

The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD)

Zabalaza

March 2002

The APF was for some time heavily involved in the 'Civil Society Indaba' where a wide range of South African organisations were preparing for the summit. But it was not to have the opportunity to continue in its participation. As usual with such processes, the decisions were made elsewhere.

The bureaucratic sellouts of the Congress of South African Trade Unions, terrified by the prospect of a mass movement outside the high walls of the pro-capitalist alliance led by the ANC, have been consistently hostile to the APF, preventing union participation in the organisation and refusing to support its campaigns. The 'Civil Society Indaba', in which COSATU and the APF were both invited to participate, was no exception. COSATU condemned the APF and other organisations that it could not control as 'unrepresentative', provoking a crisis in the Indaba that was then 'mediated' by the South African Council of Churches, which, as befits a religious institution, is known for its readiness to uphold the existing order and keep the masses in their place. The 'mediation' ended with the Indaba restructured on a far more openly authoritarian basis, with COSATU in the driving seat and the APF left by the wayside: a decision further assured by the influence of the ruling coalition on the South African NGO Coalition, always a key player in such processes. It seems that the self-proclaimed leaders of the working class were more ready to give a voice to the representatives of capital than to keep the APF on board.

But, while this development does illustrate the class loyalties of the union bureaucracy, it is not a defeat for the working class. Staying in the WSSD processes would merely have given them legitimacy while accomplishing nothing. The APF's exclusion is a sign of a contradiction in the position of the ruling class: while they want 'civil society' to give legitimacy to their crimes, they cannot afford to give that legitimacy to anyone who could pose a serious threat to their power. But the working class cannot afford either to seek legitimacy from its oppressors or to grant any legitimacy to them. Hence the APF should seek, not to return to the conference, but to condemn it utterly as a massive exercise in hypocrisy, and to condemn also the bosses behind it and their faithful servants in the union 'leadership'. As anarchists our position is simple: we the working class must retake possession of our unions, smash the bureaucracy, and transform them into the great revolutionary organisations they are capable of being – not for negotiation with the bosses or participation in their conferences, but for their utter destruction.

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