

Land and Freedom: A Few Thoughts for Discussing the Land Expropriation without Compensation Motion. 16 April 2018

In 2011 the Agrarian Reform for Food Sovereignty Campaign (FSC) took a visionary step adopting the position “*Land Occupations is the New Way of doing Land Reform*”. This slogan captures the undeniable fact, as demonstrated by the Zimbabwean land occupation experience, that without a mass movement from below re-dividing the land with a clear programme, land reform would remain just empty talk. The resolution of the agrarian question (a political question more than anything else) is a central plank on which the freedom and liberation of the oppressed landless classes in rural and urban areas rest. It is important to emphasize that the power and money of the white minority ruling capitalist classes in the countryside and urban areas is tied to land ownership of the farms, mines, natural resources, factories and the exploitation of workers. The property clause in the constitution of South Africa firmly entrenches this unequal and oppressive property system. Private property relations are the foundation of the capitalist system, a fact conveniently ignored by defenders of the property clause. Land expropriation without compensation and the accompanying redivision of land in the interest of workers and landless farmers (rural dwellers) will immediately change power relations in the countryside and at once, strike a blow at this form of private property. Therefore we have to ask: *How are we going to solve the unequal land redistribution under the current conditions? And who should be in charge of land reform or the re-division of the land?* This should define the context in which we should interrogate whether the motion on land expropriation recently tabled in parliament will push the stalled land reform forward.

A careful reading of the motion reveals that it is just another delaying tactic to draw attention away from the real political question. Firstly the motion has been referred to a constitutional review committee that will report back to parliament by 30 August 2018. This has a familiar sound to it if we remember the different land Summits, land conferences, government panels and millions of rands spend on consultant reports throughout the last 25 years in which the rural masses actively participated. These debates and conferences produced no positive outcomes instead more landlessness and oppression. Secondly the ANC government categorically stated that the motion on land expropriation without compensation, amongst other things, should not compromise food security, destabilize the agricultural sector and not undermine economic growth and job creation. To this we should pose the questions: food security for whom? In whose interest should the agricultural sector not be destabilized?

The 2012 farmworker strike exposed the extent to which workers in the agricultural sector were unable to provide in the subsistence needs of their families. A Report by Bureau for Food and Agricultural Policy (2012:49) showed that while South Africa by far has the most productive labour force, at the same time most farmworker households cannot provide the nutrition that is needed to make them food secure. It went further that “even a household with two adults earning a wage of R150 per worker per day, would not be able to afford an energy adequate and nutritional balanced daily food intake”. This inhumane reality uncovers the fact that commercial agricultural production is based on capitalist relations that thrive on the exploitation of labour and the maximization of profit

and the destruction of the environment. Neoliberal capitalism as a system is based on production for profit through the exploitation of labour and nature, distribution through the market and consumption based on your ability to pay regardless of the food and other needs of people in society. In fact the export oriented agricultural sector in its current form compromises the food security for the majority in South Africa. This is at the heart of the matter.

How should we as a movement respond to the current debate on land expropriation without compensation? After 20 years of the governments market based land reform in Zimbabwe the unequal land ownership has changed little. It was only after the self-organization of the rural and urban masses in 2000 engaging in land occupations that land was redistributed on a mass scale that changed the power relations in the countryside significantly. While the motion in parliament is flawed it does provide us with a moment to mobilize the workers and landless on a programmatic basis. Those land experts and academics that want to reduce the land question to a technical question only wants to distract us from the fundamental problem that we have to confront. Whether the constitution allows for expropriation without compensation or not is irrelevant to the task at hand. What is at stake here is winning the demand of land expropriation without compensation and re-dividing the land in the interest of those who work and live off the land thereby changing power relations in a fundamental way. This requires organization and unity between the workers and the landless farmers in both urban and rural areas. We cannot do it alone. The slogan **“Land Occupation the New Way of Doing Land Reform”** should be given effect again and popularized in the current period. Even if we decide to participate, which we should, in land debates or conferences this slogan should be our starting point. The workers and landless farmers (rural dwellers) democratically elected and accountable to the people should be in charge of land reform. This should be the basis of the democratization of the countryside.

Our programmatic approach should be based on the following objectives:

1. The re-division and redistribution of the land in both rural and urban areas in the interest of those who work (workers) and live off the land (landless small scale farmers and rural dwellers).
2. The democratization of traditional (“communal”) and church land areas
3. Democratically elected committees at a local level and answerable to the people should implement land reform.
4. Agricultural production based on agro-ecological farming methods and food sovereignty.
5. Overhauling of the entire agricultural sector and agribusiness that should be in the interest of the new farming classes, rural dwellers and workers. In essence this should lay the basis for a transition beyond the current capitalist social relations in the countryside.

This should be the basis on which we should engage to ensure that we implement land reform without restoring again oppressive and barbaric capitalist social relations in the countryside, instead building a society based on solidarity and cooperation.