates agreed to give top priority to a campaign for the salvation of the forests.

### **Renaissance**

The spirit which prevailed at the conference augurs well for the future of a socialist alternative. A French veteran of left-wing politics was moved to exclaim that in all his years of participation in communist and socialist debate and action, he had never experienced such democratic, open and respectful attitudes amongst comrades who have very different views on crucial matters. The usual crudities of the sectarian Left were remarkably absent.

During the next two years, a determined effort will be made to increase the number of organisations participating in the network and to prepare for a larger conference. ★

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*Sally Vally is a member of WOSA. For copies of the conference documents, and information on future events, contact the International Socialist Network, c/o WOSA, tel 021 476 839, e-mail WOSA@lafrika.com or 155vas@mentor.edcm.wits.ac.za*