THE BLACK THURSDAY LAND CAMPAIGN

As we approach the 100 anniversary of the promulgation of the infamous Native Land Act of 1913 South Africa is at a political turning point. The ongoing dispossession of land, livelihoods and rights continues 99 years after the Native Land Act. The failure of the market based land reform programme to address redistribution and spatial apartheid is compounded by the emphasis on market led development. South Africa is now the country with the greatest divide between the rich and the poor.

Increasingly the working class is disgruntled and frustrated even prepared to risk their lives in the battle against an ever more oppressive regime focussed on the interests of capital. Thus the launch of the Black Thursday Campaign comes at an opportune moment. While it is recognized that the Native Land Act merely formalized dispossession and landlessness the build up to the 100 year anniversary is a space for people to unite and strengthen voice against landlessness, spatial apartheid, poverty and the violation of worker rights. The campaign challenges the harsh reality of capitalism and its effects on the poor and on the environment.

The fact that the Land Act was promulgated on a Thursday and that the Marikana massacre took place on a Thursday makes the campaign still more significant. Thursday will be highlighted as a day of mourning but also a day of new life and resistance. A number of actions will take place throughout the year as a build up to the 13 June 2013, 100 years after the imposition of the Land Act.

Ongoing campaigns and struggles highlighted within the Black Thursday Campaign:

The failure of market driven land reform

Land reform is a dismal failure. Skewed patterns of land ownership continue with a mere 6% of land having been redistributed against a context where 87% of land belonged to 13% of the population. Land redistribution is determined by the market, which always works in favour of the rich, with no proactive response by the government.

More and more people are being squeezed into informal settlements without adequate housing or services. Evicted farm dwellers, communities displaced by mining, people displaced by elite developments like golf estates and game farms, people affected by privatisation of forests and railways. The dispossession of land continues. The tide of frustration grows as demonstrated by the numerous service delivery protests.

The minimal land redistribution which has taken place has failed to improve the quality of life or address levels of poverty. The emphasis on commercial agriculture not conducive to small-scale producers, the mismatch between the price of land and the state grants resulting in large groups of people taking over farms and the lack of appropriate post settlement support set land reform up for failure. The response of the state is the Recapitalisation Programme with an emphasis on appointing commercial farmers as mentors.

Farm dwellers who have become shareholders in equity schemes which bail struggling commercial farmers out of debt and financial ruin are excluded from decision making, do not benefit from the schemes and find themselves fired from “their own farm”.

Therefore small-scale farmers, farm dwellers and landless people are organizing and demanding pro-active land redistribution and service delivery.

Food insecurity and hunger

Hunger remains a reality for many South Africans. Recent research shows that 1 in 4 households experience hunger. Food, from seed to the table, is a commodity to generate profits. The result is a drastic increase in food prices, increased hunger and a rise in diet related illnesses. The response of the government has been to increase social protection measures, food parcels, feeding schemes,
rather than foster food sovereignty and challenge the domination of the seed producers, supermarkets and transportation businesses.

Therefore people are mobilized for food sovereignty and are taking control over food through seed exchanges and agro-ecological food production.

Insecure tenure and unfair labour practises

With the entrenchment of the capitalist agenda the exploitation of workers continues. Farm workers are often faced with unfair labour conditions, with not even the minimal protection of labour legislation being enforced. Conditions on many farms are in many cases inhumane with the government failing to protect the rights of farm workers and dwellers.

Displacements and evictions from farms continue as land owners increasingly source casual labour in urban townships or rural labour settlements. Access to schools, services and wages is ever more difficult with the closure of farm schools, the springing up of informal settlements to cater for evicted or casual workers and the non-adherence to even the minimum wage. Women farm dwellers are particularly vulnerable to exploitation.

Therefore farm workers will continue to organise and drive a fair labour campaign and mobilize for service delivery on farms and the benefits of agrarian transformation

The conversion of agricultural land and compounding patterns of spatial apartheid

Despite the failure of land reform and ongoing food insecurity and hunger the trend to convert agricultural land in the interests of the accumulation of capital continues, accompanied by promises of job provision. This includes the conversion of agricultural land for elite developments like golf courses, game farms and mining. People are removed from land, with farm dwellers being the first to be evicted, land is removed from the production of food and patterns of spatial apartheid are compounded as poor people are dumped into labour reserves and urban townships. Employment opportunities are limited to menial positions, often with the use of labour brokers, and low wages. Labour is exploited to ensure profits are accumulated.

The proposed fracking for methane gas over large portions of the Karoo evokes images of the gold rush of the 1880s which led to the birth of apartheid. Farm dwellers stand to lose their employment and will in all likelihood be removed from land into urban townships or squatter camps. Land for grazing and crop production will be converted to mining land. Workers who are employed will be housed in labour dumps or urban townships. Opportunities for bribing and for the enrichment of an elite few will be plentiful. Social and spatial apartheid will be compounded. Fracking is not congruent with agrarian transformation.

Therefore the campaign to raise awareness around the negative impact of fracking on the environment, on social cohesion and on compounding of apartheid patterns of spatial development continues.

Privatisation of forests, railways and coastlines

The ongoing privatisation of state assets has a negative effect on tenure security and rural livelihoods. With the privatisation of the forestry and railway sector entire settlements of rural people, former workers in the sectors, have experienced job losses and threats of removal to urban townships. Households living in these rural settlements have established livelihoods and built cultural bonds and are resistant to relocation into urban townships. However local municipalities are in general resistant to taking responsibility for the settlements. Thus entire communities are left in no-man’s land with no institution prepared to take responsibility.

The ongoing sale of coastal land to developers has a devastating effect on people’s sense of space
and access to natural resources including beaches. The culture of camping at the beach over December holidays or celebrating high days and holidays at the beach has been squashed as the coastline is fenced off and huge holiday homes and hotels are built. People are dispossessed of land, tenure and lifestyles to create playgrounds for the rich.

There is an ongoing campaign to secure tenure, services and support for livelihoods

The Demands of the Black Thursday Land Campaign

The Black Thursday Land Campaign supports the ongoing struggles and raises awareness around ongoing dispossession, exploitation and landlessness. The various struggles, campaigns and actions continue and are united within the BTLC. The demands are clear:

- **Land for livelihoods.** Land which is well located and where the necessary natural resources are accessible must be redistributed. Land must be redistributed for housing to address the insecure tenure of farm dwellers and people living in informal settlements. Land must be redistributed for agriculture and for use by small-scale farmers. Land must be redistributed for food production and for use by agro-ecological producers. Land must be redistributed to protect heritage and social cohesion and enable access to resources like coastlines and forests.

- **Food sovereignty.** All people have the right to sufficient, nutritious and culturally appropriate food produced in an environmentally sound manner. The commodification of food from seed to table must be challenged. There must be integrated support for agro-ecological food production which protects the environment while feeding people.

- **Rights and services.** The human and labour rights of workers, in particular farm workers, must be protected and extended. The government has a responsibility to protect the rights of workers rather than working in the interests of capital. The government must ensure legislation aimed at protecting the rights of workers is enforced. Services must be provided to rural areas, to informal settlements and on privately owned farms.

Landless people cannot remain passive and silent. The time has come to unite and speak with one voice.

**MAWUBUYE UMHLABA WETHU!**
ONS GROND SAL TERUG GEVAT WORD!
OUR LAND WILL BE TAKEN BACK!

See also:

- Concept note
- Information brochure