



APDUSA VIEWS

ISSUE No. 37

DECEMBER 1990

**“THE GREED AND
WASTE THAT IS
CAPITALISM”**



by

ALIE FATAAR

ABOUT COMRADE ALIE FATAAR

Comrade Alie Fataar, the writer of this issue of APDUSA VIEWS, has an illustrious political career which covers half a century of his life. Here we can do no more than to mention the highlights of his career.

1941: He joined the NEW ERA FELLOWSHIP, an ideological power-house which trained a wide section of the younger leadership of the Non-European Unity Movement.

1943: Founder member and Treasurer of the National Anti-CAD Movement. Founder member of the Non-European Unity Movement and also a member of its Head Unity Committee.

1944: First Secretary of the radicalised Teachers' League of South Africa. He, together with people like B.M Kies, R.O. Dudley, Van Schoor and others, radicalised the TLSA.

1952: Founder member of the Cape Teachers Federal Council which was a federation of the TLSA and the Cape African Teachers' Association. He was also elected its secretary.

1954: Founder member of "THE TORCH". Also a member of its editorial committee.

1959: Elected Joint Secretary together with Comrade Mqotsi of the one section of the Unity Movement.

1961: Founder and Executive member of APDUSA. Banned for five years by one B.J. Vorster.

1965: Forced to flee the country to avoid arrest, detention and imprisonment.

1968-80: Appointed teacher, lecturer and educationist in Zambia. There, for the first time, he and his wife Comrade Ursula, obtained refugee status from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

1980: Went to Zimbabwe, where he was appointed as an education officer in the Ministry of Education and Culture.

1985: Among the first abroad to hail the formation of the New Unity Movement. From the beginning he made himself available to the New Unity Movement and has actively propagated its policy abroad.

The reader will now appreciate why we earlier described his career as illustrious. The long years of eating the "bitter bread of exile" has not made him give way to cynicism or disillusionment. The long absence from the white heat of battle has not made him flabby.

At the age of 73, Comrade Fataar remains an unrepentant revolutionary who has already rolled up his sleeves for the next round of battle.

INTRODUCTION

There is not a day that passes when capitalism, through its numerous agencies, does not tell us of the failure of socialism. How it gloats over the economic misfortune of the Soviet Union! The latter was one time leader in space exploration and the second most powerful nation in the world. Today, it cannot even feed her people properly — so goes the allegation. According to the capitalists, the cause of the disaster facing the Soviet Union lies in the essence of socialism.

Against this depressing scenario we are presented with the free market system of capitalism — the panacea of all economic ills. So powerful is the propaganda against socialism, that all but its most doughty defenders are filled with misgivings about the efficacy of socialism.

In warding off blows against socialism, it is necessary to rip off the mask of benignity which the beast of capitalism has donned. To do full justice to this topic, the world needs a new “Das Kapital” as a sequel to Marx’s monumental work. In the meantime there is much that can be done.

Comrade Fataar’s contribution is a telling blow against the hypocrisy of the bourgeois propagandists. Through his pen we get a sight of part of the beast’s face — Capitalist Consumerism and World Poverty. Consumerism is a disease which afflicts people by making them want to buy compulsively material goods which are spewed out by the factories in capitalist countries. Many of the goods are not essential items and others are well beyond the means of the purchaser who, nonetheless, buys them because he or she has been brainwashed by fiendish marketing experts.

One of the meanings of “consume” is “to waste”; another meaning is “to squander”. And that is what consumerism is all about. Yet capitalist theory has it that uncontrolled spending is good for the economy, especially if the goods bought are luxury items.

Comrade Fataar’s indictment of this facet of capitalism is extremely valuable. When one is assailed with drums beating the “free market”, it is salutary to peep at the beast’s visage so as to remind ourselves what capitalism really is.

The caption of the article “**THE GREED AND WASTE THAT IS CAPITALISM**” is a fair indication of the contents of Comrade Fataar’s contribution. We hope that our readers who are interested in the subject matter will find the article thought-provoking. Equally, we trust that this article will be a useful reference and aid to the committed cadres in the world-wide battle against the ideas of capitalism.

“THE GREED AND WASTE THAT IS CAPITALISM”

Of the five billion people on earth, one billion go without food every day, and this one-fifth threatens to become bigger before the end of this decade.

Professor Canaan Banana touched on the global tragedy when he spoke on “Theology and Economic Development” in Harare on 21 September 1990, saying that people in the developing countries “need to be weaned from Western consumption patterns” if these countries are to develop economically. Excessive consumption patterns, exported by the Western countries, were being followed by developing countries, resulting in dependancy, poverty and a loss of “cultural identity”.

This obsession of consumerism, viewed globally, will have to be tackled step-by-step nationally by the Third World nations whose populations in the main suffer gross poverty, hunger and the denial of basic necessities of a decent living. There will have to be a continual internationalist struggle by the four-fifths of the world’s people (the South and the East) aimed at “Nothing less than full equality between all the nations”. That the Western capitalist, industrialised countries have so much for their personal consumption is due to their exploiting the Third World by reaping massive super-profits from what in effect are still their colonies. These Western countries have one-fifth of the world’s population but they consume four-fifths of the world’s wealth; whereas the South-East countries have four-fifths of the world’s population but consume one-fifth of the world’s wealth. This is what economically the global state of Imperialism is today: a perpetual transfer of the wealth in the form of surplus value from the poor to the rich countries in the West (and Japan) that enables the 27 industrialised nations to enjoy their living standards and wallow in obscene consumerism.

In the colonial countries there is the expectation of enjoying life styles similar or equal to those seen in these exploiting countries. Their life styles are paraded before us in the colonies when we see their cinema and television films and advertisements in our print media. We are never to know that this glitter is the preserve of only a section of their people and that millions in the West go unemployed, are on the dole, go hungry, are beggars and homeless in such cities as New York, Chicago and Harlem. The populations in the Third World cannot by any means enjoy similar life styles, except for a very small ‘elite’ of perhaps 5 to

15% amongst whom we observe the obsession of consumerism. In these countries the governments seem to cater for the relatively small segment of the middle-class (sometimes labelled *petit-bourgeoisie* or *comprador class*) consisting of small businessmen, managers, politicians, civil servants, intellectuals and certain skilled workers in urban centres. Many of these people own fine expensive houses, furniture, cars, clothes, televisions, etc., quite out of proportion to what their Third World economies can afford, and on pay days they are exhorted to spend, spend, spend and even buy on the extended credit systems so that their life styles more or less approximate those of their metropolitan counterparts, even to horse-and, now dog-racing fun and games.

Nowhere is this two-world phenomenon more glaringly obvious than in racist South Africa. The five million whites own over 90% of the wealth and enjoy it to the full, while the 35 million black populace subsist on less than 10% of the resources of the country. Consumerism is a disease of affluence amongst the white minority and the greatest deprivation is evident amongst the urban and rural masses, amongst whom there are between five and six million youths aged between 15 and 25 years who are not only unemployed but virtually unemployable without any education or skilled training. That is the dilemma facing the 'negotiated' deal that De Klerk is hoping to pull off with the liberation movement at the moment. Can he and his imperialist masters hurriedly assemble a black *comprador class* that will miraculously be able to resolve the socio-economic shambles brought on after two generations of Verwoerdian misrule?

The irony is that in the Third World countries so little seems to be able to be done fundamentally to change the socio-economic conditions of those billions of impoverished people. What appears to be at the root of the problem is the class-based rule in the countries, newly independent politically but socio-economically still in thrall.

These 'neo-colonial' (actually still colonial) governments are in effect the victims of capitalism-imperialism. They perforce continued the socio-economic relationship after political independence was either won by bloody struggle or was 'granted' for the convenience and benefit of the previous colonial power. Freedom in these countries has meant the freedom to inherit the 'freedoms' and the status enjoyed by their predecessors in office. Politicians, civil servants, managers, etc, had to have their 'perks and their Mercs', their high salary structures, bonuses and allowances, etc. 'Advancement' meant assuming all positions and salary structures which were based on "rewarding" the minority white bureaucracy and captains of industry from surplus-value siphoned from

the poorly paid labour of the mass of the indigenous population. When this unequal wealth distribution system was grafted on to the new independence structure, there emerged this consumerist society of the enlarged bureaucracy and managerial set-up, a mere 15% as against about 80% denied most of the basics of any decent living standard. One would have hoped that a moratorium would have been placed on high incomes in order to enable the lower-paid workers to obtain decent wages and salaries that would in real terms narrow the gap between upper and lower incomes. This 'sharing of wealth' would have been in conformity with what the economy could afford and an expression of 'the will to socialism'.

Another manifestation of this elitist consumerism is there for all to see in the advertisements in the various media and shop windows, and then one realises how this neo-colonial state of affairs has benefitted a small minority who have the means to be well-heeled and fairly comfortable. Even religious television programmes syndicated by the U.S. imperialism have been targeted at this new class: the beautifully furnished homes from which richly dressed white hot gospellers preach to the ragged and the hungry of the Third World seem incongruous and obscene, and that goes even when the black Bill Cosbys "entertain" with the vulgarity of American opulence.

What one might say about this vulgarity of consumerism amongst the elite of the Western world, one could with equal justification say about the same phenomenon amongst our middle-classes of the neo-colonial world: *there must be a lowering of their living standards in order to raise those of the exploited majority in both the metropolitan and the colonial countries.* This is something which, though perhaps unpalatable to many, has to be said: *Many of us are consuming much too much of the world's wealth, thereby denying as much and more to the world's impoverished and starving billions.* Do we have to remind ourselves the EEC, that multinational of multinationals, and North America have mountains of food as reserves with which to bribe Third World leaders if and when they need to? And now with the Gulf crisis it is revealed that the U.S. and Western Europe have huge storage facilities for billions of gallons of Middle East and Third World oil stored against any "eventualities", which also ensures lower oil prices for their machinery, transport, petro-chemical industries and gas-guzzling high-powered cars and even racing-car circuits. Yet another element of the obscene consumerism of the West, precisely as they do in reaping other raw materials and foodstuffs from around the Third World through their marketing and unequal exchange mechanisms to keep prices low. This,

as we know, is why the Third World (and now Eastern Europe) is in a debt-trap of imperialism and why there is starvation and below living-standards consumption in four-fifths of the world. As an aside, it is on record that petro-dollar-rich Emirs give their sons U.S. \$1 million "spending money" while many of the populace are denied decent living conditions.

It appears more obvious today that the system, global and national, of distribution and sharing of the world's wealth and riches of food, shelter, clothing, social welfare, leisure, cultural pursuits, etc, are in need of a revolutionary overhaul world-wide. What this implies is an end to the exploitation, oppression and racialist discrimination of the peoples and nations of the South and the East by the imperialist nations. In effect this entails an end to the transfer of surplus value/super-profits through unequal exchange from the poor to the rich countries, the 27 industrialised countries of North America, the EEC and Japan. Additionally, the levelling internationally of national incomes per capita by lowering standards of consumption in the exploiting countries and raising those of the exploited masses (not the bureaucracy/petit bourgeoisie comprador classes) in the Third World on the basis of real economic equality. This should lead to an end to consumerism and the replacement of the profit motive, which drives the capitalist-imperialist system, with the motives of **USE-VALUE, EQUALITY and HAPPINESS.**

In an unpublished S.A.P.E.S.* Seminar on "Non-Collaboration and Anti-Imperialism" I listed the application of some forms of Anti-Imperialism:

- * The withdrawal of all African, Caribbean and Pacific member-states from the neo-colonialist Lome Convention of the imperialist bloc known as the E.E.C.;
- * Minimising the impact of over-valued goods from the West and the export of under-valued raw materials to the West;
- * Undermining "unequal exchange" and banking;
- * As far as possible, halting the drain of mineral and agricultural resources, profits and income from the South and East to the West;
- * Cancelling, as Comrade Fidel Castro has urged, the debt by the South and the East to the West;
- * Setting up alternative and independent financial institutions, however small and weak initially, and boycotting the imperialist World Bank, the IMF and the European Bank.

* Southern African Political Economy Series

In this respect, it is most appropriate to refer to the opening address of President Robert Mugabe when he spoke at the Ninth Conference of African Ministers of Industry in Harare on 29 May 1989. Referring to "structural adjustment programmes and measures" being prescribed for "our poor and besieged African economies by multilateral aid agencies", Comrade Mugabe said they did not work if they are forced on African governments, "often against the long-term strategy of the country and its capacity to provide for the inhabitants . . ." "It is, therefore, of utmost importance that the countries themselves, without external interference, be in a position to determine the desired components of the programmes within their capacity, and the pace and direction of all these programmes." With regard to Zimbabwe, the President added, successes have been registered "without implementing the IMF/World Bank type of structural adjustment measures."

"The financing and execution of the I.D.D.A.2** programme has to be the primary responsibility of African member states themselves, individually and collectively and not of U.N.I.D.O.,*** the E.E.C., the World Bank or IMF." The past few decades has shown "unequivocally" that industrialisation in Africa or anywhere else "is not a charitable act by donors or outsiders." The African states themselves have to take measures and create conditions to develop management and technical skills, establish appropriate institutional arrangements, mobilise finance and other physical resources, acquire and develop technology in order to industrialise their economies. The process is complex, long, costly and risky. But if we want to develop our economies, we cannot avoid taking such steps and risks . . . We do not wish, as Africa, to write off ourselves as economically and politically irrelevant internationally."

One hopes to hear more of these "will to socialism" and, in effect, anti-imperialist sentiments and mandates from other Third World leaders.

Caring and sharing sentiments should not take the form of charity gratuitously given by the haves to the have-nots who will remain poor, deprived, beggars and even thieves in perpetuity. One is left with the impression that the liberation theologians, like Professor Canaan Banana, are more fundamental in their interpretation of a new world social order than many professed 'Socialists' and 'Marxists' in the world today. This may sound pessimistic, but it is a seeming reality one cannot fail to observe.

** Institutional Development Democracy in Africa

*** United Nations' Industrial and Development Organisation