

## Rising tensions in the Middle East and the crisis of Imperialism

Hamid Alizadeh 31 March 2015

Since early Thursday morning hundreds of fighter jets from Saudi Arabia and a wide coalition of Arab states have been bombing targets across Yemen, killing dozens, destroying all major runways and much of the key infrastructure of the country. Yet again Yemen, which is the poorest Arab country, has become a target for savage attacks by the Saudi regime.

Hundreds of civilians, many of whom children, have already been killed, but it is clear that this figure will dramatically rise as the targets of the attack are moving into the civilian populated areas in Sana'a and in the northern Houthi villages which are expected to be heavily bombed. This morning a refugee camp for internally displaced Yemenis was bombed, killing about 40 people and injuring 30.

Apart from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Jordan, Morocco and Sudan were also sending aircraft, while Egypt and Jordan were preparing to take part in ground offensives if necessary. Oman is the only Gulf Arab state not participating. Apart from 100 fighter jets, Saudi Arabia has dedicated 150,000 soldiers to the campaign, amassing them on its long porous border with Yemen and threatening an even bloodier ground invasion.

The United States and Britain have said they would not participate directly in the campaign, but that they will provide "logistical" and "intelligence" support. Israel has also openly supported the campaign. However, the EU has been vacillating, and although it did condemn the Houthi advance, it also said that the Saudi bombings have "dramatically worsened the already fragile situation in the country and risk having serious regional consequences".

The Saudi Ambassador to the US said on Sunday that "[t]his is a war to protect the people of Yemen and its legitimate government from a group that is allied and supported by Iran and Hezbollah," and later on he said: "we are doing this to protect Yemen."

The level of hypocrisy is nauseating. The Saudi regime is killing thousands of people and destroying all the key infrastructure of this extremely poor country in order to... "protect it"!

The protection of Yemen and its people have nothing to do with this imperialist adventure which has one main goal: to protect the Saudi ruling class and its narrow, petty interests in the Middle East, which are directly opposed to the poor and exploited people of the region.

For years Saudi Arabia supported the former dictator of Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh, who was hated by his own people and finally overthrown during the Arab revolution. Then the Saudis, along with the rest of the dictators and despots of the Gulf states, manoeuvred to install into the presidency Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, who was a vice-president for 17 years before the revolution.

However, after assuming power Hadi's support quickly evaporated when the masses realised that corruption, nepotism and tribalism had remained in place, and that poverty and misery had become worse. Hadi also imposed harsh austerity measures on the population of which 60 percent already live in deep poverty. Thus, in order to rule, Hadi increasingly rested on different factions who dominated the different regions of Yemen. In particular he leaned on the tribal-Islamist Islah Party, while the Houthi tribal movement and the Zaydi people, who account for 40 percent of the population were marginalised as they had been for 60 years.

It was in this context, that the Houthis could gain strength and take over large parts of the north. Their slogans against US imperialism, against corruption and against poverty and austerity resonated with the many

impoverished youth, mainly in the north where the majority are Shias. By the time the Houthis took Sana'a the "legitimate president" Hadi did not have any base left and he was swept aside with ease and without much resistance.

President Hadi and the Saudi Minister of Defense after Hadi's flight to Saudi Arabia in the South Hadi is not in much of a better position. Here he managed to whip up the wrath of the secessionist movement and push a layer of people into the arms of Islamist groups through his open cooperation with US imperialism and by allowing them to run a drone programme in the country. In the end Hadi's last refuge was in the southern city of Aden towards which the Houthis were advancing.

### **Saudi Arabia and Iran**

The Saudis could not accept the disintegration of Yemen and it falling into the hands of Iranian backed forces on its southern borders.

Since the Iraq war, Iran has developed into the biggest threat to the position of Saudi Arabia in the region. This conflict has developed with rising tensions between Saudi and Iranian proxies in the region - tensions which have been pushed towards an increasingly sectarian character.

While the Houthis are not fully in sync with Iran it is clear the Iranian Revolutionary Guards have been supporting them financially and militarily, as well as advising the Houthis on how to develop a political movement along the lines of Hizbollah in Lebanon. The Guards themselves claim to have 300-400 personnel in Yemen working with the Houthis. But for the Saudis the expansion of the influence of the Houthis represented a danger and they decided to make an example of them..

For years the competition between the Saudi regime and Iran has been going on in the corridors and through proxies - in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bahrain and more - but the attack on Yemen is a turning point. For the first time the conflict is being fought out openly - on Saudi Arabia's side at least. This is a sign of the enormous contradictions which have built up in the region. The carpet bombing of Yemen is a signal to Tehran of the capabilities of the Saudis.

### **Saudi-US rift**

The American and British governments have also officially supported the campaign. Exposing the cynical and hypocritical nature of US imperialism, the Americans have been changing alliances in Yemen as if they were changing shirts. First they supported Saleh for more than 30 years, then they supported Hadi, then they found a way of working with the Houthis (in particular against Al Qaeda) and now find themselves on the other side of the barricades, again as partners in Saudi Arabia's war on Yemen and the Houthis. (No doubt this will massively benefit Al Qaeda as well).

However, this does not change the fact that the Americans - who have historically been very close to the Saudis - were not informed of the attack which was decided and planned behind the backs of the US along with other formerly close allies of US imperialism such as Egypt, Jordan, Pakistan and Kuwait.

In fact, for the Saudis the attack was also a show of strength towards the US. This was clearly expressed by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who said that the "Iran-Lausanne [read U.S.]-Yemen axis" must be stopped.

This shows a deep mistrust which has developed amongst the traditional Middle Eastern allies of the US since the Iraq war, in that it is not doing enough to combat the rise of Iranian influence. It is not by chance that the attack on Yemen comes just days before a deadline for the US to reach an agreement with Iran on the nuclear issue.

The Iranian Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif said that the war in Yemen would not affect the negotiations. But it would be childish to believe him. Of course it will affect the negotiations, because the negotiations turn fundamentally around Iran's role in the Middle East and its relationship with US imperialism.

## US Iranian detente

The competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran is not a new phenomenon. However, since the US invasion of Iraq tensions have been rising by the day. The occupation, by destroying Saddam's state and armed forces, removed the biggest check for Iran and its army which was then free to intervene in the region. This posed a major threat to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States who would be extremely weak in the face of any advancing Iranian army.

Even more crucially, however, room for manoeuvre for US imperialism was severely weakened by the defeat in Iraq along with the economic crisis - which was itself deepened by the wars - and the following demoralisation and mass opposition to the war inside the US. The Arab revolution and the changing mood of the masses placed even bigger barriers in the way of US military activity in the region. Unable to freely intervene militarily, US imperialism has increasingly had to rely on other powers - namely Iran - to defend its interests in the region.

In Iraq the reliance of the US on Iran has been clear for many years. However, the rise of the Islamic State and the ensuing collapse of the Iraqi state has pushed the Americans closer to the Iranians. While the Kurds in the north have been able to push out the Islamic State from their territory, it has been abundantly clear that the only reliable troops to fight IS in the rest of the country are the Iranians.

In Syria, the scenario is similar. Over the past two years, and in particular since last summer, the US has de facto been fighting on the side of the Assad regime against the different Islamist groups, in particular the Islamic state. The Gulf states, Turkey, Jordan and Yemen on the other hand, have been on the other side of the divide, supporting different sectarian groups in their fight against Assad, who is close to the Iranians.

Over the past year Israel has been actively cooperating with the Syrian branch of Al Qaeda, Jabhat al Nusra, a group who earlier this year crushed the last remnants of the HAZM Movement, which is one of the few groups officially supported by the US. Israel have been supplying arms and air cover for al Nusra soldiers who have also been treated in Israeli hospitals.

Turkey also has been supporting Jabhat al Nusra and to a certain extent also the IS, providing them with arms and allowing them to take refuge within its borders. Of course the biggest support for the Islamist groups in Syria came from the Gulf where private and state funds have been flowing into a myriad of groups and militias. For the US however, the Assad regime is the only option of establishing some kind of stability in the region.

In Lebanon the situation is becoming similar. The state is increasingly forced to rely on Hizbollah troops in its fight against Sunni fundamentalism in its north where hundreds of thousands of Syrians have taken refuge.

New York Times journalist Roger Cohen, wrote: "But the Islamic Republic has demonstrated again a deep-seated resilience. By Syrian, Iraqi, Afghan and Egyptian standards it is an island of stability."

In Yemen the same process was taking place. As the Hadi government was collapsing, opening up room for massive instability and the rise of Al Qaeda, the Iranian backed forces were proving to be the most stable factor. Foreign Affairs, reflecting the mood amongst the dominant layer of the US ruling class wrote:

"The United States may need to look beyond alarmist slogans and flag burning to open a direct line of communication with Houthi leadership. Hadi's government is powerless and has fled a political confrontation with the new Houthi government in acknowledgment that it lacks sufficient public and tribal support to wage a campaign against the Houthis. Those loyal to the Houthi family have emerged as one of the most effective military forces combating the expansion of al Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham in the Arabian Peninsula. If the West turns its back on Houthi leadership because of slogans, opportunistic aid from Iran, or Hadi's protestations, it might end up forsaking a serious partner in the Middle East."

*This poses the problem facing US imperialism clearly. The US have no choice but to accommodate the Iranians. That is the real discussion at the nuclear negotiations. Events have changed the balance of forces in the region in Iran's favour, and no amount of wishful thinking can change that. The negotiations are a means to formalise the new situation. The question is not whether there will be a deal, but what kind of a deal this will be and how it can be implemented.*

### **Saudi Arabia - a nation in crisis**

However, the question is not as simple for the Saudis. For Saudi Arabia, Iran is considered an existential threat. In spite of its sea of wealth, the house of Saud and the nation of Saudi Arabia - as opposed to Iran - is an extremely weak nation. The workers and youth have no loyalty to it, the state or the regime which they see as illegitimate in every way.

They are repelled by the ruling clans who live in extreme opulence and decadence while not allowing the majority any room to breathe. This hypocrisy is even more repelling for the Muslim Saudi people in the light of the ruling clique's self-proclaimed role as the "protectors of Mecca".

Its Shia minority, who mainly live in the oil rich areas of the country, have been heavily repressed for decades and represent an internal threat. On the other hand, amongst the Sunni population there is also a significant layer of people who are unhappy with the kingdom, which they believe should be a Caliphate. For years the Saudis have sent the Wahabi Sunni fundamentalists abroad to Afghanistan, Pakistan, etc. However, there are still thousands of Al Qaeda and now Islamic State sympathisers, fiercely opposed to the kingdom, within the country.

This explains why the Saudi Army, which is the fourth most costly in the world, has never been to war. When the Saudis moved to crush the revolution in Bahrain in 2011 they relied heavily on Pakistani soldiers and mercenaries. The House of Saud has also recently called for the Pakistani army to be deployed on the Saudi-Iraqi border to defend the country against an offensive by the IS. It is clear that the kingdom does not trust its own forces who could just as well turn their expensive arms against the kingdom itself. This places the regime in a weak position when faced with an external threat.

The Saudi dictatorship was deeply shaken by the Arab revolution which they saw as a direct threat to their own rule. They feared that the revolution would inspire the poor, the oppressed - of which there are plenty in Saudi Arabia - and the youth to rebel.

Thus, Obama's failure to back their common ally, Hosni Mubarak, during the Egyptian revolution further complicated US relations with the kingdom which lost trust in the ability of the US to come to its rescue if the Saudi masses moved. From this point on, the Saudis assumed an increasingly independent position and gradually began to diverge away from US interests in the Middle East.

### **A desperate situation calls for desperate measures**

The risk of having a Shia ruled, Iranian backed country on its borders was too big to take. While this would be seen as inaction by the Sunni Islamist sections of the regime, it would also be a signal to the oppressed Shias of the kingdom itself to rebel. It would mean the loss of "its own" sphere of influence to the Iranians who would use it as a base from which to pressure the Saudis even further.

The Saudis were also alarmed by how easily the Americans fell into the new situation. Just a few months ago, when asked about the relationship with the Houthis when they took power in Sana'a, a US official said: "They're not our military objective. It's AQAP and we have to stay focused on that."

For the Saudis this was a red line. Mustafa Alani of the Dubai-based Gulf Research Center, told the Washington Post : "It started with Lebanon, then Syria, then Iraq and now Yemen. It's like a domino, and Yemen is the first attempt to stop the domino...Now there is an awakening in the region, a counter strategy, and Yemen is the testing ground. It is not just about Yemen, it is about changing the balance of power in the region." Alani

went on to blame the United States and its pursuit of a deal with Iran for the expansion of Iranian influence that triggered the Saudi intervention. "It is not only the Iranian nuclear bomb that is an issue, it is Iranian behavior that is equal to a nuclear bomb."

The despots of the Gulf are terrified of losing their position, their power and their privileges. This fear is the main driving force behind their actions. Like a wounded animal trapped in a corner, the rotten despotic regime is lashing out in an existential struggle which it is doomed to lose sooner or later. This is also why they have announced the setting up of a common Arab armed forces to intervene in the region, circumventing US and European imperialism. Whether this will materialise is another question, because the Arab rulers have just as many contradictions amongst themselves as they have within their countries.

The sending of ground troops into Yemen, however, is a very short sighted and desperate adventure. Besides the weakness of the Saudi army, Yemen is a very hard terrain and the Houthis are a war hardened people. Abdullah Saleh, the previous president who is now cooperating with the Houthis, waged six wars against them, but they have never been fully defeated in the inhospitable terrain they inhabit in the northern mountains. The Yemenis are also proud people who despise Saudi imperialism. Thus an occupation would probably mean the strengthening of Houthi and Al Qaeda forces among layers where they did not have any support before. In the end the result can only be a defeat for the Saudis and a strengthening of the authority of the Houthis amongst the population.

At the same time the Saudis are increasing the chance of attacks into Saudi Arabia itself, where the Houthis have shown they are capable of operating before. In the previous Saudi war against the Houthis in 2009, the rebels took control of a mountainous area inside Saudi Arabia, in the border region of Jabal al-Dukhan and occupied two villages inside Saudi territory for more than a week. The Saudi border regions of Asir, Najran, and Jizan were originally Yemeni regions annexed by Saudi Arabia following the defeat of the Kingdom of Yemen in 1934. They contain Shiite Zaydi tribes whose allegiance may lie more favourably with the Houthi movement than with the Saudi government.

Thus, the Saudis might be able to remove the Houthis from power, but they will not be able to annihilate them and they will only be able to replace them with a weak government which would need permanent support. This will mean a long bleeding of Saudi resources at the expense of further internal instability - something the Iranians will utilise to the fullest. The possibility of a break up of Saudi Arabia in the long run, is implicit in the whole situation.

#### **More tension**

Of course, for the Iranians the war on Yemen is a big provocation. No doubt that they will increase their support for their proxies in the peninsula. In particular Bahrain, with its large Shia population, will be a target for the Iranians. In a recent speech Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah in Lebanon said: "Bahrain is like any other country in the world and it is possible to send weapons and fighters even to the most tightly controlled countries in the world."

They might also intervene more directly in Iraq and Syria. But even more threatening to Saudi interests, the Iranians might step up their activities in the Shia dominated areas in Saudi Arabia itself. As the puppet Arab regimes enter into crisis, Iran remains one of few real nations with a strong army in the region. This will mean that US dependence on the Islamic Republic will increase further.

In the end it is clear that Iran will become the dominant force in the region. This will only make it an even greater threat to the Saudi ruling class which will escalate the conflict. For the Saudis this is a question of life and death, which means that no option can be ruled out.

#### **The Crisis of US imperialism**

In the final analysis, the chaos, anarchy and barbarism spreading throughout the Middle East can be attributed to US imperialism and its infinite arrogance. Since the end of World War Two it has spread

sectarianism, fundamentalism and has been the backer of endless reactionary forces in the Middle East. However, now it is entering a crisis which limits its reach. Thus the reactionary forces that it has conjured up are slipping out of its control.

The Saudis are demanding a change of US policy, but this is not decided by individuals, but by material interests. The relationship with the Saudis has changed as the material conditions have changed.

In the 1980's the role of Saudi oil on the world market and for the US was so important that it would have gone to war to defend the Saudi ruling class against a revolution or any other popular movement. Today, however, that may no longer be the case. The US has gone from being the biggest buyer of Saudi oil to a major competitor. This not only represents a threat to the profits of the Saudi ruling class, but also to their role in world politics. The result has also been a price war instigated by the Saudis partially against the US shale oil industry and partially against Iran.

So in terms of oil prices the Saudis have even been a source of instability, rather than stability. The Saudi price war against US shale companies is threatening up to one million US jobs. At the same time China has become the biggest buyer of Saudi oil.

At the moment, US Imperialism cannot and will not cut ties with the Saudis who are crucial to securing world energy prices as well as the military operations of the US in the Middle East. But it is clear that the relationship is at its weakest in the history of Saudi Arabia and that there is a widening gulf between the interests of the two ruling classes.

In the Middle East the crisis of US imperialism is obvious. The Saudis (and their Arab stooges) are building their own army beyond the control of US imperialism.

Israel is openly in conflict with the US Administration, going as far as to wiretap its negotiations with Iran and play the recordings for its Republican enemies at home. They are also openly cooperating with Al Qaeda in Syria. The relationship between the US and Israel has never been so strained as it is today. After the electoral victory of Netanyahu, the Administration did not congratulate him. On the contrary, John Kerry sent a letter criticising the rhetoric of Netanyahu during the elections.

Meanwhile, Israeli dependence on US aid has gone down relatively. From the 20-30 percent of GDP in the past, US aid to Israel today is around two percent of GDP. The Israelis have been openly humiliating the Americans on a daily basis and Netanyahu has even met with Russian President Vladimir Putin to spite the Americans.

Turkey has also openly opposed the US in Syria and Iraq, working with the Islamic State and Al Qaeda. At the same time it has increased ties with Russia, allowing it to build an important gas pipeline through Turkey which would circumvent Ukraine on its way to Europe. Egypt, which is the second biggest beneficiary of US military aid, has been openly defying the US and is a key player in the present military campaign.

As with any empire in decline, it is the satellite vassals who lead the centrifugal forces of its disintegration. At the end of the Ottoman Empire it was the Egyptians who rebelled building their own army and having their own bilateral relations with the enemies from Europe. They even went as far as annexing other Ottoman regions. The Sultan warred with the Egyptians and the Wahabis in the Peninsula, but in the end he had no option but to accommodate them to preserve the unity of the empire, but it was too late. Egypt was a reflection of the general decay of the Empire, just as the rebellion of the US allies in the Middle East is a sign of the crisis of capitalism and the ongoing decline of US imperialism which is leading to increased instability amongst the nations of the world.

As it stands now, the US can not cut its ties with its traditional allies, but it also needs their mortal enemy, Iran. The ground is shifting beneath the feet of the rulers and contradictions are piling up. In one way or another they must be resolved.

Some “clever” strategists call this a “New Paradigm” a “multi-polar Middle East” a change in strategy, etc. They try to theorise and present the new situation as a choice of the ruling class, but this is just a cover for the complete incompetence of US imperialism and its allies. In fact the events of today highlight more than anything the complete lack of control of the US ruling class over the situation.

The US is a colossus with feet of clay. It is being dragged down by a deep crisis which touches every aspect of its life such as its military defeats, the demoralisation and decay of its army; its economic crisis which is polarising the ruling class as well as the masses while hindering it from waging offensive wars and its political crisis which is undermining the legitimacy of its political system completely. All of these factors mean that the US is declining as a force, internally as well as externally. In this vacuum, other smaller powers are trying to step in, a fact which deepens the crisis and raises tensions.

For its rabid dogs in the Middle East the situation is no different. The Saudis, the Israelis and the Turks are all regimes which are constantly solving one crisis by preparing another. The biggest threats to these regimes are the masses who are being radicalised by the crisis of capitalism and the Arab revolution. Thus each one in its own way is desperately looking to short term solutions to sustain their criminal rule. This is the main driving force of the ruling class and out of this comes all the barbarism and reaction which presently dominates the Middle East.

However, there is a far more important force which is also being prepared. The Arab revolution which started in 2011 is at a temporary ebb, but nothing has been solved. Poverty, unemployment and the lack of democracy are increasing and the ruling class has never been as weak amongst the masses as it is today.

In Egypt the Sisi dictatorship is extremely weak, only held up by the fact that the masses are tired and disoriented after years of struggle. But the Egyptian revolution has never been defeated in open struggle. The masses remember how they brought down four governments in three years. In fact, as a warning they brought down Al Sisi's first government - the Biblawi government - in the spring of 2014. Sooner or later, the same force will go head to head against Sisi.

In Turkey as well society is completely polarised and Erdogan's popularity is being eroded by the rise of unemployment and the daily corruption scandals surrounding Erdogan and his cronies.

Iran is not far behind. Amongst the younger generation the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic is extremely low. For it, the Islamic Revolution has no progressive content, but is merely a symbol of dictatorship, backwardness and decay. The rottenness and corruption behind the scenes is far from the pious ideals that the mullahs hypocritically preach. At the moment the masses are watching the negotiations in the hope that they will bring them some kind of relief from the US imposed sanctions, but sooner or later they will begin to move again.

There is not a single stable regime in the whole region, and even Saudi Arabia could see a revolutionary explosion at any time. After decades of rule capitalism has not been able to solve any of the problems of the Arab and Middle Eastern masses. On the contrary, today we see the revival of tribalism and the plague of fundamentalism and barbarism on a scale never seen before.

In the middle of this, the people of Yemen, just as those of Iraq and Syria, who have been subjugated to poverty and deprivation for decades, are considered mere pawns in the eyes of the parasitic ruling classes. This proud nation which holds many cultural treasures is descending into barbarism and tribalism. This is the best that capitalism can offer the masses.

The Arab revolution showed that once the masses move all the reactionaries can be easily swept aside. The task however, is not only to overthrow the reactionary rulers, but also to remove their reactionary state and the capitalist system which spawns them.

## No to the imperialist war against the people of Yemen! Down with Capitalism and Imperialism!

<http://www.marxist.com/saudi-war-on-yemen-rising-tensions-in-the-middle-east-and-the-crisis-of-imperialism.htm>

### China's Bank & Waning USA Hegemony

Jack Rasmus 29 March 2015

Two events occurred last week that mark a further phase in the waning of US global economic hegemony: China introduced its own Economic Development Bank, the 'Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank' (AIIB); and the IMF simultaneously announced it will decide in May to include the Chinese currency as a global reserve-trading currency alongside the dollar, pound, and euro—an almost certainly 'done deal' as well.

The dual moves caught the US off guard, especially as the USA's erstwhile main economic ally, Britain, was the first to announce it would join China's AIIB as a founding member. That announcement set off a quick succession of further announcements by major western economies that they too were now joining the AIIB—by Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg, and Switzerland—as major European capitalist economies scurried to ensure a piece of the Asian economic action and to tap China's huge foreign currency reserves for investment in their own economies. Singapore and Australia followed within days. South Korea and Canada are now reconsidering joining, as are other once solid USA economic allies.

The initial USA response to Britain was to accuse it of "constant accommodation" of China. US Treasury Secretary, Jack Lew, even made telephone calls to British finance minister, George Osborne, requesting that he 'hold off' after Britain's initial announcement, according to reports in the international business press. That effort was apparently to no avail, however, as British politicians, including prime minister, David Cameron, facing re-election within weeks, chose to leverage the decision for political purposes as well as economic. Reportedly the US also attempted to strong-arm Singapore into not joining, but failed there as well.

The entire affair caught USA political bureaucrats by surprise. The matter of joining the AIIB was thought to have been raised in European centers at low levels, but not at senior financial minister or ambassador levels. No decisions appeared imminent. Events in recent weeks show the Europeans successfully kept USA out of the loop concerning their real intentions, as Britain last week 'jumped the gun', as they say, with British government officials giving the reason for their decision to join the AIIB as "We want to be a Chinese partner of choice in international finance"(read: we want a slice of the economic pie before someone else gets to eat it).

#### The China-UK Connection

In making their announcement, British officials vowed that they want the UK to become the main destination for Chinese investments. In 2013-14, when the British and Euro economies were in particularly bad shape, major trade delegations from China repeatedly visited both Britain and Germany on numerous occasions. Much of Britain's recent tentative economic recovery the past two years has been driven by infrastructure and property deals that have been heavily financed by massive China private capital inflows into London real estate, infrastructure projects, and south England investments. Deals to revitalize investment in Britain's nuclear power sector are also being financed by China investment. Without China investments in the UK in recent years, and other capital inflows from emerging markets, British economic 'recovery' would have remained British 'stagnation' at best.

USA vs. China policies toward British banks offer another example of a growing divergence of interests between the USA and Britain with regard to China.

USA bank regulators have been targeting and fining London banks for their

repeated scandals, money laundering, global interest rate (Libor) manipulations, and speculative excesses. London in recent years has become a veritable 'wild west' of international banking. The US levying of fines on UK banks has been justified. But banking is one of the few industries that keep Britain from becoming a 'third tier' economy. British Prime Minister Cameron therefore has done—and will do—whatever it takes to protect and advance the economic interests of his so-called 'City of London' (UK banking sector). He is even prepared to leave the European Union, if necessary, to prevent re-regulation of the British banking sector. So it should not have been a surprise to the USA when Cameron and other conservative British politicians turned to China and quickly joined China's AIIB. All the signals were there already. British finance capital had already last year, in 2014, announced an agreement with China that London would become the global trading center for China's currency, the Yuan. And Britain has become increasingly dependent on China money capital inflows in recent years, as noted. So the recent AIIB decision is just a logical consequence of deepening British-China economic relations that have been already underway now for some time, even though the USA didn't totally 'see it coming'.

Deepening China-Europe economic relations extend to the Eurozone and eastern Europe economies as well, not just to Britain. Trade integration between China and Germany has been growing sharply. China is Germany's fourth largest trading partner. China has been setting up investment funds in eastern European economies from the Baltics to the Balkans; China has an offer on the table to buy Greece's main port at Pireaus; and in recent years has been repeatedly purchasing Italian and other southern European countries sovereign bonds to help those economies weather their recent debt crisis.

#### Origins of the AIIB

The origins of the AIIB announcement trace back at least to 2010, when the USA quietly agreed to allow China to increase its influence in the USA-dominated international economic institution, the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Since then, however, the USA has reneged on that agreement, in order to ensure that China's influence in the IMF would remain minimal. So China went off last October 2014 and formed its own AIIB, in what amounts in effect to a fundamental challenge to the IMF's parallel USA-dominated institution, the World Bank.

With 27 nations having already signed on, including Britain and other Europeans, Australia, Singapore, and others, the AIIB represents a major challenge to the USA-dominated development banks, the World Bank, as well as to the Asian Development Bank (USA and Japan dominated ADB) located in Manila, Philippines.

Initially the AIIB is to be funded with \$50 billion to invest in Asian infrastructure. That compares with \$160 billion in the Asian Development Bank (ADB). However, the near term AIIB target is to provide \$100 billion in funding. And by 2020, potentially up to \$730 billion. That's a lot of projects and potential profits for European and British businesses.

Britain and the other European economies were quick to join China's AIIB because it allows their own companies almost guaranteed participation in the AIIB's lending projects—thus giving them a 'leg up', as they say, in their competition with USA and Japanese companies involving development and infrastructure investment projects in the EMEs. It also gives them, the British and the Europeans, the opportunity to redirect some of that investment capital to companies inside their own economies, where their own companies get to provide semi-finished goods and services to the infrastructure projects in Asia that the AIIB will approve with its initial (and no doubt soon to expand) \$50 billion fund.

Indeed, Europeans have become increasingly frustrated with USA dominated World Bank and IMF, in which the USA typically vetoes decisions of those institutions that it dislikes with as little as 20% of the 'voting rights' in those bodies. At the same time, conservatives in the US Congress continue to refuse to provide the US's share of the operating funds for those institutions. China's AIIB enters the global infrastructure investment field with a promise by China not to veto and to hold no more than 49% of voting rights in the AIIB. It is an attractive alternative to the USA's World

Bank and IMF dominated bodies. Not surprising, Europe and other major economies are therefore seriously interested in participating in the AIIB. However, to the extent they do, it represents a waning of USA economic influence over its once, almost completely economically subservient allies.

### The 'Old Order' of US Economic Hegemony

The USA's dominance of the IMF and World Bank since 1945 has provided Washington with great leverage in influencing both political events and economic directions in emerging market economies (EMEs). Often multi-billion dollar lending projects are dangled before an EME, or threatened with suspension, if the EME in question fails to do the bidding of Washington involving a political decision Washington wants, or an investment concession Washington wants from the EME for a US bank or company.

A good example of the kind of 'economic arm-twisting' by the USA still going on today is the pressure exerted by USA government and courts to force Argentina to agree to terms demanded by USA shadow bankers with regard to the repayment of loans; or the moves underway by USA government and bankers to drain Venezuela's currency reserves to effect a collapse of its currency, the Bolivar, to set off import inflation to set the stage for another coup and political intervention. Those are extreme, but not untypical, examples; countless 'lesser' forms of pressure on EMEs occur frequently by the USA through its control of decisions by the IMF and World Bank. Ukraine is another, perhaps more traditional example, where the USA has influenced the IMF to install US citizen, shadow banker, like private equity CEO, Natalia Jaresko, to run the Ukraine's economy as finance minister as a condition for the Ukraine receiving IMF loans.

But by providing an alternative source of infrastructure project funding, the China AIIB reduces potential USA economic and political influence over EMEs.

From 1944 to 1973 the U.S. maintained more or less total economic hegemony in the global economy. The U.S. dollar was the prime currency for trading and reserve purposes. This dominance was challenged in the post-1973 period briefly, however, as the U.S. economy experienced an economic crisis at that time. The institutional arrangements by which the U.S. retained dominance from 1944 to 1973 were restructured and rearranged. The U.S. economy and its world dominance was restored in a new set of arrangements and relationships with other states and economies starting in the 1980s, which is sometimes referred to as 'Neoliberalism'. The symbol of that economic dominance, the U.S. dollar, after having seriously weakened in the 1970s was restored again to unchallenged status as the global currency in the 1980s and after.

But the restructuring of the global economy in the 1980s, led by the United States (and a junior partner the UK) has now run its course for a second time.

Once the unchallenged global currency, the U.S. dollar is once again facing challenge as the dominant global currency. US dominated global institutions like the World Bank and IMF are being challenged by alternative institutions, like the AIIB. The focal point of that challenge, today and in the years ahead, is China. The Yuan will not overturn or replace the US dollar tomorrow, or even in the near term. The World Bank and Asian Development Bank won't be displaced by the AIIB. But in the longer term it is inevitable, should China continue to grow at its recent rates and the USA continue to lag with its recent below historic average growth rates.

Recent events surrounding the AIIB, and the IMF adding the Yuan to its currency mix, are just a subset of the broader and even more strategically significant rise of the Yuan as a global trading and reserve currency and of alternative institutions developed that break the hegemonic control of global economic institutions by the USA.

### A Global Economic 'Grand Game'?

As China continues to successfully target Europe for economic integration,

the USA has been clumsily targeting Russia for European de-integration.

What's ironic is that the USA today is directing its most aggressive efforts against Russia, in an attempt to prevent Europe from deepening its economic relationships with that country and to roll back those relationships by means of economic sanctions. Since at least 2010, Europe's growing resource and trade integration with Russia since has made the USA increasingly nervous. Much of the USA's policies toward Ukraine (especially the USA initiated coup there in 2014), and subsequent efforts to get Europe to impose severe sanctions on Russia, should be viewed in this light. The USA wants to sever the growing Europe (especially German)-Russian trade connections and, in particular, Europe's recent growing dependence on Russian energy. It is at least arguable that the USA initiated and supported the coup in the Ukraine with that in mind: i.e. to provoke a Russian military response, in order to force Europe to impose severe sanctions leading to a roll back economic relations with Russia. The USA sees its economic influence in Europe as strategic. Severing Russia economically from Europe ensures that. It would ensure Europe's continuing dependence on the USA, economically, and therefore politically and militarily. The Ukraine-Russia conflict should thus be viewed in the context of a much bigger 'competition' between Russia and the USA over economic influence in Europe.

But while the USA focuses on undermining economic relations between Europe and Russia, China continues to 'slip in the back door' and deepen its economic relationships with Europe. Today it's the AIB. Tomorrow the Yuan as an officially accepted trading currency. Thereafter the Yuan as the dominant trading and reserve currency, and an even deeper European dependence on China money capital flows.

China thus represents by far a much greater challenge to US economic hegemony in Europe, and indeed globally as well. But the USA blindly continues to engage in economic adventurism in Europe to contain a Russian threat there that doesn't exist.

[zcomm.org](http://zcomm.org)

*Jack Rasmus is the author of the forthcoming book, 'Systemic Fragility in the Global Economy', by Clarity Press, 2015, and the prior book's, 'Epic Recession: Prelude to Global Depression', 2012, and 'Obama's Economy: Recovery for the Few', 2012. He has been a local union president, negotiator and representative for several American unions. He blogs at [jackrasmus.com](http://jackrasmus.com).*

## What's South Africa's anti-human rights game at the UN?

Rebecca Davis 29 March 2015

This week, the United Nations human rights council announced the establishment of a special new role to look into issues pertaining to privacy, in the wake of the Edward Snowden surveillance revelations. Information activists argue that such an individual could play a vital role in protecting citizens' right to privacy. Guess which country said it couldn't support such a resolution? South Africa.

A resolution calling for a UN Special Rapporteur on privacy, spearheaded by Germany and Brazil, stemmed from NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden's expose of the extent to which government agencies in the US and UK in particular were carrying out covert surveillance on their citizens.

The resolution affirmed the right to privacy in the digital age and expressed deep concern at "the negative impact that surveillance and/or interception of communications, including extraterritorial surveillance and/or interception of communications, as well as the collection of personal data, in particular when carried out on a mass scale, may have on the exercise and enjoyment of human rights".

It provides for the establishment of a UN Special Rapporteur on the right to privacy, who will be appointed for three years to gather information on

privacy-related matters and practice and report on violations of the right to privacy.

There had been some concerns in advance that the USA or the UK might try to block the resolution in order to protect their massive surveillance systems. Ultimately, this was not the case. US representatives in the council affirmed the need to protect the right to privacy.

Other countries weren't so sure. Saudi Arabian representatives announced that they were developing measures to ensure "public order and morality in the digital age", and that they regretted that the UN hadn't taken them up on these ideas. They also said that the new mandate was unnecessary.

Another unenthusiastic country was South Africa. The UN report on the meeting records: "The draft resolution on the right to privacy in the digital age raised pertinent issues of priority for South Africa...While recognising the importance of this thematic issue, the creation of a new mandate to deal with the right of privacy was not the appropriate way. It would have been appropriate to incorporate it with the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression."

South Africa, it concluded, "was no longer able to associate itself with the text".

This news came as no surprise to South Africa's Right2Know group, which has registered growing concerns over the South African government's own surveillance practices, with activists, unionists and political journalists allegedly being particular targets.

"A Special Rapporteur on privacy could act as a line of defence across the world in cases of mass surveillance, and arbitrary and secret monitoring and interception of people's communications," R2K's Murray Hunter told the Daily Maverick on Sunday.

"And if we've learned anything after Snowden, it's that we need someone in that position, yesterday. As for [South Africa's] proposal to give the job to the existing Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression - our global problem with privacy can't just be tucked into the already taxed mandate of an existing institution."

South Africa's voting record at the UN has come under fire in the past, though its position on UN resolutions makes news only infrequently at home. South Africa has previously voted to block condemnation of human rights abuses in countries like Burma, Zimbabwe and North Korea.

Amidst criticism on this score, former South African ambassador to the UN Dumisani Kumalo has previously accused the UK and the US of deliberately misrepresenting its positions.

We didn't do things the way the British and the Americans wanted us to do them and if you don't do it like the big ones, the French and the Americans and the British, the way they want to do them, then you are a cheeky African, well I am happy being a cheeky African, Kumalo told VOA News in 2009.

The current South African ambassador to the UN is Kingsley Mamabolo, who has been in his position since 2013. Mamabolo worked in leadership posts for the ANC in exile, and began his diplomatic career in the democratic South Africa as the first High Commissioner to Zimbabwe.

This week at the UN, South Africa continued its habit of voting against the grain beyond its lack of enthusiasm for the privacy resolution. It also abstained on a UN Human Rights Council resolution which condemned "the terrorist acts and violence committed against civilians by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh); strongly condemns the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic; and strongly condemns the intervention in the Syrian Arab Republic of all foreign terrorist fighters and those foreign organisations fighting on behalf of the Syrian regime"

On this matter, South Africa was joined by countries including Kazakhstan, Pakistan and Nigeria. South Africa also abstained on a resolution mandating a Special Rapporteur to investigate human rights in Iran. A resolution to condemn "gross human rights violations" in North Korea was

also met with an abstention from South Africa, together with the likes of Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

Lest you think that South Africa's presence at the UN is merely characterized by wishy-washiness, it's not the case that South Africa abstains on everything country-specific, as it might seem. For example, last week South Africa also voted in favour of a resolution condemning Israel for violating human rights in the occupied Syrian Golan.

There is a clear tendency in South Africa's voting record at the UN to support - or refuse to condemn - states which it sees as being the victims of some form of neo-colonialism. There is also a certain amount of south-south solidarity in voting patterns, although countries like Cuba enthusiastically supported the establishment of the Special Rapporteur on Privacy.

In March last year, South Africa led a group including China, Russia and Saudi Arabia in proposing amendments to water down the right to peaceful protest. From this perspective, its lack of support for privacy-related resolutions takes on a yet more alarming hue.

"South Africa is a constitutional democracy with the right to privacy written into our Bill of Rights," warned R2K's Hunter. "We should not find ourselves standing alone alongside Saudi Arabia and Bahrain at the Human Rights Council."

[www.dailymaverick.co.za](http://www.dailymaverick.co.za)

## Nigerians Head to the Polls Amid Rising Tensions



**With several court challenges in the works, the elections are highly contested and poses a threat to the PDP rule, says Associate Professor Zachariah Mampilly of Vassar College**

The Real News Network 27 March 2015

**SHARMINI PERIES, EXEC. PRODUCER, TRNN:** Welcome to The Real News Network. I'm Sharmini Peries coming to you from Baltimore.

The Nigerian elections will be taking place this Sunday March 28th. They were originally scheduled for last month, but the election commission postponed them because of the destabilization due to Boko Haram insurgency in the northeastern part of the country.

But they also say that it is because the voter ID cards had been not been fully distributed to the millions that need the card to be able to vote. The incumbent president, Goodluck Jonathan, of the People's Democratic Party, PDP, the party that has dominated Nigerian politics since democracy was established in 1999. Jonathan will be seeking a second term, and that will be his final term, and his running mate is Namadi Sambo. His main contender, from the All Progressives Congress, APC, is Muhammadu Buhari, along with his running mate, Yemi Osinbajo.

Now joining me to discuss the elections and the largest economy in Africa is Zachariah Mampilly. He is an assistant professor of political science at Vassar College, and a Fulbright visiting faculty member at the University of Dar es Salaam. Thank you so much for joining me today.

**ZACHARIAH MAMPILLY, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, VASSAR COLLEGE:** Thank you for having me.

**PERIES:** So let's unpack who the parties are, who is running, what are the lead contending parties, and perhaps their position on Boko Haram.

**MAMPILLY:** Sure. So the ruling party, of course, is the PDP of Goodluck Jonathan, which has been the ruling party in Nigeria for the past 15 years, since the transition to democracy took place in 1999. And the main contender, as you said, the former general Buhari, who is part of a new party called the APC, or All Progressives Congress, which is a very interesting party in the sense that it is - it's primarily established as a party of rivals, comprised of many defectors from the PDP.

Buhari himself, of course, is a former leader of Nigeria. He was a military ruler in that country. But he has gone through what he suggests is a democratic transformation, and he renounces his former autocratic past, and has tried to run in this election very much as someone who has embraced democracy.

**PERIES:** Now, apparently one of the reasons that the elections were postponed from last month to Sunday was because the voter ID cards had not been fully distributed; millions of people had not received them. But there's some issues already in terms of the voter ID cards, and the constitutionality of using electronic cards to ID people. Apparently it is not allowed, as yet, in terms of the electoral process in Nigeria. What more do you know about that?

**MAMPILLY:** Well, I think that the key thing to understand is that this is going to be a highly contested election. Unlike all the previous elections that have happened since 1999, this is the one that is truly competitive, and actually poses a threat to the PDP's rule. So we do expect that there will be litigations on all sides, regardless of what the outcome is. And so we can see both sides, now, gearing up a number of different challenges, including voter ID and other aspects of the registration process.

**PERIES:** And also apparently the presence of the military at the polling stations is also considered problematic. On one hand, the security is required, because there could be potential attacks in polling stations. And then on the other hand, the security is seen as a way in which the ruling party might be flexing its muscle, since the security forces are seen as a part and parcel of government at this point.

**MAMPILLY:** I think that's correct. You know, if you look back at the protest movement that happened in early 2012, the so-called Occupy Nigeria protest, this regime has always been willing to put military forces onto the streets in the name of security. And I think very much as they did in 2012, we're seeing them deploy the military. Largely in the name of protection, but certainly as an intimidation factor, as well.

**PERIES:** And I guess what's on everyone's mind is how Boko Haram and people associated with Boko Haram is going to react to these elections. Do we have any indication of that?

**MAMPILLY:** It's very difficult to know what Boko Haram is planning. Certainly they have taken steps that seem as they are gearing up for some sort of actions in the current elections, but it's hard to say whether they are going to target their actions around the election specifically, or if they're just going to continue with the long-running insurgency in that country.

I think what's important is the ways in which Boko Haram is manipulated by a variety of political elites in the country, and that the insurgency has long had very disturbing ties to a number of political figures, especially in the north of the country.

**PERIES:** And from all of the judicial warfare that's going on in terms of the legitimacy of the elections, you know, both party candidates, leading party candidates are being challenged at this moment in terms of their qualifications to run for president. Is this sort of a stage for what might come as a result of the results of the election?

**MAMPILLY:** Yeah, it's fair to assume that this election may not be over after all the votes are in. We expect that there will be a number of litigations going back and forth. Also, Nigeria's election has a fairly distinct process due to the federal nature of the country. Not only does a candidate have to win a majority of votes, they also have to win a certain percentage of votes in each of the states of the country. So we can expect that there will be many levels of challenges levied against either side, regardless of who comes out as the victor.

**PERIES:** Now, we also will be following this election over the weekend at The Real News, but do you have any sense of what the current polls are predicting in terms of the victory?

**MAMPILLY:** The polls are coming back extremely close. I do think what's interesting is that many in Nigeria, even though they have serious doubts about Buhari and his supposed transformation into a democratic figure, are suggesting that people should vote for Buhari simply as a rebuke to the current administration, which most, most Nigerians view as highly inept and incapable of dealing with the severe structural problems.

The unfortunate thing is that nobody really expects that Buhari has a clear plan to improve the conditions in Nigeria either, but they, there's a sense that this could be a protest vote, and that the way we should interpret it is not as support for Buhari but as a rejection of the incumbent.

**PERIES:** Zachariah Mampilly, assistant professor of political science at Vassar College, thank you so much for joining us.

**MAMPILLY:** Thank you for having me.

**PERIES:** And thank you for joining us on The Real News Network.

*Zachariah Mampilly is the Director of the Africana Studies Program and an Associate Professor of Political Science at Vassar College. He is the author of Rebel Rulers: Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life during War and Africa Uprising: Popular Protest and Political Change.*

## A Multi-Faceted Crisis Surrounding Turkey

Taylan Tosun 26 March 2015

A multi-faceted crisis has been emerging and has begun to surround Turkey for the last few months. There is a growing crisis on the political scene, i.e., concerning the classical political parties and representative system. There is a growing social crisis underlying the one on the political level. The Kurdish question is exerting an increasing pressure on the political scene. And lastly a very serious economic crisis is on the horizon. Indeed this has been a familiar pattern in Turkey, at least in recent history. Political and economic crises have been always overlapped and triggered each other.

### **Increasing split between Erdoğan and his party AKP**

Ex-Prime Minister R. Tayyip Erdoğan have been elected as President of the Republic on August 2012. Since then things have been working somewhat differently from the way we have been accustomed to see. The classical pattern in Turkey's political scene during the 12 years of AKP's rule was more or less like this: Tayyip Erdoğan, as the Prime Minister, was the authoritative one-man figure who seemed to govern both Turkey and his party AKP on his own. Everything he said has always been perceived as the final word of the government. The success of Erdoğan was also the success of AKP and vice versa.

Things have been changing since the presidency election. Since he has been selected as the President of Republic, Erdoğan attempts to establish a kind of “parallel” government with his consultants and some high ranking figures within AKP and state bureaucracy. His discourse and policy proposals differ sometimes quite radically from that of the government now led by Ahmet Davutoğlu, the ex-Foreign Minister. We have recently observed this difference with regard to a recent discussion about Turkish Central Bank’s interest rates. We have witnessed this difference as to whether the Undersecretary of Turkish Intelligence Service (MIT) should resign, participate to the forthcoming national elections in June and become the Foreign Minister of the new cabinet -in case AKP comes to power again. Prime Minister Davutoğlu wanted H. Fidan to resign and become a MP candidate; finally Erdoğan convinced him to remain as the head of the intelligence service. We have also testified a similar difference concerning a joint declaration by some ministers and Kurdish party (HDP) MP’s regarding the peace process between PKK and Turkish government.

Maybe the most remarkable difference was the last one. The essence of the joint declaration was a call by Abdullah Öcalan -sentenced to life imprisonment- to PKK for convening a congress in spring, before the national elections. He proposed to the prospective congress to take a definite decision for abandoning armed struggle against Turkey - probably PKK will not lay down arms in other parts of Kurdistan, but this is a different matter. In return Öcalan put forward some broad conditions such as democratization steps and constitutional changes to be taken by the government. While the Turkish government promoted the joint declaration for increasing its votes particularly among the Kurdish population, President Erdoğan adopted a reserved “wait and see” attitude towards the declaration.

Indeed it’s obvious that Erdoğan pursues a different agenda. He aims to change the political representation system of Turkey. Turkey is being governed by a parliamentary system whereas he wants to govern Turkey by a presidential system. But unlike United States or France, he’s advocating a “Turkish type” of presidential system where there will be no checks and balances mechanisms such as powerful local parliaments/administrations, and indeed all power will be concentrated in the hands of the would-be president, that is, Tayyip Erdoğan himself.

T. Erdoğan often organizes public meetings and asks from the crowd to secure 400 MP’s for AKP so that the next government will be able to change the constitution. But this is just the source of the growing tension between him and the ruling AKP. If the parliament adopts the presidential system and Erdoğan becomes President, then AKP will be reduced to a mere supporter in the legislative body of his policies and thus will lose all effective governing power. Erdoğan will govern with a cabinet of his choice and many leading figures of AKP will be excluded from the governing mechanism. Not only this. Moreover AKP, a broad-based mass party, will lose most of its influence on the society as well as on the state mechanism which is a very decisive apparatus in Turkey with regard to the distribution of wealth.

The growing gap between Erdoğan and the ruling party AKP reflects also a divergence in the policies pursued by both sides. It becomes increasingly visible that Erdoğan allies with the military represented in a constitutional body named “National Security Council” (NSC). Those who think that military no longer has any decisive role in Turkey’s political scene are badly mistaken. Any political figure or party wishing to remain in power must still, in one way or another, ally with the military. Erdoğan expresses the hard line policy of the NCS, especially concerning the Kurdish question. Just a few days after the joint peace process declaration, he said that there was no such thing as “Kurdish question” in Turkey. On the other hand the government, now preparing for the national elections, has no choice but to pursue more comprehensive and “liberal” policies. That’s why the government has to take credit of the peace process by presenting itself as the only political actor who puts finally an end to the bloody conflict lasting for 30 years.

To sum up, for the first time since the beginning of AKP’s rule in late 2002, the AKP constituency witnesses a split between their leader Erdoğan, a

much reliable figure for them and the AKP, the party that they brought to power three times during the last 12 years. And this could be the beginning of a number of splits this time within the AKP itself.

### **A polarized society and the approaching economic crisis**

Turkey's society has been deeply polarized politically since about 2010. Indeed this polarization has been largely manufactured by Erdoğan. On the one hand there are those who regularly vote for AKP and they constitute about 50 per cent of the voters. They mostly believe without further questioning what Erdoğan and other leading figures of AKP say about critical issues. They are mostly religiously conservative of varying degrees. On the other hand there are secularists comprising about 30-35 per cent of the population. The majority of the secularists (about 26-27 per cent) vote regularly for the Republican People's Party (CHP). Of course there are also Alawites, a heterodox Muslim community who have been seriously exposed to discrimination during the years of AKP rule.

Just a few examples may clarify how the AKP constituency's allegiance to Erdoğan has been secured by propaganda campaigns. During the Gezi uprising in June 2013, which was obviously a secular resistance, Erdoğan and pro-AKP media have managed to convince their conservative constituency that Gezi protestors were nothing but vandals and were manipulated by pro-coup provocateurs. Another recent example is this: Recently a young woman has been raped and then burned to death. Thousands of secular women and feminists took to the streets all around Turkey to protest the violence against women. Erdoğan, now the President of the Republic, publicly criticized the way secular women have protested the murder and said "we pray when someone is dead, we don't took to the streets; those feminists don't belong to our culture and civilization". He meant feminists have nothing to do with Islam and should be excluded by religious people.

The project of Erdoğan and AKP was to create a large and prosperous conservative middle class by way of clientelistic networks. Thus those who would like to benefit from the wealth created through these networks should adopt a conservative life style and hate the secularists as their main adversaries. Fortunately, Turkey's economy could not produce enough wealth for the realization of this social engineering project.

What happened instead is this: AKP and Erdoğan created a capitalist class of their own mostly by state tenders. So a new bourgeoisie has emerged by winning state tenders particularly in construction and infrastructure projects. As it has always been the case with the so-called "emerging markets", the wealth thus created has not been distributed to popular classes and poured to businessmen communities having strong ties with the government.

This is why AKP and Erdoğan have felt the need to polarize Turkey's society around religious values. Since the life standard of the large conservative masses didn't change much, to polarize the society and thus to consolidate/protect AKP's own electoral base was the optimal solution.

### **Turkey may experience a serious economic crisis in near future**

Economic crises and drastic changes in people's material conditions have always treated the status quo in Turkey. Power mechanisms like the one built up by Erdoğan and AKP may manufacture people's consent only up to a point. When a serious economic crisis hits large portions of the working classes, conservatives as well as secularists, the polarizations and divisions created among the society break down easily. I sincerely believe that a significant part of the voter base of AKP and Erdoğan will get rid of their illusions once an economic crush will destroy their "success story" which persisted more than a decade due a lack of a real democratic and popular opposition and presence of abundant money in international financial system to borrow

And here's a crisis on the horizon. Since a few months we have every sign of an economic crisis or at least a drastic downturn in Turkey.

Like other similar "emerging markets", Turkey's economy boosted until 2012 mainly due to hot money and credit inflow from global funds and foreign banks. There has been a huge hot money and bank credits inflow

since 2003 and it has been intensified after the global financial crisis, when FED has started the successive quantitative easing programs (QE). Traditionally Turkish private sector suffers from a chronic shortage of capital accumulation. The real wages are generally low and don't allow for an aggressive consumption. When the huge global liquidity has enabled cheap and massive borrowing, Turkish banks and real sector firms have borrowed heavily. They used these foreign resources to finance non-productive investments like real estate and construction. Turkey's economy is traditionally dependent on domestic consumption. Thus banks encouraged households to use large amounts of consumer credits and to borrow by using credit cards.

Now, as FED ended its QE program last year and announced that it will raise federal interest rates, money inflows to Turkey have begun to dry up. Since foreign financial investments are now heading for more secure instruments like US treasury bonds and since local private corporations are heavily indebted in terms of US dollar, Turkish Lira has been devalued about 15 per cent against dollar only during the last two and half months. Devaluation of the Turkish lira increases day by day the total foreign debt of the local firms. Not only that. Local consumption has been increasingly stagnating because working and middle class households have also indebted heavily during the last decade.

#### **Consequently...**

Consequently, it seems very likely that a probable economic crisis in the near future will enable the discussion of the real problems of Turkey, put an end to those manufactured polarizations, make possible the questioning of the clientelistic networks built up by AKP and Erdoğan and cause still more splits both between the would-be President Erdoğan and AKP and also within the AKP itself. What's needed is a real democratic and popular opposition for taking advantage of this upheaval.

<https://zcomm.org/znetarticle/971407/>

### **Secretive and seedy: how aid donors are opening the agribusiness flood gates**

#### **When big agribusiness teams up with international aid organisations to corner the market on seeds, everyone loses.**

Ian Fitzpatrick 23 March 2015

A secretive conference, co-organised by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), one of the world's largest donors, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) takes place in London today, 23 March 2015.

The meeting bears the ludicrously long sobriquet 'Multiple Pathways for Promoting the Commercial and Sustainable Production and Delivery of Early Generation Seed of Food Crops in Sub-Saharan Africa.' To give it a more succinct description, this is a meeting where corporations will discuss how to increase their control of the global seed sector.

The list of invited participants reads like a roll call for some of the most renowned actors in the agribusiness world. Syngenta (the world's third biggest seed and biotechnology company), and its 'greenwashing' relative, the Syngenta Foundation for Sustainable Agriculture, will make an appearance, as well as the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, and donor organisations like the UK's Department for International Development and The World Bank.

Why invite a farmer organisation when your aim is helping companies sell new seed varieties?

The invite list is entirely made up of corporations, development agencies and aid donors. Not a single farmer organisation was invited. But then, why invite a farmer organisation when your aim is helping companies sell new seed varieties?

From what we've seen of the pre-meeting documents that were circulated, the aim of the conference will be to share findings of a report by Monitor Deloitte on developing the commercial seed sector in sub-

Saharan Africa.

The neoliberal agenda and food sovereignty

The report recommends that in countries where demand for patented seeds is weaker (i.e. where farmers are using their own seed saving networks), public-private partnerships should be developed so that private companies are protected from 'investment risk'. It also recommends that NGOs and aid donors should encourage governments to introduce intellectual property rights for seed breeders and help to persuade farmers to buy commercial, patented seeds rather than relying on their own traditional varieties.

Finally, in line with the broader neoliberal agenda of agribusiness companies across the world, the report suggests that governments should remove regulations (like export restrictions) so that the seed sector is opened up to the global market.

The neoliberal agenda of deregulation and privatisation poses a serious threat to food sovereignty.

This neoliberal agenda of deregulation and privatisation, currently promoted in almost every sphere of human activity - from food production to health and education - poses a serious threat to food sovereignty and the ability of food producers and consumers to define their own food systems and policies.

The two organisations organising the conference, BMGF and USAID, are two of the main driving forces behind the adoption of commercial, patented seeds among poor farmers in Africa. When seed markets are dominated by a handful of companies selling their patented seeds, farmers' ability to save, exchange and sell their own seed varieties is threatened.

### **Small farmers hold the keys**

We know that up to 75% of the seed varieties needed to produce our food are currently in the hands of small farmers. We also know that smaller farms are more biodiverse, and therefore more resilient to crop disease and climate change than large plantations.

75% of the seed varieties needed to produce our food are currently in the hands of small farmers.

But despite the incredibly important role that small farmers play in preserving seed varieties and creating resilient food systems, large donors like BMGF, USAID, and DfID (particularly with its support of the New Alliance initiative) seem more interested in supporting big business and promoting policies that make it easier for agribusiness companies to control seed markets. In fact, BMGF and USAID's priorities are laid bare in the report. They include increasing the role of large seed companies in the seed sector, together with helping small and medium-sized companies produce their own patented seed varieties.

The recent Declaration of the International Forum for Agroecology, which was backed by Via Campesina, one of the world's largest social movements with over 250m members, and dozens of other farming and food producing groups, is as clear about the problem:

"The corporate model over-produces food that poisons us, destroys soil fertility, is responsible for the deforestation of rural areas, the contamination of water and the acidification of oceans and killing of fisheries. Essential natural resources have been commodified, and rising production costs are driving us off the land. Farmers' seeds are being stolen and sold back to us at exorbitant prices, bred as varieties that depend on costly, contaminating agrochemicals."

It is also clear about the solution, stating that agroecology, within a food sovereignty framework, offers us a collective path through the current food crisis. A truly sustainable food system recognises the fundamental contribution that small farmers make to it through their preservation of seed diversity and farmers' own innovation, research and breeding skills. It also recognises that farming is political and a sustainable farming system requires us to challenge the current power imbalance in the food system and put the control of seeds and other resources into the hands of the

estimated two billion small farmers, fisherfolk, peasants and pastoralists that currently feed our world.

[www.opendemocracy.net](http://www.opendemocracy.net)

Ian is a food sovereignty researcher for Global Justice Now, helping to build the case for food sovereignty and agroecology in Africa. Prior to this he worked as a freelance environmental researcher for Sustain, Food Ethics Council and the New Economics Foundation, and was the co-founder of a co-operative bakery in Leeds (Leeds Bread Co-op). Ian has an MSc in ethnobotany from the University of Kent, and a DPhil (PhD) in anthropology from the University of Oxford.

## Real unemployment is double the 'official' unemployment rate

Pete Dolack 23 March 2015

How many people are really out of work? The answer is surprisingly difficult to ascertain. For reasons that are likely ideological at least in part, official unemployment figures greatly under-report the true number of people lacking necessary full-time work.

That the “reserve army of labor” is quite large goes a long way toward explaining the persistence of stagnant wages in an era of increasing productivity.

How large? Across North America, Europe and Australia, the real unemployment rate is approximately double the “official” unemployment rate.

The “official” unemployment rate in the United States, for example, was 5.5 percent for February 2015. That is the figure that is widely reported. But the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics keeps track of various other unemployment rates, the most pertinent being its “U-6” figure. The U-6 unemployment rate includes all who are counted as unemployed in the “official” rate, plus discouraged workers, the total of those employed part time but not able to secure full-time work and all persons marginally attached to the labor force (those who wish to work but have given up). The actual U.S. unemployment rate for February 2015, therefore, is 11 percent.



Canada makes it much more difficult to know its real unemployment rate. The official Canadian unemployment rate for February was 6.8 percent, a slight increase from January that Statistics Canada attributes to “more people search[ing] for work.” The official measurement in Canada, as in the U.S., European Union and Australia, mirrors the official standard for measuring employment defined by the International Labour Organization — those not working at all and who are “actively looking for work.” (The ILO is an agency of the United Nations.)

Statistics Canada’s closest measure toward counting full unemployment is

its R8 statistic, but the R8 counts people in part-time work, including those wanting full-time work, as “full-time equivalents,” thus underestimating the number of under-employed by hundreds of thousands, according to an analysis by The Globe and Mail. There are further hundreds of thousands not counted because they do not meet the criteria for “looking for work.” Thus The Globe and Mail analysis estimates Canada’s real unemployment rate for 2012 was 14.2 percent rather than the official 7.2 percent. Thus Canada’s true current unemployment rate today is likely about 14 percent.

### **Everywhere you look, more are out of work**

The gap is nearly as large in Europe as in North America. The official European Union unemployment rate was 9.8 percent in January 2015. The European Union’s Eurostat service requires some digging to find out the actual unemployment rate, requiring adding up different parameters. Under-employed workers and discouraged workers comprise four percent of the E.U. workforce each, and if we add the one percent of those seeking work but not immediately available, that pushes the actual unemployment rate to about 19 percent.

The same pattern holds for Australia. The Australia Bureau of Statistics revealed that its measure of “extended labour force under-utilisation” – this includes “discouraged” jobseekers, the “underemployed” and those who want to start work within a month, but cannot begin immediately – was 13.1 percent in August 2012 (the latest for which I can find), in contrast to the “official,” and far more widely reported, unemployment rate of five percent at the time.

Concomitant with these sobering statistics is the length of time people are out of work. In the European Union, for example, the long-term unemployment rate – defined as the number of people out of work for at least 12 months – doubled from 2008 to 2013. The number of U.S. workers unemployed for six months or longer more than tripled from 2007 to 2013.

Thanks to the specter of chronic high unemployment, and capitalists’ ability to transfer jobs overseas as “free trade” rules become more draconian, it comes as little surprise that the share of gross domestic income going to wages has declined steadily. In the U.S., the share has declined from 51.5 percent in 1970 to about 42 percent. But even that decline likely understates the amount of compensation going to working people because almost all gains in recent decades has gone to the top one percent.

Around the world, worker productivity has risen over the past four decades while wages have been nearly flat. Simply put, we’d all be making much more money if wages had merely kept pace with increased productivity.

### **Insecure work is the global norm**

The increased ability of capital to move at will around the world has done much to exacerbate these trends. The desire of capitalists to depress wages to buoy profitability is a driving force behind their push for governments to adopt “free trade” deals that accelerate the movement of production to low-wage, regulation-free countries. On a global basis, those with steady employment are actually a minority of the world’s workers.

Using International Labour Organization figures as a starting point, professors John Bellamy Foster and Robert McChesney calculate that the “global reserve army of labor” – workers who are underemployed, unemployed or “vulnerably employed” (including informal workers) – totals 2.4 billion. In contrast, the world’s wage workers total 1.4 billion – far less! Writing in their book *The Endless Crisis: How Monopoly-Finance Capital Produces Stagnation and Upheaval from the USA to China*, they write:

*“It is the existence of a reserve army that in its maximum extent is more than 70 percent larger than the active labor army that serves to restrain wages globally, and particularly in poorer countries. Indeed, most of this reserve army is located in the underdeveloped countries of the world, though its growth can be seen today in the rich countries as well.”*

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The earliest countries that adopted capitalism could “export” their “excess” population through mass emigration. From 1820 to 1915, Professors Foster and McChesney write, more than 50 million people left Europe for the “new world.” But there are no longer such places for developing countries to send the people for whom capitalism at home can not supply employment. Not even a seven percent growth rate for 50 years across the entire global South could absorb more than a third of the peasantry leaving the countryside for cities, they write. Such a sustained growth rate is extremely unlikely.

As with the growing environmental crisis, these mounting economic problems are functions of the need for ceaseless growth. Once again, infinite growth is not possible on a finite planet, especially one that is approaching its limits. Worse, to keep the system functioning at all, the planned obsolescence of consumer products necessary to continually stimulate household spending accelerates the exploitation of natural resources at unsustainable rates and all this unnecessary consumption produces pollution increasingly stressing the environment.

Humanity is currently consuming the equivalent of one and a half earths, according to the non-profit group Global Footprint Network. A separate report by WWF-World Wide Fund For Nature in collaboration with the Zoological Society of London and Global Footprint Network, calculates that the Middle East/Central Asia, Asia-Pacific, North America and European Union regions are each consuming about double their regional biocapacity.

We have only one Earth. And that one Earth is in the grips of a system that takes at a pace that, unless reversed, will leave it a wrecked hulk while throwing ever more people into poverty and immiseration. That this can go on indefinitely is the biggest fantasy.

<https://zcomm.org/zcommentary/real-unemployment-is-double-the-official-unemployment-rate-mar18/>

## Can You Say “Blowback” in Spanish?

Rebecca Gordon 23 March 2015

They behead people by the hundreds. They heap headless, handless bodies along roadsides as warnings to those who would resist their power. They have penetrated the local, state, and national governments and control entire sections of the country. They provide employment and services to an impoverished public, which distrusts their actual government with its bitter record of corruption, repression, and torture. They seduce young people from several countries, including the United States, into their murderous activities.

Is this a description of the heinous practices of the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria? It could be, but as a matter of fact it's not. These particular thugs exist a lot closer to home. They are part of the multi-billion-dollar industry known as the drug cartels of Mexico. Like the Islamic State, the cartels' power has increased as the result of disastrous policies born in the U.S.A.

There are other parallels between IS and groups like Mexico's Zetas and its Sinaloa cartel. Just as the U.S. wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya fertilized the field for IS, another U.S. war, the so-called War on Drugs, opened new horizons for the drug cartels. Just as Washington has worked hand-in-hand with and also behind the backs of corrupt rulers in Central Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa, so it has done with the Mexican government. Both kinds of war have resulted in blowback – violent consequences felt in our own cities, whether at the finish line of the Boston Marathon or in communities of color across the country.

In Mexico, the U.S. military is directly involved in the War on Drugs. In this country, that “war” has provided the pretext for the militarization of local police forces and increased routine surveillance of ordinary people going about their ordinary lives.

And just as both the national security state and the right wing have used

the specter of IS to create an atmosphere of panic and hysteria in this country, so both have used the drug cartels' grotesque theater of violence to justify their demonization of immigrants from Latin America and the massive militarization of America's borderlands.

### **The War in Mexico**

If there was an official beginning to Mexico's war on drugs, it would have to be considered the election of Felipe Calderón as the country's president in 2006. The candidate of the right-wing Partido Acción Nacional, the National Action Party (PAN), Calderón was only the second Mexican president in 70 years who did not come from the Partido Revolucionario Institucional, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). His predecessor, Vicente Fox, had been the first.

It was Calderón who, with encouragement and assistance from the United States, changed Mexico's war on drugs from a metaphor into the real thing, in which guns and grenades would fuel the deaths of more than 60,000 Mexicans through 2012.

The current president, Enrique Peña Nieto of the PRI, admits that another 27,000 Mexicans were murdered in the first year of his presidency. At least another 25,000 have been disappeared since 2007. It was Calderón who brought the Mexican military fully into the fight against drugs, transforming an ineffective policing policy into a full-scale shooting war with the cartels. At least 50,000 military personnel have been deployed.

In addition to ordinary citizens, journalists and politicians have been particular targets in this war. The Committee to Protect Journalists reports that murders of Mexican reporters have increased dramatically since 2006. Among those whose killers have been positively identified, 69% died at the hands of the drug cartels, and at least 22% were killed by government or military personnel.

Wikipedia lists over 100 politicians who have lost their lives in Mexico's war on drugs. That list does not include a woman named Aide Nava González, whose headless body was dumped this month on a road in Guerrero state. Nava was contending for the Partido Revolución Democrática, the Democratic Revolution Party, slot on the ballot in the town of Ahuacuotzingo. Her husband, the former mayor, had been murdered there last year. A note from Los Rojos, a local drug gang, was left with Nava's body. "This is what will happen," it read, "to anyone who does not fall in line, fucking turncoats."

Guerrero is the home of Ayotzinapa, a town where 43 teachers-in-training once attended a rural teachers college. All 43 "disappeared" last September during a demonstration in the neighboring town of Iguala. Their arrest by police, and apparent subsequent murder at the hands of a local drug gang, Guerreros Unidos, was one of the few stories of Mexican suffering to break into the U.S. mainstream media last year. The mayor of Iguala has since admitted that he instructed the police to hand the students over to the gang and has been arrested, along with his wife. The town's police chief is still on the run.

Like the "war on terror" globally, Mexico's war on drugs has created endless new pretexts for government repression, which has its own lengthy history in that country. That history includes the long-remembered police murders of some 300 students, among the thousands protesting in Mexico City's Plaza de las Tres Culturas a couple of weeks before the Summer Olympics began in 1968. Juan Méndez, the U.N.'s Special Rapporteur on Torture, wrote in his 2014 mission report on Mexico:

"The National Human Rights Commission recorded an increase in the number of complaints of torture and ill-treatment since 2007 and reported a peak of 2,020 complaints in 2011 and 2,113 in 2012, compared with an annual average of 320 in the six years prior to 2007. Between December 2012 and July 2014, the Commission received 1,148 complaints of violations attributable to the armed forces alone."

According to Méndez, it's difficult to pinpoint the exact number of torture cases in the country in any year, because there is no national registry that records such complaints. Nor is everyone who was tortured by

representatives of the government likely to report their suffering to that same government.

What is not difficult to pinpoint is the nature of the torture. Méndez notes the “disturbing similarities” in the complaints of those tortured. The police and the military are regularly reported to use a combination of “punches, kicks, and beatings with sticks; electric shocks through the application of electrical devices such as cattle prods to their bodies, usually their genitals; asphyxiation with plastic bags; waterboarding; forced nudity; suspension by their limbs; [and] threats and insults.”

The purpose of such torture is clear as well. As Mendez reports, it’s “to punish and to extract confessions or incriminating information.” A 2008 change to the Mexican constitution makes it easier to do this: under this policy of pre-trial detention (*arraigo* in Spanish), suspected drug traffickers can be held for up to 80 days without charge. According to the Mexican Commission for the Defense and Promotion of Human Rights, “Supposedly, *arraigo* is used as a means to investigate suspected criminals, but in practice, it is used as a kind of public scrutiny that allows more time for the authorities to determine whether the detained is guilty or innocent.” It’s much easier to extract a confession when you have electric cattle prods and waterboarding at your disposal.

### **Washington Fights a “War” in Mexico**

Who pays for Mexico’s war on drugs? You won’t perhaps be too surprised to learn that the United States foots a major part of the bill. Between 2008 and 2014, Congress has appropriated \$2.4 billion dollars to fight the cartels, as part of the Mérida Initiative, a “security cooperation agreement” between the U.S. and Mexican governments. That money supports a failed war in which tens of thousands have been killed and thousands more tortured.

U.S. involvement, however, goes far beyond money. Along with the publicly acknowledged Mérida Initiative, the Justice Department and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) signed secret agreements with the Fox and Calderón administrations without the knowledge or consent of the Mexican congress. These openly violated the Mexican constitution, which reserves to that congress the right to approve agreements with foreign governments, as well as the U.N. Convention Against Transnational Crime, which requires that activities carried out by one country inside another be approved by the appropriate agency in the country where those activities take place.

Under these secret agreements, U.S. DEA agents met repeatedly with high-level members of particular drug cartels, especially the Sinaloa group, to obtain information about rival organizations. Informants served as go-betweens in contacts between the DEA and “El Chapo” Guzmán, the head of that cartel. Guzmán was arrested in 2014 by the Mexican government. The newspaper *El Universal* conducted a year-long investigation in which its reporters documented the extent and effects of this illegal cooperation. The DEA arranged to dismiss drug trafficking charges that were pending in the United States against some of their Sinaloa Cartel informants. In other words, it allowed the cartels with which it worked to continue business – and murder – as usual.

In at least one case, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) issued multiple re-entry visas to informants, allowing them to bring significant quantities of drugs into the United States with impunity. In fact, it appears that, in order to maintain the flow of information, U.S. officials took sides in the drug war that devastated the Mexican city of Ciudad Juárez, killing an estimated 10,500 people. With tacit U.S. permission, the Sinaloa Cartel was able to defeat the rival Juárez Cartel.

Seventy percent of the guns used in Mexico’s drug wars also come from this country. Most are purchased at one or another of the 6,700 licensed firearms sales outlets along the U.S.-Mexico border. The University of San Diego’s Trans-Border Institute estimates that, between 2010 and 2012, about 253,000 firearms were bought each year for transfer to Mexico. And most of them made it across the border. The Institute reports that “Mexican authorities have seized roughly 12.7% of the total annual trade” in weapons. U.S. interdiction efforts account for a measly 2% of those

seized.

And not all of the weapons that ended up in Mexico did so against the wishes of the U.S. government. In the debacle known as “Fast and Furious,” the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) allowed “more than 2,000 weapons, including hundreds of AK-47-type semi-automatic rifles and .50 caliber rifles,” to “walk” across the border and into the hands of the Mexican cartels. Its ostensible purpose was to follow the guns in hopes that they would lead to the arrest of high-level cartel leaders. But relevant agencies of the Mexican government were never informed about the operation, and it seems that there was no actual effort to track the weapons once they crossed the Mexican border. The weapons turned up at crime scenes in both Mexico and the United States. On December 14, 2010, near the Mexican border in Arizona, one of them killed Brian Terry, a U.S. Border Patrol agent.

ATF wasn’t the only agency involved in “Fast and Furious.” Personnel from ICE, the Department of Homeland Security, the DEA, and the U.S. Attorney’s Office in Arizona also participated, along with the FBI and the IRS.

Nor was the Mexican government entirely informed, although it seems clear that one man, Eduardo Medina Mora, knew about it. A former director of Mexico’s equivalent of the CIA, Medina is considered the “legal architect” of that country’s drug war. He was Mexico’s attorney general when Fast and Furious got underway. By 2010, he’d been removed from that post (possibly because one of his top deputies was arrested for taking bribes from the cartels) and appointed ambassador to the United Kingdom. Later, he served as ambassador to the U.S. until, in early March 2015, President Peña Nieto barely won Senate approval of Medina’s appointment to a 15-year term as head of Mexico’s Supreme Court. Mexicans who still remember Fast and Furious were outraged.

The Pentagon and CIA are also involved in Mexico in significant ways. Since at least 2011, the Pentagon has deployed both piloted aircraft and drones in the Mexican war on drugs. The CIA has also sent operatives to do intelligence gathering. And without specifying which agencies are responsible for such activities, the New York Times reports that “the United States has trained nearly 4,500 new [Mexican] federal police agents and assisted in conducting wiretaps, running informants, and interrogating suspects.” Furthermore, the “Pentagon has provided sophisticated equipment, including Black Hawk helicopters.”

In 2011, the State Department recalled career diplomat Earl Anthony Wayne from Kabul. He was then serving as deputy ambassador to Afghanistan and coordinating with the NATO-led occupation forces there. His new assignment based on his counterinsurgency experience? Ambassador to Mexico. In 2013, the U.S. Army opened a special-ops center in Colorado, according to the El Paso Times, “to teach Mexican security forces how to hunt drug cartels the same way special operations teams hunt al-Qaida.” Because that worked out so well in Afghanistan and Iraq.

### **The Drug War Comes Home (Along With Plenty of Blowback)**

All in all, the U.S. drug war in Mexico has been an abject failure. In spite of high-profile arrests, including in 2014 Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán, who ran the Sinaloa group, and in 2015 Servando “La Tuta” Gómez, head of the Knights Templar Cartel in Michoacán, the cartels seem as strong as ever. They may occasionally split and reassemble, but they are still able to move plenty of product, and reap at least \$20 billion a year in sales in the United States. In fact, this country remains the world’s premier market for illegal drugs.

The cartels are responsible for the majority of the methamphetamine sold in the United States today. Since 2006, when a federal law made it much harder to buy ephedrine and pseudoephedrine in this country, the cartels have replaced small-time U.S.-based meth cooks. The meth they produce is purer than the U.S. product, apparently because it’s made with purer precursor chemicals available from China. The other big product is heroin, whose quickly rising consumption seems to be replacing the demand for cocaine in the United States. On the other hand, marijuana legalization appears to be cutting into the cross-border traffic in that drug.

The Washington Post reports that almost 9% of Americans “age 12 or older – 22.6 million people – are current users of illegal drugs, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.” That represents a one-third increase over the 6.2% in 1998. It takes a lot of infrastructure to move that much product.

And that’s where U.S.-based gangs come in. Urban gangs in the United States today are not the Sharks and Jets of West Side Story. Certainly, there are still some small local groups formed by young people looking for family and solidarity on the streets. All too often, however, today’s gangs represent the well-run distribution arm of the international drug trade. In Chicago alone, 100,000 people work in illegal drug distribution, selling mostly into that city’s African-American community. Gang membership is skewing older every year, as gangs transform from local associations to organized, powerfully armed criminal enterprises. Well over half of present gang members are adults now. The communities where they operate live in fear, caught between the gangs that offer them employment while threatening their safety and militarized police forces they do not trust.

Just like U.S. military adventures in the Middle East and Afghanistan, the U.S.-Mexico war on drugs has only left a larger problem in place, while producing blowback here at home. A particularly nasty example is the cartels’ use of serving U.S. military personnel and veterans as hit men here in the United States. But the effects are far bigger than that. The DEA told the Washington Post that Mexican cartels are operating in more than 1,200 U.S. cities. In all those cities, the failed war on drugs has put in prison 2.3 million people – in vastly disproportionate numbers from communities of color – without cutting demand by one single kilo. And yet, though that war has only visibly increased the drug problem in the same way that the war on terror has generated ever more terror organizations, in both cases there’s no evidence that any other course than war is being considered in Washington.

<https://zcomm.org/znetarticle/can-you-say-blowback-in-spanish/>

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## Call to Impeach Dilma Not As Popular As Portrayed

Danica Jorden 20 March 2015

Reminiscent of the popular movement that led to the resignation of former Brazilian president Fernando Collor de Mello in 1992, instead of “Fora Collor,” (“Get Out Collor”) protestors are now waving banners with the words “Fora Dilma” and favouring the same English word “impeachment” in a bid to oust the South American country’s current president, Dilma Rousseff. Both leaders were accused of mismanagement and corruption, with Petrobras, the national petroleum company, at the centre of the criticism against Dilma. Likewise, protestors are numbering at least a million. But the similarity is deceptive. Collor was a member of the wealthy elite who ostensibly ran afoul of the interests controlling Brazil at the time, whereas Dilma, the former revolutionary now at the helm of the country as head of the PT, the leftist Workers Party, is a populist who continues to inspire more wide-spread, albeit less reported, manifestations of support outside of the country’s affluent city centres.

According to the MST (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra, Landless Workers Movement) website, differently composed demonstrations also took place this weekend in favour of rooting out corruption at Petrobras but against privatization of the mostly state owned oil company.

“Paralyzing Petrobras is a crime against the Brazilian people. The workers are in the streets to defend the interests of the people,” said João de Moraes, director of the Federação Única dos Petroleiros (United Federation

of Petroleum Workers, FUP).”[1]

The MST goes on to describe actions that took place throughout the country.

“Actions with the same list of complaints occurred in more than 17 of the country’s states (AL, AP, BA, CE, DF, GO, MA, MG, MS, MT, PB, PE, PR, RJ, RN, SC, SE.). In total, 22 cities in Brazil had demonstrations defending the same demands.”[2]

In a country whose major cities house 20 million residents each, and where 2 million people only represent 1% of Brazil’s population, a realistic scale of the protests can be difficult to imagine. And in a country as big as Brazil, the billions involved in the Petrobras scandal can be daunting to look at as well. International investment banks estimate that \$8.1 billion in profits were skimmed as kickbacks to politicians and business leaders.[3]

And while Collor’s corruption and mismanagement in 1992 inspired widespread protests that crossed social strata, the polemic about Dilma is dividing Brazil along class lines. In fact, Sunday’s protests calling for Dilma’s impeachment took place along the Avenida Paulista in São Paulo, and the Avenida Atlântica in Rio de Janeiro, in the shadow of opulent condos whose occupants generally burst from ground floor garages and rarely mix with the general public. The anti-Dilma protestors are waving banners critical of social programs spending and calling for a return to military rule.

Also disturbing are the many links between this latest impeachment movement and far right extremist leaders and groups. One major player in the protests’ organization, Revoltados Online (Rebels Online), decries, in typically racist and classist jargon, Northeasterners, where a greater percentage of the descendants of formerly enslaved and native people live, who lie in hammocks collecting welfare. [4]

Rio’s racist, sexist and inflammatory politician Jair Bolsonaro is hailed by protestors, many of whom express nostalgia for the military dictatorship and accuse Dilma and Lula of communism.[5] Telesur is reporting on Koch Brothers involvement[6], and the refrain of impeaching a popularly elected president who has committed no crime will be familiar to many in the United States.

Actually, the Petrobras investigation, Operação Lava Jato (Operation Quick Wash), whose name sardonically refers to money laundering through carwash and gas station franchises, is aimed at corruption that took place in the mostly state-controlled oil company before Dilma’s first term in office, and though she chaired its board of directors from 2003 to 2010, she is not under any charges.

Curiously, it was reported in November 2014 that the companies under suspicion gave equally to the recent political campaigns of both Dilma and her main adversary, Aécio Neves.[7] Aécio heads the Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira (Brazilian Social Democracy Party, PSDB), another major player in Sunday’s anti-government protests.

The PSDB is also the party of Brazil’s vice president, Michel Temer, who would presumably assume the presidency if Dilma were forced to resign. And lest one think that the president who stepped down in 1992 was never heard from again, Fernando Collor de Mello, scion of a political family, was quickly cleared and resumed his political career, now serving as a Federal Senator representing the State of Alagoas.

In a country where the vote is compulsory and non-voters are fined, events may not play out in the same way as in other places where the wealthier turn out in higher numbers at the polls. And cuts in social programs leading to resentment can attract voters from across class lines to parties generally protesting higher taxes and investigations into the affairs of the more well-heeled. A substantially lower exchange rate coupled with lower oil prices are hurting the population across the board.

But 2 million people are 1% of Brazil’s population, as economist Theotonio dos Santos points out in an article outlining a future path:

“Continuity of social programs, protecting Petrobras, independent corruption trials, interest rates for human and sustainable development, guarantees for the rights of workers, ending ‘fiscal adjustments’ to service interest payments, mobilizing workers around principles and objectives that meet their needs, policies for the integration of Latin America, alliance with the BRICS, defending the sovereignty of oppressed nations, defending our natural resources, these are the paths by which many more than the 1% will come to the streets, this time to defend the historical goals that led to the constitution of a peoples government in Brazil.”[8]  
<https://zcomm.org/znetarticle/brazil-call-to-impeach-dilma-not-as-popular-as-portrayed/>

*Danica Jorden is a writer and translator of French, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish. All translations by the author.*

[1][2] <http://www.mst.org.br/2015/03/13/cerca-de-100-mil-ocupam-a-paulista-pela-constituente-e-em-defesa-da-petrobras.html>

[3] <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-30129184>

[4] <http://www.publico.es/internacional/quienes-detras-protestas-brasil-dilma.html>

[5] <http://zh.clicrbs.com.br/rs/noticia/2014/12/iotti-protesto-pela-volta-da-ditadura-e-por-aulas-de-historia-4658862.html> The political cartoon’s captions read: “Return to Military Dictatorship Now” and “More History Lessons For These People.”

[6] <http://www.telesurtv.net/english/analysis/Are-the-Koch-Brothers-Behind-Brazils-Anti-Dilma-March-20150313-0001.html>

[7] <http://noticias.uol.com.br/politica/ultimas-noticias/2014/11/25/empreiteiras-da-lava-jato-doaram-r-988-mi-a-campanhas-de-dilma-e-aecio.htm>

[8] <http://www.alainet.org/es/articulo/16827>

## Netanyahu's victory - what does it mean?

Francesco Merli 19 March 2015

With a defiant right-wing turn promising that no Palestinian state would be established as long as he remained in power, Israeli prime minister Netanyahu has managed to overturn unfavourable opinion polls at the last minute and emerge as the winner of the Israeli elections on Tuesday. His appeal was aimed - and successfully so - at rallying the right wing around his figure and firm leadership by appealing once again to the historically deeply rooted fears of ordinary Israeli citizens over external threats to Israel. What are going to be the consequences of his victory within Israel and internationally?

Netanyahu's electoral success represented such a sharp turn in the situation that has taken all analysts by surprise, as well as his opponents. It was mainly due to a swing in votes from the extreme right wing public opinion towards Netanyahu's party, Likud, which came out on top in the polls, gaining about 30 seats (the final results will be released later on) in the 120-strong Knesset. This victory undoubtedly gives Netanyahu a new lease of life, and has important internal and international consequences that need to be carefully analysed.

By looking superficially at the election results one may conclude that Netanyahu managed to cut across - at least on the electoral plane - a general process of radicalisation to the left and an anti-establishment mood which was gaining momentum in the run up of the elections. This mood has affected large sections of the youth and of Israeli society in general over the past few years, especially after the 2011 mass movements. Such a sharp turn in the situation was unexpected but should not surprise Marxists in the least. Sudden twists and turns in the political situation are indeed a feature of all periods characterised by a deep crisis of the dominant system, like the one we have entered worldwide since 2008.

Every crisis polarises society in different directions: in the direction of a radical questioning of the system and revolution on the one hand, and of a

mobilisation of reactionary forces, on the other. This process is inevitable, as the opposing camps are rallying their forces by drawing in previously inert layers of society for future decisive battles. The rise of one side does not exclude the other. On the contrary, it arouses countering forces. Political volatility is a feature of epochs of crisis such as the one we have entered on a world scale.

In this case, we can clearly see that Netanyahu's victory will temporarily revive his position as the natural arbiter between different factions of the Israeli ruling class. In addition, he will gain more leverage in the international arena, in increasingly complicated relations with the US. But this respite is going to be a short-lived detour from the march of events.

In fact, the relative freedom from internal and international constraints Netanyahu is going to enjoy for a short period after his victory may also help to accelerate the process of radicalisation within Israeli society, in circumstances where deep social processes are at work. At the same time, a stronger Netanyahu introduces an additional element of unpredictability into the already extremely unstable situation in Israel and wider relations in the Middle East.

The extent of such unpredictability is reflected in a post-election comment by the New York Times:

*Despite the resounding victory after Mr. Netanyahu's hard-line statements in the campaign's final days, the direction he will take in what would be his fourth term is as much a mystery as the man himself.*

#### **Social polarisation and the future**

The increasing political volatility has roots in the objective situation. Government statistics released at the beginning of March underline the scale of the social problems facing Israel and the growing divide between rich and poor, but also how hard the crisis is hitting even the middle layers. According to the central bureau of statistics, 41% of Israelis are in a constant state of overdraft with more than a third owing at least 10,000 shekels (\$2,500). What is the reason for this? A recent report from the state comptroller shows that house prices have rocketed in the last six years by almost 55% and rents by 30%. Wages, however, have remained largely stagnant over the same period.

Will Netanyahu be able - or even willing - to address these problems? Rhetoric about a Jewish State, resorting to a boost in Jewish-only settlements (grown by 23 percent between 2009 and 2014) and an aggressive foreign policy cannot compensate for the fact that Netanyahu's policies over the past two years have been locked to austerity and cuts to social welfare. This, to such an extent that his partner in the coalition (and one of the most popular figures back in 2013), finance minister Yair Lapid, saw his personal support sink and the votes for his party Yesh Atid and seats almost halved in the current election.

Netanyahu's victory bears one consequence more serious than any other. The growing discontent is rooted in the worsening of the material conditions of living for large layers of Israeli society. However, the way it has expressed itself has changed over the past period. The present results show that this movement has not yet gained enough momentum to sweep across the political scene by electoral means. However, we need to understand that, with the possibility to change things by electoral means obstructed for a period, the bulk of the Israeli population will at some point - like in 2011 - be forced to express itself through social unrest and class struggle. But this time the movement will acquire - in a much quicker way - an anti-establishment character and will be more consciously political.

The rise to prominence within the Labour Party (the leading force of the second biggest front, the Zionist Union coalition) of a few left personalities such as the 29-years old Stav Shaffir, personally linked to the 2011 movement, should not be underestimated as a symptom of the radicalisation taking place. Had the Labour Party won the election, this process would have been delayed or even blocked, but the most likely scenario is one of the LP being relegated for a while as a loyal opposition to the government, which may give some scope for internal differentiation

to continue.

However, the principal symptom of a radical mood emerging in important sections of the youth and workers in Israel, especially but not only within the Arab minority, is the rise of the Joint List led by the left wing Hadash's new leader Aymen Odeh. Odeh's denunciation of the present state - This is a state of the tycoons against all the disadvantaged in the country - struck a chord among a section of the masses and rallied new support to the left coalition. The Joint List scored more than 10 percent, coming third in the polls. Hadash and the Joint List may well emerge in the new Knesset as the main opposition pole in the next period. It is drawing support among the Israeli Arab workers and poor as well as their Jewish counterparts. Furthermore, an important section of the Labour Party's leadership may choose at some point to support Netanyahu in a coalition, as Ehud Barak already did in the previous government.

#### **A difficult and strained relationship with US imperialism**

Netanyahu's victory will determine a cosmetic change in US dealings with Israel in order to smoothen relations. Several incidents, such as Netanyahu's visit to the United States to speak to Congress on 3rd March having been invited by the Republican Speaker of the House of Representatives, have upset the Obama administration. But US-Israel tensions are not determined by a clash of personalities between Obama and Netanyahu, but by the increasingly divergent strategic interests of US imperialism and what is traditionally its closest ally in the Middle East.

*Speeches aside, there is no question that U.S.-Israeli relations have been changing substantially since the end of the Cold War, and that change, arrested for a while after 9/11, has created distance and tension between the countries. Netanyahu's speech is merely a symptom of the underlying reality. There are theatrics, there are personal animosities, but presidents and prime ministers come and go. What is important are the interests that bind or separate nations, and the interests of Israel and the United States have to some extent diverged.* (Stratfor, Netanyahu, Obama and the Geopolitics of Speeches, March 3, 2015)

These tensions are the consequence of the weakening of the power of US imperialism in the region, which gave more scope for regional powers (the main ones being Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Israel) to play their own game. US and Israeli interests have often diverged in the past, but what is emerging is a more serious cause of strain. The need for the American state to disengage from direct involvement in the area means that it necessarily finds itself more and more on the same side of the barricades as its long-standing foe: Iran, in the war against ISIS both in Iraq and in Syria.

From Israel's point of view the growing influence of Iran represents a critical threat to their own existence and has pushed Netanyahu to the paradox of regarding the forces related to Al-Qaeda in Syria as the lesser evil. Netanyahu's personal unpredictability enters the equation here, and had convinced the US administration to move against him significantly during the election campaign. But as the crisis in Israel develops, it can and will convert itself into a source of further instability in the Middle East.

Israeli capitalism is stumbling from one crisis to another and demonstrates that there is now no stable regime in the whole of the Middle East. Each turn in Israel's internal situation will affect the government's foreign policy, and, likewise, changes in international relations will accelerate the course of events within the country, in a spiral which may well get beyond Netanyahu's control.

<http://www.marxist.com/netanyahus-victory-what-does-it-mean.htm>

## **N Ireland: Public sector workers strike against austerity**

**For a second day of strike action in the run-up to the May general election!**

Kevin Henry, Socialist Party (CWI Ireland), Belfast 18 March 2015

Friday 13 March saw tens of thousands of workers in education, health, civil services and, importantly, public transport, take part in coordinated strike action against a Stormont austerity agenda.

The action involved Nipsa, the largest union in the North, the teachers' union Into, Unite, Unison and the GMB, against a backdrop of anti-union propaganda in the local press. Union busting tactics were used against ambulance workers on the day - management declaring a 'state of emergency' in order to stop workers striking!

However, the strike was overwhelming supported by the population. An opinion poll on the Belfast telegraph website put support for the strike at 82%!

### **U-turn**

The political effect of the strike was seen on the Monday before, when Sinn Féin did a U-turn on welfare reform. They accused their government colleagues, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), of acting in bad faith and not implementing measures necessary to protect the vulnerable.

The real reason was summed up by a Belfast Telegraph commentator: "Maybe it has dawned on the party [Sinn Féin] that in slashing services and triggering massive strike action later this week it is now the target of the unions and the workers."

Sinn Féin, who are not in principle opposed to 'welfare reform', i.e. cuts, fears being exposed for implementing vicious austerity in the North, thereby damaging their image as an 'anti-austerity' party in the South.

This all serves to underline the weak nature of the Northern Ireland assembly. It has not just been Sinn Féin but also the DUP which has been forced back from austerity measures when faced with a determined protest movement.

Socialist Party members were out on force on the day, joining the marches and visiting picket lines, not just in Belfast but in Derry, Newry, Enniskillen, Craigavon, Magherafelt, Cookstown and Dungannon. Our members distributed 10,000 leaflets to build for the strike action.

We also distributed almost 10,000 leaflets on the day and sold over 250 copies of our strike paper.

### **Where next?**

In several key unions, Socialist Party members played an important role putting pressure on trade union leaders and officials to ensure strike ballots were won and the strike was enthusiastically built for.

Socialist Youth members were to the forefront in campaigning to get young people to join the strike - including mobilising college students to join the marches, and in Queens University organising a referendum where 87% of students voted to take strike action.

On the picket lines, the key question on people's minds was, where next? Unfortunately, the answer largely received from the speakers' platform in Belfast would have left them disappointed. Shockingly, the trade union official chairing the rally said: "People always ask, where next? To that I say to the cafes and pubs"!

This lack of serious intent was a million miles removed from the Socialist Party, whose material on the day declared: "Name the next strike date."

The key issue now is to ensure that 13 March is not a one-off event but the opening shot in a campaign that can stop Stormont implementing its austerity agenda.

Socialist Party members in the unions are campaigning for a second day of strike action in the run-up to the general election. If the current trade union leaders are not prepared to do this, then union activists must organise to make them do it.

Linked to this is the urgent task of building a new party of protestant and

catholic workers that can challenge the establishment parties in Stormont that have nothing to offer but division and poverty.  
<http://www.socialistworld.net/doc/7132>

## USA orchestrates mass demonstrations in Brazil

Pravda 17 March 2015

On Sunday, March 15, flames of mass protests started burning in several Brazilian cities. Thousands of people took part in demonstrations against Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff and government corruption. The rallies were held in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, Belo Horizonte (Minas Gerais), Salvador (Bahia), Recife (Pernambuco) and many other cities.

Demonstrators accuse Rousseff of her support to oil state corporation Petroleo Brasileiro (Petrobras). The company was allegedly bribing the government for obtaining lucrative contracts and plundered the Brazilian budget in the amount of \$28 billion, while Dilma was serving as the head of the board of directors of the corporation.

Who is working on a coup in the heart of world football and Latin America?

It is quite possible that the CIA is involved in the plan to stage riots in Brazil nationwide. Over the recent years, BRICS has become the main geopolitical threat to the United States. One of today's top issues for the Western press is to retrieve balance in the global monetary and financial system. This is a potent threat that BRICS poses to the US and the US dollar, Pravda.Ru wrote in an article from March 13 titled *CIA, FBI, NSA and all the king's men work to topple Brazilian President Rousseff*.

The reasons, for which Washington wants to get rid of Dilma Rousseff, are easy to understand. She signed the agreement about the establishment of the New Development Bank with the initial registered capital worth 100 billion reserve fund, as well as additional \$100 billion. Rousseff also supports the creation of a new world reserve currency, Pravda.Ru says.

Dilma Rousseff also prevents the return of USA's major oil mining companies to the oil and gas market of Brazil. The country is rich with huge deposits of oil, the unconfirmed reserves of which exceed 100 billion barrels. However, it was during Lula's presidency, when Brazil opted for the Chinese state-run company Sinopec.

[http://english.pravda.ru/news/world/americas/16-03-2015/130039-mass\\_demonstrations\\_brazil-0/](http://english.pravda.ru/news/world/americas/16-03-2015/130039-mass_demonstrations_brazil-0/)

## The Failure of Modern Industrial Agriculture

John Ikerd 17 March 2015

Americans are being subjected to an ongoing multimillion-dollar propaganda campaign designed to “increase confidence and trust in today's agriculture.” Food Dialogues, just one example of this broader trend, is a campaign sponsored by the U.S. Farmers and Ranchers Alliance—an industry organization whose funders and board members include Monsanto, DuPont, and John Deere. The campaign features the “faces of farming and ranching”—articulate, attractive young farmers, obviously chosen to put the best possible face on the increasingly ugly business of industrial agriculture, which dominates our food- production system.

Genetically engineered crops, inhumane treatment of farm animals, and routine feeding of antibiotics to confined animals—among many other problems—have eroded public trust in American agriculture. In response, the defenders of so-called modern agriculture have employed top public relations firms to try to clean up their tarnished public image. Their campaigns emphasize such issues as water quality, food safety, animal welfare, and “food prices and choices.”

Mounting public concerns in each of these areas are supported by a growing body of scientific evidence. For example, a 1998 EPA study found 35,000 miles of streams in 22 states polluted with biological wastes from concentrated animal feeding operations. The number of “impaired waters” in Iowa has tripled since the late 1980s, as industrial farming systems, such as factory farms, have replaced traditional family farms.

On food safety, a recent U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study reviewed dozens of studies linking routine feeding of antibiotics in concentrated livestock operations to people being infected with antibiotic-resistant bacteria, such as MRSA. “Use of antibiotics in food-producing animals allows antibiotic-resistant bacteria to thrive,” they concluded. “Resistant bacteria can be transmitted from food-producing animals to humans through the food supply.” The big agricultural corporations claim that they are committed to the humane treatment of animals—while advocating legislation to criminalize unauthorized photography in concentrated animal feeding operations. Numerous scientific studies over the past 50 years have documented inhumane treatment in these “animal factories.” The mistreatment is not only a result of inevitable overcrowding in confinement operations, but also results from routine management practices, transportation, and even in the genetic selection of animals for maximum productivity.

The Food Dialogues campaign claims to advocate consumer choice by supporting all types of farming. However, its language strongly suggests that industrial agriculture is essential to keeping food affordable. It considers organic agriculture and other sustainable farming alternatives to be no more than “niche markets.” In reality, the only clear “benefit” of industrial agriculture is that it requires fewer farmers. There is no indication that industrial agriculture has produced more food than could have been produced with more sustainable methods, only that it has employed far fewer farmers. Any production-cost advantage has been more than offset by higher margins, including profits, elsewhere within the corporate food supply chain. Over the past 20 years, an era of intensive agricultural industrialization, U.S. retail food prices have risen faster than overall inflation rates.

Agricultural industrialization has had a devastating effect on the quality of rural life. Industrial agriculture has replaced independent family farmers with a far smaller number of farm workers, most of whom are paid poorly. In 1960, farmers were still more than 8% of the U.S. workforce. They are less than 1% today. Rural communities have suffered both economically and socially from this loss of traditional farm families. More than 50 years of research demonstrates that communities supported by small to mid-size family farms are better places to live, both economically and socially, than are communities dependent on large farming enterprises.

Perhaps most important, industrial agriculture has failed in its most fundamental purpose: providing food security. The percentage of “food insecure” people in the United States is greater today than during the 1960s—early in the current phase of agricultural industrialization. (See Gerald Friedman, “Food Insecurity in Affluent America,” pp. 41-42) Furthermore, the industrial food system is linked to a new kind of food insecurity: unhealthy foods. A recent global report by 500 scientists from 50 countries suggested that “obesity is [now] a bigger health crisis than hunger.” There is growing evidence that America’s diet-related health problems are not limited to poor consumer food choices or processed “junk foods” but begin with a lack of essential nutrients in food crops produced on industrial farms. It’s high time for fundamental change in American agriculture. The growing litany of farm/food problems today cannot be solved by redesigning the USDA “food pyramid,” placing warning labels on junk foods, or imposing more stringent regulations on farmers. Today’s problems are deep and systemic. They are inherent in the worldview from which industrial agriculture emerged and upon which its evolution depends.

In economic terms, industrialization allows capital and technology to be substituted for workers and managers. In other words, it allows raw materials or natural resources to be transformed into more valuable products while employing fewer, lower-skilled workers—in both labor and management positions. In a world with an abundance of natural resources

and a scarcity of workers, industrialization seemed a logical strategy for economic development. With increases in populations and depletion of natural resources, the economic benefits of industrialization have declined while the negative consequences for unemployment and environmental degradation have grown.

For agriculture, the benefits of industrialization have been fewer and the costs have been greater. The reality of agriculture is in conflict with the worldview that supports industrialization. Industrialization is rooted in a mechanistic worldview: the industrial world works like a big, complex machine that can be manipulated by humans to extract natural resources and use them to meet our needs and wants. In reality, the world is an extremely complex living ecosystem, of which we humans are a part. Our well-being ultimately depends on working and living in harmony with nature rather than conquering nature. We are currently seeing the disastrous consequences of treating living ecosystems as if they were inanimate mechanisms.

Thankfully, a new kind of agriculture is emerging to meet these ecological, social, and economic challenges. The new farmers may call their farms “organic,” “ecological,” “biological,” “holistic,” or “biodynamic.” Their farming methods may be called “agroecology,” “nature farming,” or “permaculture.” They all fit under the conceptual umbrella of sustainable agriculture. They are committed to meeting the food needs of all in the present without diminishing opportunities for those who will live in the future. The strength of this movement is most visible in the growth of the organic-foods market, although some types of “organic farms,” especially those mimicking industrial agriculture, may not be sustainable. Sales of organic foods grew by more than 20% per year during the 1990s and early 2000s, before leveling off at around 10%-12% annual growth following the recession of 2008. Organic foods now amount to around \$35 billion in annual sales, something less than 5% of total food sales. The local food movement, as exemplified by farmers markets and “community supported agriculture,” has replaced organics as the most dynamic sector of the food market, although it is only about half as large in sales.

Some question whether organic or other sustainable farms can meet the food needs of a growing global population. A comprehensive review in the journal *Nature* compared organic and conventional crop yields in “developed” countries, concluding: “Under certain conditions—that is, with good management practices, particular crop types and growing conditions—organic systems can . . . nearly match conventional yields.” The challenge in the United States and the so-called developed world is to create a food system that will meet the basic food needs of all without degrading its natural and human resources. Ecological and social sustainability, not just yields, is the logical motivation for organic agriculture in the so-called developed world. Globally, industrial agriculture is not needed to “feed the world.” Small, diversified farms already provide food for least 70% of the world’s population and could double or triple yields without resorting to industrial production methods.

Everywhere we look, we can see the failure of the grand experiment of industrial agriculture. It’s time for fundamental change.

[zcomm.org](http://zcomm.org)

*JOHN IKERD is professor emeritus of agricultural economics at the University of Missouri-Columbia and author of several books, including *The Essentials of Economic Sustainability* (Kumarian Press, 2012).*

## Brazil 2015: crises, attacks and fights

LSR - Liberdade, Socialismo e Revolução, Translation Bing 16 March 2015

The Finance Minister, Joaquim Levy, admits that Brazil's GDP should have shrunk last year. But the austerity policy of the Government, along with the crisis of Petrobras and hydro electric and crises, can lead to a 2015 much worse. Who no doubt will come out losing, if you don't set up a strong resistance, are workers and young people.

The Government did everything to make the data until the end of the election to then drop a package of badness. Rousseff campaigned alerting about the measures that Aetius or Marina would implement if they won the elections, while his team was just about ready to implement the same measures after the elections.

Until September last year, the Government's official goal was still the year would close with a primary surplus of more than \$ 80.8 billion. The year closed with the first primary deficit since 1997, of R \$ 32.5 billion, a mistake for calculation of R \$ 113 billion.

The damage would be greater still if the Government hadn't delayed transfers for that year. Are R \$ 17.9 billion in the areas of health, work, education and social assistance, delaying the transfer to States and municipalities. In education, the postponement of expenditure was r \$ 6.6 billion.

Three days after the second round, the Central Bank increased the Selic rate, which accumulates three high and reached 12.25%. Soon followed the indication the Finance Minister Joaquim Levy, former Director of the Bradesco and an economist at the Liberal School of the University of Chicago. The Government is willing to deepen the economic crisis this year, with an increase in interest rates and cuts in public spending and the purchasing power of workers, hoping it leads to resumption of growth before the election in 2018.

These measures are only the beginning. What we experience is the exhaustion of the previous growth model. Lula and Dilma Governments backed the growth based, on one side, commodity exports of agribusiness and minerals and, on the other hand, in a domestic consumption growth based on increased credit and certain measures of redistribution of income (increase in the minimum wage, bolsa Familia, etc.), along with infrastructure works projects (Cap).

None of these pillars can sustain the economy. The deceleration of China dropped the price of commodities. Domestic consumption stopped growing with high inflation and household indebtedness.

Inflation took a new leap in January. According to the IBGE, she came to 1.24% that month, the highest rate since February 2003, accumulating a high of 7.14 percent in the last 12 months. This high reflects the increased rates, as rates on transport, increase gas prices and also the high-dollar, which makes imported products. The energy crisis must still raise the electricity bill this year by up to 46%.

Consumer interest rates soared again. The average rate of interest on the overdraft reached 200.6% p.a. in December 2014. Debts at credit card revolving reached the unprecedented value of R \$ 29.8 billion, with an average interest rate of 258% per annum.

The works of PAC, overpriced and delayed, also failed to boost the economy. The measures countercyclical exemption of taxes to stimulate consumption, implemented from the global crisis that erupted in 2008, it no longer work and left a hole in the public accounts.

The auto industry was the one who most benefited from these measures, with years of IPI demoted. But today suffers a major crisis and it was the sector that most reduced the production last year, with a drop of 16.8 percent, while the industry as a whole suffered a 3.2% drop in production.

The Brazilian labour market had in 2014 the worst year of creating formal jobs the years of Lula and Dilma in power. The signings of workers officially registered outscored layoffs in 396.9 thousand vacancies. Unemployment not only increased last year by a part of the active population out of the labour market, some going to the informal sector.

This year the unemployment must grow. The industries in the Southeast are still laying off employees, which generated clashes, as the victorious strike at Volkswagen in São Bernardo do Campo and now the paralyzation of GM workers in São José dos Campos.

The Petrobras crisis threatens tens of thousands of jobs, cut investments and accumulation of debts. The builders have been investigated by operation carwash are struggling. The OAS, for example, suffers from the restriction of the credit due to corruption and has debts of r \$ 1.4 billion to pay in the short term. Heavy construction in Sao Paulo laid off 6 percent of the workforce last year.

Many municipalities and States go through an economic crisis and suffer immediately when the federal Government delays the transfers. Last year, State Governments had a deficit of \$ 13.2 billion and 17 of 27 States closed their accounts in red, a fact unprecedented since the passage of the Fiscal responsibility law, in 2000. The fight against the package of cuts in Parana, which included a strike of civil servants, should be repeated in other States.

PT Governments are not the first to try selling the illusion that possess a magic formula that can raise the standard of living of the poor in a sustainable way, without touching the great fortunes and guaranteeing the profits of big business. When the contradictions of the capitalist system itself lead to a crisis, those Governments that elect with hundreds of millions of dollars from donations from major corporations, end up turning their lean and meager reforms in contrarreformas.

2015 will be a year of attacks and fighting. The challenge of the left is participating in the resistance against these attacks and, at the same time, build a coherent socialist political force which can give an alternative to the capitalist system based on exploitation and oppression.

We have to build a program that breaks the current fight against the cuts, privatization, layoffs, high interest rates, prices and tariffs - and face the system logic pointing to a break: taxation of great fortunes, lace and enterprises, suspension of payment and audit of public debt, re-nationalization of privatized companies, opening accounts and nationalization of companies that implement mass layoffs, exchange control and other measures.

<http://www.lsr-cit.org/nacional/economia/1283-2015-crisis-ataques-e-lutas>

### **2015: crises, ataques e lutas**

LSR - Liberdade, Socialismo e Revolução 16 de março de 2015

O ministro da Fazenda, Joaquim Levy, admite que o PIB do Brasil deve ter encolhido o ano passado. Mas a política de austeridade do governo, junto com a crise da Petrobras e as crises hídrica e elétrica, pode levar a um 2015 bem pior. Quem sem dúvida sairá perdendo, se não montarmos uma forte resistência, serão os trabalhadores e jovens.

O governo fez de tudo para maquiagem os dados até o fim das eleições para, logo depois, soltar um pacote de maldades. Dilma fez uma campanha alertando sobre as medidas que Aécio ou Marina implementariam se ganhassem as eleições, enquanto sua equipe já se preparava para pôr em prática as mesmas medidas após as eleições.

Até setembro do ano passado, a meta oficial do governo ainda era que o ano fecharia com um superávit primário de mais de R\$ 80,8 bilhões. O ano fechou com o primeiro déficit primário desde 1997, de R\$ 32,5 bilhões, um "erro" de cálculo de R\$ 113 bilhões!

O rombo seria maior ainda, se o governo não tivesse atrasado repasses para esse ano. São R\$ 17,9 bilhões nas áreas de saúde, trabalho, educação e assistência social, atrasando também o repasse para estados e municípios. Só na educação, o adiamento de despesas foi de R\$ 6,6 bilhões.

Já três dias após o segundo turno, o Banco Central aumentou a taxa Selic, que já acumula três altas e chegou a 12,25%. Logo seguiu a indicação a ministro da Fazenda de Joaquim Levy, ex-diretor do Bradesco e um economista da escola neoliberal da Universidade de Chicago. O governo

está disposto a aprofundar a crise econômica esse ano, com aumento de juros e cortes nos gastos públicos e no poder de compra dos trabalhadores, esperando que isso leve a uma retomada do crescimento antes das eleições em 2018.

Essas medidas são só o começo. O que vivenciamos é o esgotamento do modelo de crescimento anterior. Os governos Lula e Dilma apostaram no crescimento baseado, em um lado, nas exportações de commodities da agroindústria e minérios e, no outro lado, em um crescimento do consumo interno baseado em aumento do crédito e certas medidas de redistribuição de renda (aumento do salário mínimo, bolsa família, etc.), junto com projetos de obras de infraestrutura (PAC).

Nenhum desses pilares consegue mais sustentar a economia. A desaceleração da China derrubou o preço das commodities. O consumo interno parou de crescer com a alta da inflação e endividamento das famílias.

A inflação deu um novo salto em janeiro. Segundo o IBGE, ela chegou a 1,24% naquele mês, a taxa mais elevada desde fevereiro de 2003, acumulando uma alta de 7,14% nos últimos 12 meses. Essa alta reflete o aumento das taxas, como tarifas dos transportes, aumento do preço da gasolina e também a alta do dólar, que encarece os produtos importados. A crise energética deve ainda elevar a conta de luz esse ano em até 46%.

As taxas de juros ao consumidor subiram novamente. A taxa média dos juros do cheque especial chegou a 200,6% ao ano em dezembro de 2014. As dívidas no rotativo do cartão de crédito alcançaram o valor inédito de R\$ 29,8 bilhões, com uma taxa média de juros de 258% ao ano.

As obras do PAC, superfaturadas e atrasadas, também não conseguiram dinamizar a economia. As medidas “contracíclicas” de desoneração de impostos para estimular o consumo, implementadas a partir da crise mundial que estourou em 2008, já não funcionam mais e deixaram um buraco nas contas públicas.

A indústria automobilística foi quem mais se beneficiou com essas medidas, com anos de IPI rebaixado. Mas hoje sofre uma grande crise e foi o setor que mais reduziu a produção no ano passado, com uma queda de 16,8%, enquanto a indústria como um todo sofreu uma queda de 3,2% na produção.

O mercado de trabalho brasileiro teve em 2014 o pior ano de criação de vagas formais dos anos de Lula e Dilma no poder. As contratações de trabalhadores com carteira assinada superaram as demissões em 396,9 mil vagas. O desemprego só não aumentou no ano passado por que uma parte da população ativa saiu do mercado de trabalho, alguns indo para o setor informal.

Esse ano o desemprego deve crescer. As indústrias no sudeste continuam a demitir trabalhadores, o que já gerou confrontos, como a vitoriosa greve na Volkswagen em São Bernardo do Campo e agora a paralização dos trabalhadores da GM em São José dos Campos.

A crise da Petrobras ameaça dezenas de milhares de empregos, com corte nos investimentos e acúmulo de dívidas. As construtoras investigadas pela operação Lava-Jato estão com dificuldades. A OAS, por exemplo, sofre com a restrição ao crédito devido à corrupção e tem dívidas de R\$ 1,4 bilhões a pagar em curto prazo. A construção pesada em São Paulo demitiu 6% da força de trabalho no ano passado.

Muitos municípios e estados passam por uma crise econômica e sofrem imediatamente quando o governo federal atrasa os repasses. No ano passado, os governos estaduais tiveram um déficit de R\$ 13,2 bilhões e 17 de 27 estados fecharam as contas no vermelho, um fato inédito desde a aprovação da Lei de Responsabilidade Fiscal, em 2000. A luta contra o pacote de cortes no Paraná, que incluiu uma greve de servidores públicos, deve se repetir em outros estados.

Os governos do PT não são os primeiros a tentar vender a ilusão de que possuem uma fórmula mágica que consegue elevar o nível de vida dos mais

pobres de forma sustentável, sem tocar nas grandes fortunas e garantindo os lucros das grandes empresas. Quando as contradições do próprio sistema capitalista levam a uma crise, esses governos, que se elegem com centenas de milhões de reais de “doações” de grandes empresas, acabam transformando suas magras e parcas reformas em contrarreformas.

2015 vai ser um ano de ataques e de lutas. O desafio da esquerda é participar na resistência contra esses ataques e, ao mesmo tempo, construir uma força política socialista coerente que pode dar uma alternativa a esse sistema capitalista baseado em exploração e opressão.

Temos que construir um programa que parta da luta atual - contra os cortes, privatizações, demissões, alta de juros, dos preços e das tarifas - e enfrente a lógica do sistema apontando para uma ruptura: taxaçaõ das grandes fortunas, rendas e empresas, suspensão do pagamento e auditoria da dívida pública, reestatização das empresas privatizadas, abertura da contabilidade e estatização de empresas que implementam demissões em massa, controle de câmbio, e outras medidas.

[www.lsr-cit.org/nacional/economia/1283-2015-crisis-ataques-e-lutas](http://www.lsr-cit.org/nacional/economia/1283-2015-crisis-ataques-e-lutas)

## Disconnecting the minerals-energy-climate dots

Patrick Bond 13 March 2015

Sometimes a single event reveals crucial stories about our strengths and weaknesses in advancing progressive social change and ecological sanity. Early last month I sought out intersections between three simple phenomena: the predatory extractive industries now looting Africa; our energy access crises (especially here in South Africa); and climate change.

I thought that progressive civil society allies might begin to assemble their strengths in class, gender, race, generational and environmental consciousness; that they would fuse activist passion and NGO technical sophistication; and that they could draw upon lessons from Africa's many great anti-extraction struggles.

I fear I was wrong. Even with the best will, and amongst truly exceptional activists and strategists at the Cape Town Alternative Mining Indaba (AMI) from February 9-12, a typical civil society “intersectionality” gap was glaringly evident.

That clunky word - “the study of intersections between forms or systems of oppression, domination or discrimination” - is increasingly understood to be vital medicine to treat the NGO disease of silo-isation: being stuck in our little specialisations with historic prejudices intact, unable to lift up our heads and use the full range of human capacities to find unity.

The AMI brought together more than 150 activists from vibrant African community organisations, another hundred or more NGO workers stretching from local to international, the hottest advocacy networks, a phalanx of public interest lawyers, a few brave trade unionists and even some curious armchair academics like myself. It should have offered the best conditions possible for intersectional work.

The kick-off day included a set-piece protest march to the gleaming Cape Town International Convention Centre. The target: the corporate African Mining Indaba attended by thousands of delegates from multinational and local mining houses plus a few of their side-pocket politicians.

There, former UK Labour Party prime minister Tony Blair gave a keynote speech notably hostile to “problematic, politicised” trade unions who enjoy class struggle more than class snuggle. Security was ultra-tight because Blair is, after all, regularly subject to citizen arrests because of his Iraq-related war crimes.

And money was another reason no activists could make their case inside: the entrance fee was nearly \$2000. For a taste of some of the grievances against the big mining houses, see the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre's balanced fact sheet.

The AMI's internal critics told me they felt the march was tame and predictable. It was. Actually, the week's best moment for confrontation was a small guerrilla theatre stunt just outside the convention centre. Pretoria's Anglican Bishop Jo Seoka invited suited executives to drink the disgusting water that his grassroots allies brought from mining-affected communities. No one took the bait; and amusing video resulted.

The march helped activists let off some steam, for they were angry at the blasé mood in both

Indabas. Just beforehand in the opening AMI plenary, two charismatic keynote speakers - Zimbabwean democracy advocate Brian Kagoro and Matthews Hlabane from the SA Green Revolutionary Council - were joined by militants from several communities who raged openly against petit-bourgeois NGO reformism.

Warned Kagoro, "We risk here, as the elite of civil society - civilocracy - becoming irrelevant. If you want mining to carry on, in just a bit more humane way, there will be another Alternative Mining Indaba happening in the streets."

Indeed, if the AMI does avoid that fate, a healthier future would probably require switching the event away from trendy Cape Town suburbs and instead convening a people's assembly and set of (vernacular-translated, inter-connected) teach-ins located at various sites within the gritty mining belts sweeping from northwest to eastern or northern South Africa. Only in such venues can the masses properly hold forth.

Perhaps with this bracing threat in mind, the march was followed by three days of exceptionally rich presentations and debates. The break-out rooms were filled with campaigning tales and most carried the frisson of outright opposition to non-essential mining.

For example, asked the leading-edge critics, do we really need to drink the fizzy sugar water (Coca Cola products whose profits line SA Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa's gorged pockets) from the tin cans (smelted in Richards Bay, South Africa, at a wicked cost in terms of coal-fired electricity) that we immediately toss away into the AMI hotel's (non-recycled) rubbish bin?

To slow the awesome destruction caused by senseless mining, some activists suggested UN "Free Prior and Informed Consent" language as the best way for communities to deflect prospecting. Techniques to delay Environmental Impact Assessments were shared. Tax justice narratives came in handy, given the mining houses' prolific capital flight and illicit financial flows. Still other progressive lawyers suggested routes into the jurisdiction of legal reparations. And almost everyone complained of a Resource Curse in which multinational mining capitalists corrupt African politics, economics, environments and societies.

I had a clear sense that no one believed minor Corporate Social Responsibility reforms will ever treat, much less cure, the Resource Curse. Instead, the reforms discussed were practical handles for raising concerns, getting publicity, adding a bit of pressure, and giving mining-affected communities - especially women - a sense of hope and solidarity.

Still, for me, the event also provided a sobering and somewhat depressing lesson. Much more work is needed to generate intersectionality: connecting the dots to other issues, political scales and constituencies. The disconnects were obvious regarding three issues which might become vital elements in campaigning against extractive industries, in both the short and long term: electricity access, climate change and mineral economics. Consider each in turn.

### **SHORT-TERM EMPOWERMENT CRISIS**

Just outside the AMI, but apparently unnoticed, South African society was seething with hatred against state electricity supplier Eskom. The increasingly incompetent agency has threatened near-daily 'load-shedding' (electricity black-outs for two hours at a time) for years to come.

There's not enough working power capacity (only 30 000 MegaWatts when 43 000 are technically available) to meet industrial and household demand most days. Mega-mining corporations have extraordinary access to that power, symbolized in 2014 when a former executive of the world's largest commodity firm, GlencoreXstrata, was seconded into Eskom to represent mining interests: Mike Rossouw.

Rossouw had for many years served as chair of the 31-member Energy Intensive Users' Group (EIUG), the largest corporate guzzlers which together consume 44% of the country's supply. The nickname Minerals-Energy Complex emerged 20 years ago thanks to very sweet Eskom deals that have persisted for most of the company's 85-year history. For example, two of the world's biggest mining houses, BHP Billiton and Anglo American Corporation, signed decades-long agreements supplying them at US\$0.01/kWh, a tenth as much as what low-income South Africans pay.

So South Africa's load-shedding phenomenon should be blamed on both the multinational mining corporations and the local energy industry, and their allies in Pretoria and Eskom's MegaWatt Park headquarters. This is not an unusual configuration in Resource-Cursed Africa, where vast amounts of electricity are delivered via high-tension cables to multinational corporate mining houses for the sake of extraction and capital-intensive smelting.

Most African women meanwhile slave over fires to cook and heat households: their main energy source is a usually fragile woodlot; their transmission system is their back; and their energy consumption is often done while coughing, thanks to dense particulates in the air. Going from HIV-positive to full-blown AIDS is just an opportunistic respiratory infection away, again with gendered

implications for care-giving.

Given these intense contradictions, how could the AMI anti-mining activists, strategists, funders and intellectuals not connect the dots; how could they fail to put together load-shedding due to mining overconsumption, with most Africans' lack of basic electricity access, and place these at or near the fore of their grievances so as to harvest so-far-untapped popular support for their programme of rolling back mining and rolling forward clean household electricity?

A Cape Town-based "Million Climate Jobs" campaign already suggests how turning off the vast flow of electricity to South Africa's smelters and mines would, in turn, help redirect employment there to more constructive, post-carbon activities: jobs in renewable energy, public transport, insulation retrofitting, digging biogas digesters and many others.

As for communities, their class/race analysis of electricity access is expressed readily when they show visitors their own dirty household energy, often in the immediate vicinity of a massive mine, smelter or powerplant (see the excellent mini-doccie "Clear the Air" by the NGO groundWork, for example, or the fiery tv Big Debate episode on energy).

So why can't those dots - the environment-labour-community-feminist sites of struggle - be connected at the NGO-dominated AMI? Why do the words energy and electricity not even appear in the final AMI declaration, in spite of their extreme abuse by multinational mining capital?

### **LONG-TERM CLIMATE CRISIS NOT ON SA CIVIL SOCIETY SHORT-TERM AGENDA?**

As I mulled over this paradox in the unlikely (luxury Hilton Hotel) AMI venue, my eye was caught by a flashy red-and-white document about South African coal, containing explosive information and some of the most vivid photos I've ever seen of ecological destruction and human suffering. It is full of horrifying facts about the coal industry's wreckage: of public and household health, local environments, and the lives of workers, women, the elderly and children. (Regrettably there's no web link and I won't name the agency responsible in order to make a more general point and avoid singling out a particular example by name.)

This particular booklet doesn't hesitate to explain mining industry abuse via cooptation of African National Congress ruling-party elites via Black Economic Empowerment (BEE). Cyril Ramaphosa-style BEE translates into worse misery for the many, and enrichment for a very few such as South Africa's deputy president. His billion-dollar net worth comes not only from that notorious 9% share of Lonmin and all that it entailed, but also from his Shanduka company's filthy coal operations. With men like him at the helm, South Africa certainly isn't going to kick the life-threatening Minerals-Energy Complex habit.

It's a good critique that connects many dots, and certainly the particular agency that published it is one I consider amongst the half-dozen better international NGOs. Their grantees do amazing things in many South African, other African and global contexts.

Yet the coal booklet offered only a token mention - a few words buried deep in the text - about climate change. Though coal is the major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, and although there's a vibrant world campaign against coal mining in favour of renewable energy, the climate crisis was completely lost amidst scores of other eloquently-described grievances.

Drawing this to the agency's attention, I received this explanation from one staffer: "While climate change is a great middle class rallying point, it has no relevance to people living in poverty beyond their empty stomachs, dirty water and polluted air."

As we learned the hard way at the civil society counter-summit during the United Nations COP17 here in Durban, this may be a brutally frank but nevertheless true estimation of the hard work required to mobilise for climate justice. In the last comparative poll I've seen (done by Pew in 2013), only 48% of South Africans considered climate change to be a 'top global threat', compared to 54% of the rest of the world.

Fortunately though, the terrain is fertile, especially in the South African provinces - Limpopo, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal - attracting the most militant and sophisticated attacks on Big Coal anywhere in Africa. They are carried out by a myriad of militant community and environmental groups, including Mining Affected Communities United in Action, the Green Revolutionary Council, Bench Marks Foundation (a progressive church-based research/advocacy network), periodic critiques by radical NGOs groundWork and Earthlife (the latter hosts a branch of the International Coal Campaign), legal filings by the Centre for Environmental Rights and Legal Resources Centre, supportive funders like ActionAid, and women's resistance organisations (supported by Women in Mining, Womin).

Still, aside from communiqués by Womin feminists and occasional NGOs (mostly in passing), it is extremely rare that they connect the dots to climate change.

## **GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS ARE POLLUTANTS, TOO (!)**

A good example of disconnecting-the-dots emerged last week, when South African Environment Minister Edna Molewa infuriated grassroots communities, NGO activists and progressive lawyers who fight prolific pollution by mining houses, petro-chemical plants and smelters. Molewa's job includes applying new Minimal Emissions Standards to 119 firms - including the toxic operations of Eskom, Sasol, AngloPlats, PPC cement, Shell, Chevron and Engen oil refinery - whose more than 1000 pollution point sources are subject to the Air Quality Act.

Ten years ago when the law was mooted, these firms should have begun the process of lowering emissions. They didn't, and so Molewa just let 37 of them (mostly the largest) off the hook for another five years by granting exemptions that make a mockery of the Act.

Yet notwithstanding justifiably vociferous complaints, South Africa's environmental NGOs (ENGOS) simply forgot to mention climate change. There was just one exception, Samson Mokoena, who coordinates the Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance: "Not only has Eskom been granted postponements, but so has the largest emitter of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) in the country, Sasol."

(At its Secunda plant, Sasol squeezes coal and gas to make liquid petroleum, in the process creating the single greatest site of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions on earth, and Eskom is Africa's largest CO<sub>2</sub> emitter by far when adding up all its plants together.)

In contrast to Mokoena, one of the world's top campaigning ENGOS ignored CO<sub>2</sub> in predicting that Molewa's decision will "result in about 20,000 premature deaths over the remaining life of the [Eskom] power plants - including approximately 1,600 deaths of young children. The economic cost associated with the premature deaths, and the neurotoxic effects of mercury exposure, was estimated at R230 billion." Add climate change (that NGO didn't, for reasons I just don't get) and these figures would rise far higher.

The excuse for giving Molewa a pass on the climate implications of her latest polluter-massage is that the Air Quality Act was badly drafted, omitting CO<sub>2</sub> and methane. That omission allowed one of the country's leading journalists to report, "The three pollution baddies that can cause serious health issues, are particulate matter (soot), sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxides."

Ahem, surely in such a list, GreenHouse Gas (GHG) emissions qualify as a baddy? More than 182 million Africans are expected to die prematurely by 2100 thanks to GHGs, according to Christian Aid.

But Molewa "seemed to have developed a 'massive blind spot', ignoring how air pollution was transported over very long distances to damage human health in places far removed from the source of emissions," alleged another international ENGO.

Sorry, but just as big a blind spot exists when that very ENGO simply forgot about climate change, even though GHGs are co-pollutants with all the other air-borne toxins, transported over very long distances, wreaking enormous damage.

There is, however, one thing worse than neglecting climate change when you have an excellent chance to raise consciousness: assimilation into the enemy camp. In some cases, civil society degenerates from watchdog to lapdog.

I don't mind naming what may be the most notorious, a multinational corporate tool called the WorldWide Fund for Nature (WWF), whose SA chairperson Valli Moosa also chairs AngloPlats. Moosa was responsible for what, five years ago, the SA Public Protector termed "improper conduct" when approving the world's largest coal-fired power plant now under construction, Eskom's Medupi.

At the time, Moosa was serving as both Eskom chair and a member of the ruling party's finance committee, and signed a dubious boiler-supply deal worth more than \$4 billion with a company, Hitachi, whose local affiliate was 25% owned by Moosa's party. The Medupi boilers needed to have 7000 of the welds redone. (The ruling party led the liberation struggle and regularly wins elections... but really isn't too experienced at making coal boilers.)

With a man like Moosa at the helm, I wasn't too surprised when, a couple of days after Molewa's announcement and a day after the SA finance minister yet again postponed introducing a carbon tax law, WWF's Saliem Fakir "welcomed the government's commitment to the mitigation of climate change and support which showed that South Africa was leading the way among developing countries in terms of policy measures towards easing the burden on the environment."

When WWF meets a toxic polluter or a captive regulator like Molewa, it seeks a snuggle-not-struggle relationship. It's long overdue that it changes its acronym to WTF.

**BEHIND THE DISCONNECTIONS LIES CAPITALISM**

In Naomi Klein's brilliant new book and her husband Avi Lewis' forthcoming film, 'This Changes Everything', we find crystal-clear linkages between climate ("This") and practically all other areas of social struggle. For Klein, it is the profit motive that, universally, prevents a reasonable solution to our emissions of greenhouse gases: from energy, transport, agriculture, urbanisation, production, distribution, consumption, disposal and financing.

In other words, the intersectionality possibilities and requirements of a serious climate change campaign span nearly all human activity. Through all these aspects of the world's value chains, we are carbon addicted. In each sector, vested corporate interests prevent the necessary change for species survival.

It is only by linking together our single issues and tackling climate as the kind of all-embracing problem it is, that we can soar out of our silos and generate the critical mass needed to make a difference.

But in turn, that means that any sort of systemic analysis to save us from climate catastrophe not only permits but requires us to demand a restructured economic system in which instead of the profit motive as the driving incentive, large-scale ecologically-sound planning becomes the fundamental requirement for organising life.

So it's time, in civil society, that "capitalism" should be spoken about openly, even if this occurs now for the first time in many generations, especially in those politically backward societies - e.g. North America and Europe - where since the 1950s it was practically forbidden to do so.

In much of Africa, in contrast, grievances against colonialism were so fierce that when neo-colonialism replaced it over fifty years ago, many progressive activists found courage to talk about capitalism as the overarching, durable problem (worse even than the remaining white settlers). In South Africa, anti-capitalist rhetoric can regularly be heard in every township, blue-collar (and red-collar) workplace, and university. Here, Moscow-trained presidents and even communists who were once trade union leaders have quite comfortably populated the highest levels of the neoliberal state since 1994.

Talking about capitalism is now more crucial than ever. If we don't make this leap to address the profit motive underlying so much eco-social chaos, then our economic future is also doomed, especially in Africa. One reason for that is what is sometimes called "natural capital" depletion: the minerals, gas and oil being torn out of the earth don't grow back.

The next logical question is whether, given the diminishing natural wealth that results, the economic activity associated with extractive industries is a net positive or net negative. In resource-rich Norway, Australia, Canada and the US, where the headquarters of mining and petroleum companies are located, the profits recirculate. According to natural capital accounts compiled in the World Bank's book [\[url=http://siteresources.worldbank.org/ENVIRONMENT/Resources/ChangingWealthNations.pdf\]](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/ENVIRONMENT/Resources/ChangingWealthNations.pdf)The Changing Wealth of Nations[/url], this plus educational investment gives these countries much higher net positive returns.

Environmental damage is another matter - but on economic grounds, again, the critical question is whether the profits are being reinvested. Answer: in the Global North, yes; but in Africa, no! They're being looted by multinational corporates and local comprador allies.

That means that one of the AMI's other dot-disconnections was any talk of the capitalist economy, or even mention of the way mineral resources are being stripped away so fast and with so little reinvestment that the net economic effect of mining is profoundly negative for the continent's wealth. (This fact you need not accept from me; have a look at the Changing Wealth of Nations to see Africa's -6% annual wealth effect from natural capital outflows.)

What is the solution? Can Africans with intersectionality dot-connecting talents now more forcefully consider an eco-socialist model? If we do not recover the socialist traditions of Frantz Fanon, Patrice Lumumba, Amilcar Cabral, Walter Rodney, Ruth First, Thomas Sankara and Chris Hani, and to these add environmentalist, feminist and other intersectional arguments, the generations living now will have quite literally kindled next-generation Africans' scorched-earth future.

Large-scale planning may sound terrifying, given how badly earlier attempts turned out, such as the Soviet Union's. On the other hand, Cuba has made the jump out of carbon addiction faster than any other society thanks to planning. Or just compare the well-planned and executed evacuation of Havana during Hurricane Katrina in 2005, to utter chaos in capitalist New Orleans. State-led innovations ranging from municipal water systems to the internet (a product of Pentagon R&D) are so vital to daily life that, unless denied them, we don't think twice about their public sector origins and status as public goods.

And after all, is there any other way to achieve the power shift required to overcome a climate disaster, than to build a movement for democratic state decision-making?

To do so, though, requires a somewhat longer-term perspective than the average activist and NGO strategist has scope for, in sites like the AMI.

If we do not make that leap out of the silos into which all of us have sunk, we will perish. We are so overly specialised and often so isolated in small ghettos of researchers and advocacy networks, that I'm not surprised at the AMI's conceptual impotence. Even our finest extractives-sector activists and strategists are not being given sufficient scope to think about the full implications of, for example, where our electricity supply comes from, and why mining-smelting corporates get the lion's share; how climate change threatens us all; and how the capitalist economy makes these crises inevitable.

The solution? A critical part of it will be to think in ways that intersect, with as much commitment as we can muster to linking our class, race, gender, generational, environmental and other analyses of the oppressed. Action then follows logically.

[zcomm.org](http://zcomm.org)

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## Caught in the Middle

### **Boko Haram Insurgency Highlights the Vulnerable Condition of Women and the Girl - Child in Nigeria**

H.T Soweto 13 March 2015

A few years ago, precisely in 2013, the Ejigbo Sodomy (a shocking case of brutalization of three women in the Ejigbo community of Lagos for allegedly stealing pepper) hallmarked the gender inequality and the unspeakable violence the female gender experience in a patriarchal Nigeria.

However today in Nigeria, there is probably no other more shocking and brutal signifier of the vulnerable condition of women and the girl-child than the Boko Haram insurgency which has dragged on for six horrible years. On the night of 14-15 April 2014, 276 school girls were abducted from Government Secondary School located in the town of Chibok, Borno State by the dreaded Islamic terrorist group, Boko Haram. They were targeted to prove all the more strongly the Boko Haram's opposition to formal education and especially girl-child education. Nearly a year after, they have not been found. During this time, they are feared to have been subjected to the most brutal treatment including rape, forced marriage and indoctrination. But the terrible consequence of the Boko insurgency goes far beyond the fate of the Chibok girls. Scattered within Nigeria and neighbouring African countries are over 3 million displaced people, a sizeable proportion of whom are women and children. Some of these women have been widowed and have lost their savings and source of living. Living in refugee camps, many of which are ramshackle shelters with no provision of basic facilities, they are exposed to the most brutal conditions.

On the occasion of this year's International Women's Day, the fate of the women and children caught up in conflict as well as the women experiencing other forms of gender-based violence and discrimination should awaken our fervour to fight for a better society. The theme of this year's international women's day as announced by the United Nations is Empowering Women - Empowering Humanity: Picture it! Just like last year and previous years, beautiful speeches and promises would be made by government, businesses and Non Governmental Organisations on how to improve the lot of women. A few flash-in-the-pan achievements or tokenist steps would be showcased as evidence that the world is moving closer to a gender-equal society. Unfortunately not only is this not true but, as usual, none of the promises that would come out of this year's women's day event would touch the fundamental and root cause of gender inequality in society. The United Nations - a comity of Nations that defends the same system of capitalism that engenders and reinforces gender inequality and violence against women - is the least equipped to

solve the problem of women and the girl-child.

Women, half of the world's population, in their daily struggle to fend for the family and keep a job experience nothing close to empowerment. Rather the dominant picture of the condition of women is that of constant discrimination, humiliation and disempowerment. In countries like India and many countries in Africa, rape has become an epidemic. So also is domestic violence which now rises in line with the severity of the capitalist economic crises that began in 2008 and the worsening of the conditions of the working and middle classes since then.

What is particularly tragic in the anti-terror war in Northeast Nigeria is that women are caught up in a conflict in which both principal actors (the Nigerian capitalist State and the Boko Haram insurgents) harbour the most horrific and backward ideas about women's role in society. While the Boko Haram insurgents want to establish a reactionary Sharia system under which the woman would be nothing more than an object of her husband's pleasure to be veiled and restricted to the kitchen and backyard of her husband's house, the woman suffers double exploitation under the capitalist system first as an object to exploit for profit and second as a victim of the backward patriarchal social relations.

Patriarchy is a social relation that affirms the dominance and superiority of the man in all things including in the family, school, workplace and society. Though inherited from Nigeria's pre-capitalist societies, decades of the colonial plunder of Nigeria's wealth and the entrenchment of the exploitative system of capitalism has done more to reinforce all the barbarity in social relations, particularly inequality between the sexes. Capitalism exploits the working class man and woman no doubt but it exploits the latter more. First is the free, unpaid labour which women whether as daughters or wives are expected to provide in the family e.g. cooking, washing, cleaning, taking care of the health of family members, looking after aged parents etc. This frees the ruling class from the cost of meeting these responsibilities which society should basically provide. The enforcement of this work on women is justified by patriarchal social norms, customs, culture all rigged in favour of men who are regarded as breadwinners of the family. For instance, there can be no pressure on government to establish state-funded old people's homes because this job is being done for free in millions of homes across the country by women.

By chaining many women to domestic labour, they are unable to have the time for personal development, build a career, go for leisure, engage in political activities or even have a respite, a holiday from family responsibilities. As such the typical successful and hardworking wife or mother in accordance with the norms laid down by our patriarchal culture is that one whose only achievements in life are making her husband happy and taking care of her family. This is what is called family values. Any departure from this is considered a taboo.

But a combination of changing attitudes amongst women and economic pressures have meant that increasing numbers of women work, whether in regular jobs, in markets or on the land. But this does not mean that women have been freed from exploitation, in fact they are doubly exploited. The special discrimination women face at workplaces is manifested in lower pay and different conditions for the same job as the man. There is also discrimination in terms of promotion etc. This is without cognisance of the condition of working women who are single parents. In addition to this is the lack of crucial facilities like crèche at workplaces to allow women play their motherly role at the same time they work. This means a lot of working women shuttle between creches located far away from their workplace everyday. This makes motherhood arduous for working women and forces most women to put the family first over their career. Of course by losing her source of living, the woman loses one means by which she can procure her independence in the family. Now reduced to a position where she depends on her husband for her most basic needs, the ground is prepared for the possibility of an abusive relationship in which the woman is the footrest of the man.

A similar situation of society hindering the ability of the woman to progress manifests in schools also. In a report in Guardian newspaper of Thursday 5 March 2015, lack of toilet facilities was reported to hinder girl-child

education. According to the National School Health Desk Officer of the Sanitation, Hygiene and Water Nigeria (SHAWN) programme, Mr. Jide Dada, most female students prefer to stay at home during their menstrual cycles owing to lack of dedicated toilet facilities in their schools. This is said to be the leading cause of absenteeism in the Northern part of the country. In Nigeria, over 10 million children are out of school, a big proportion of whom are girls.

It will take the complete dismantling of the patriarchal social relation alongside with the capitalist system that reinforces it for hope to begin to rise for the liberation or the improvement in the condition of women in Nigeria. This would require that the labour movement takes up more energetically issues concerning gender inequality including the exploitation of women in the home and workplaces. Unfortunately the women's section of the labour movement in Nigeria has been turned into an NGO. It plays little or no role in the lives of an average working woman. This has to change. Specifically, the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC) must use the occasion of this year's International Women's Day to launch a campaign to stop gender discrimination in the home and workplaces, rape, sexual harassment and domestic violence and also to advance women's reproductive rights. This campaign which should include public workshops, protest rallies and strikes where applicable should also be targeted at factories and sweatshops where women are often subjected to the most brutal condition of labour for pittance by private employers of labour who rarely obey the labour law. The labour movement must insist on a minimum standard to be observed by employers in relation to their female employees. This minimum standard should not just be about pay but also about conditions and facilities to support female employees.

Just like racism, gender discrimination has economic and political goals. By reinforcing patriarchal social relations, capitalism is able to exploit the labour of women in most cases for free. We need a new and better society which places women in their rightful place as equals of men. This is not just about the number of women in public offices, but about the number of women who are in reality independent, fully educated, in gainful employment and free from gender discrimination and oppression of all shades.

Socialists are active in the campaign against women oppression and seek to mobilize women in struggle. The more women themselves are involved in both battles for their own demands and the general demands of Labour the sooner we can build a movement that can fully liberate women by breaking with capitalism and enthroning a socialist system that can ensure that Nigeria's wealth is democratically and judiciously utilised to cater for the needs of the mass majority, men and women inclusive. In calling for this programme we are also emphasizing the socialist roots of International Women's Day. The first such day, in 1909, was organized by socialists in New York to celebrate a textile workers' strike the previous year. This led to a 1910 international conference of socialist women calling for an annual International Woman's Day to demand equal rights and the following year, 1911, saw simultaneous demonstrations for women's rights in a number of European countries. Then, especially after the 1917 Russian revolution began with a protest strike and demonstration of women workers marking International Women's Day, the celebration of this protest day spread tight around the world.

As women have become more active demanding both their rights and participating in broader struggles there have been attempts to bury International Women's Day's socialist origins and present the struggles of women as having nothing to do with capitalism.

This is a division which the DSM rejects. The oppression of women is rooted in the history of class society and is maintained today by capitalism. This is why we stand opposed to Boko Haram's reactionary ideas about the role of women as much as we oppose the existing capitalist arrangement which converts women into second class citizens. Ultimately, the struggle for socialism is impossible without the awakening into mass struggle working women who are half the world's population. The Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM) fights for a socialist Nigeria linked to a Confederation of Socialist Africa and the World built by working men and women in joint

struggle against patriarchy and capitalism.

## Why the UN climate talks have wasted 23 years

George Monbiot (The Guardian) 11 March 2015

If you visit the website of the UN body that oversees the world's climate negotiations(1), you will find dozens of pictures, taken across 20 years, of people clapping. These photos should be of interest to anthropologists and psychologists. For they show hundreds of intelligent, educated, well-paid and elegantly-dressed people wasting their lives.

The celebratory nature of the images testifies to the world of make-believe these people inhabit. They are surrounded by objectives, principles, commitments, instruments and protocols, which create a reassuring phantasm of progress while the ship on which they travel slowly founders. Leafing through these photos, I imagine I can almost hear what the delegates are saying through their expensive dentistry. "Darling you've re-arranged the deckchairs beautifully. It's a breakthrough! We'll have to invent a mechanism for holding them in place, as the deck has developed a bit of a tilt, but we'll do that at the next conference."

This process is futile because they have addressed the problem only from one end, and it happens to be the wrong end. They have sought to prevent climate breakdown by limiting the amount of greenhouse gases that are released; in other words, by constraining the consumption of fossil fuels. But, throughout the 23 years since the world's governments decided to begin this process, the delegates have uttered not one coherent word about constraining production.

Compare this to any other treaty-making process. Imagine, for example, that the Biological Weapons Convention made no attempt to restrain the production or possession of weaponised smallpox and anthrax, but only to prohibit their use. How effective do you reckon it would be? (You don't have to guess: look at the US gun laws, which prohibit the lethal use of guns but not their sale and carriage. You can see the results in the news every week). Imagine trying to protect elephants and rhinos only by banning the purchase of their tusks and horns, without limiting killing, export or sale. Imagine trying to bring slavery to an end not by stopping the transatlantic trade, but by seeking only to discourage people from buying slaves once they had arrived in the Americas. If you want to discourage a harmful trade, you must address it at both ends: production and consumption. Of the two, production is the most important.

The extraction of fossil fuels is a hard fact. The rules governments have developed to prevent their use are weak, inconsistent and negotiable. In other words, when coal, oil and gas are produced, they will be used. Continued production will overwhelm attempts to restrict consumption. Even if efforts to restrict consumption temporarily succeed, they are likely to be self-defeating. A reduction in demand when supply is unconstrained lowers the price, favouring carbon-intensive industry.

You can search through the UN's website for any recognition of this issue, but you would be wasting your time. In its gushing catalogue of self-congratulation(2), at Kyoto, Doha, Bali, Copenhagen, Cancun, Durban, Lima and all stops en route, the phrase "fossil fuel" does not occur once. Nor do the words coal or oil. But gas: oh yes, there are plenty of mentions of gas. Not natural gas, of course, but of greenhouse gases, the sole topic of official interest.

The closest any of the 20 international conferences convened so far have come to acknowledging the problem is in the resolution adopted in Lima in December last year. It pledged "cooperation" in "the phasing down of high-carbon investments and fossil fuel subsidies"(3), but proposed no budget, timetable or any instrument or mechanism required to make it happen. It's progress of a sort, I suppose, and perhaps, after just 23 years, we should be grateful.

There is nothing random about the pattern of silence that surrounds our lives. Silences occur where powerful interests are at risk of exposure. They protect these interests from democratic scrutiny. I'm not suggesting that the negotiators decided not to talk about fossil fuels, or signed a common accord to waste their lives. Far from it: they have gone to great lengths to invest their efforts with the appearance of meaning and purpose. Creating a silence requires only an instinct for avoiding conflict. It is a conditioned and unconscious reflex; part of the package of social skills that secures our survival. Don't name the Devil for fear that you'll summon him.

Breaking such silences requires a conscious and painful effort. I remember as if it were yesterday how I felt when I first raised this issue in the media(4). I had been working with a group of young activists in Wales, campaigning against opencast coal mines(5).

Talking it over with them, it seemed so obvious, so overwhelming, that I couldn't understand why it wasn't on everyone's lips. Before writing about it, I circled the topic like a dog investigating a suspicious carcass. Why, I wondered, is no one touching this? Is it toxic?

You cannot solve a problem without naming it. The absence of official recognition of the role of fossil fuel production in causing climate change - blitheringly obvious as it is - permits governments to pursue directly

contradictory policies. While almost all governments claim to support the aim of preventing more than 2°C of global warming, they also seek to “maximise economic recovery” of their fossil fuel reserves. (Then they cross their fingers, walk three times widdershins around the office and pray that no one burns it). But few governments go as far as the UK has gone.

In the Infrastructure Act that received royal assent last month, maximising the economic recovery of petroleum from the UK’s continental shelf became a statutory duty(6). Future governments are now legally bound to squeeze every possible drop out of the ground.

The idea came from a government review conducted by Sir Ian Wood, the billionaire owner of an inherited company - the Wood Group - that provides services to the oil and gas industry. While Sir Ian says his recommendations “received overwhelming industry support”(7), his team interviewed no one outside either the oil business or government. It contains no sign that I can detect of any feedback from environment groups or scientists.

His review demanded government powers to enhance both the exploration of new reserves and the exploitation of existing ones. This, it insisted, “will help take us closer to the 24 billion [barrel] prize potentially still to come.” The government promised to implement his recommendations in full and without delay(8). In fact it went some way beyond them. It is prepared to be ruthlessly interventionist when promoting climate change, but not when restraining it.

During December’s climate talks in Lima, the UK’s energy secretary, Ed Davey, did something unwise. He broke the silence. He warned that if climate change policies meant that fossil fuel reserves could no longer be exploited, pension funds could be investing in “the sub-prime assets of the future”(9).

Echoing the Bank of England and financial analysts such as the Carbon Tracker Initiative, Mr Davey suggested that if governments were serious about preventing climate breakdown, fossil fuel could become a stranded asset.

This provoked a furious response from the industry. The head of Oil and Gas UK wrote to express his confusion(10), pointing out that Mr Davey’s statements come “at a time when you, your Department and the Treasury are putting great effort into [making] the UK North Sea more attractive to investors in oil and gas, not less. I’m intrigued to understand how such opposing viewpoints can be reconciled.” He’s not the only one. Ed Davey quickly explained that his comments were not to be taken seriously, as “I did not offer any suggestions on what investors should choose to do.”(11)

Barack Obama has the same problem. During a television interview last year, he confessed that “We’re not going to be able to burn it all.”(12) So why, he was asked, has his government been encouraging ever more exploration and extraction of fossil fuels? His administration has opened up marine oil exploration from Florida to Delaware - in waters that were formally off-limits(13). It has increased the number of leases sold for drilling on federal lands and, most incongruously, rushed through the process that might, by the end of this month, enable Shell to prospect in the highly vulnerable Arctic waters of the Chukchi Sea(14).

Similar contradictions beset most governments with environmental pretensions. Norway, for example, intends to be “carbon neutral” by 2030. Perhaps it hopes to export its entire oil and gas output, while relying on wind farms at home(15). A motion put to the Norwegian parliament last year to halt new drilling because it is incompatible with Norway’s climate change policies was defeated by 95 votes to 3(16).

Obama explained that “I don’t always lead with the climate change issue because if you right now are worried about whether you’ve got a job or if you can pay the bills, the first thing you want to hear is how do I meet the immediate problem?”(17)

Money is certainly a problem, but not necessarily for the reasons Obama suggested. The bigger issue is the bankrolling of politics by big oil and big coal(18), and the tremendous lobbying power they purchase. These companies have, in the past, financed wars to protect their position(19); they will not surrender the bulk of their reserves without a monumental fight. This fight would test the very limits of state power; I wonder whether our nominal democracies would survive it. Fossil fuel companies have become glutted on silence: their power has grown as a result of numberless failures to challenge and expose them. It’s no wonder that the manicured negotiators at the UN conferences, so careful never to break a nail, have spent so long avoiding the issue.

I believe there are ways of resolving this problem, ways that might recruit other powerful interests against these corporations. For example, a global auction in pollution permits would mean that governments had to regulate just a few thousand oil refineries, coal washeries, gas pipelines and cement and fertiliser factories, rather than the activities of 7 billion people(20). It would create a fund from the sale of permits that’s likely to run into trillions: money that could be used for anything from renewable energy to healthcare. By reducing fluctuations in the supply of energy, it would deliver more predictable prices, that many businesses would welcome. Most importantly, unlike the current framework for negotiations, it could work, producing a real possibility of averting climate breakdown.

Left to themselves, the negotiators will continue to avoid this issue until they have wasted everyone else’s lives as well as their own. They keep telling us that the conference in Paris in December is the make or break

meeting (presumably they intend to unveil a radical new deckchair design). We should take them at their word, and demand that they start confronting the real problem.

With the help of George Marshall at the Climate Outreach and Information Network, I've drafted a paragraph of the kind that the Paris agreement should contain. It's far from perfect, and I would love to see other people refining it. But, I hope, it's a start:

*“Scientific assessments of the carbon contained in existing fossil fuel reserves suggest that full exploitation of these reserves is incompatible with the agreed target of no more than 2°C of global warming. The unrestricted extraction of these reserves undermines attempts to limit greenhouse gas emissions. We will start negotiating a global budget for the extraction of fossil fuels from existing reserves, as well as a date for a moratorium on the exploration and development of new reserves. In line with the quantification of the fossil carbon that can be extracted without a high chance of exceeding 2°C of global warming, we will develop a timetable for annual reductions towards that budget. We will develop mechanisms for allocating production within this budget and for enforcement and monitoring.”*

If something of that kind were to emerge from Paris, it will not have been a total waste of time, and the delegates would be able to congratulate themselves on a real achievement rather than yet another false one. Then, for once, they would deserve their own applause.

[www.monbiot.com](http://www.monbiot.com)

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## Community protest levels reach new record highs

D.D. de Bruyn 10 March 2015

The number of civic protests in South Africa has skyrocketed to new record highs. New figures which were released by the Civic Protest Barometer of the University of the Western Cape on 19 February 2015 show that the number of protests by communities, so-called “service delivery” protests, more than doubled between 2007 and 2014. The researchers also show that 2014 was the year with the highest number of these protests on record.

The report states that between 2012 and 2014, Gauteng had more protests than any other province. Between 1 April and 10 May 2013 Gauteng was hit with an astonishing 560 protests according to the provincial police. Since 2007 Gauteng's share of protests had been rising more rapidly than any other province. Cape Town was the most protest-prone municipality, with

84 protests last year, followed by Johannesburg, eThekweni, Tshwane and Ekurhuleni. These five municipalities accounted for half of all protests recorded.

Commenting on the figures, the report states: Issues relating to municipal services and the administration of municipalities were cited more often as the cause of protests than all other grievances put together. In addition the barometer tests one hypothesis about the causes of protests, namely that it signals a 'rebellion of the poor', against the empirical data.

These protests are now truly part of daily life in the country. This is especially true in the decade after 2004 which has been characterized by escalation of popular protests and increased militancy reminiscent of the anti-apartheid struggle days. Intelligence service company Municipal IQ recently showed that South Africa had almost one protest every second day in 2014 with Gauteng being the most protest-ridden province. Furthermore, by January 2013 the data shows that service delivery protests in 2012 accounted for 30 percent of protests recorded since 2004. Between 2008 and 2013 approximately 3000 protests took place.

Most of the recorded protests took place in the informal settlements or poor urban areas in the country's biggest metro areas such as Cape Town, Johannesburg and Ekurhuleni. Poor or non-existent delivery of services, such as housing, electricity, water and sanitation, are at the top of grievances of most communities. Another reason for the explosion of public protest is rooted in very high levels of youth unemployment. Out of these protests, a large number of grassroots organisations have emerged like Operation Khanyisa, Abahlali baseMjondolo, No Land! No House! No Vote!, and the Ses'kona Peoples Rights Movement.

2015 has already started with a series of high profile protests like in Malamulele and Mhlabankeng. What this shows is that the working class and poor communities are looking to radical solutions to the unbearable conditions under capitalism. But these protests also reveal the lack of a revolutionary leadership with a programme, as we have seen in Malamulele where the grievances were channeled into impotent demands for a separate municipality. But the struggle against poverty, unemployment and the lack of housing will not be solved by attempts to isolate the community, but rather to combine the demands of all the protesting communities under a revolutionary programme which is linked to the revolutionary socialist transformation of our society.

<http://www.marxist.com/south-africa-community-protest-levels-reach-new-record-highs.htm>

## Are Inter-Capitalist Rivalries Intensifying?

Jack Rasmus 10 March 2015

Capitalism is by nature based on intense, and often destructive, competition. Not only between capital and labor, but between capitalists themselves. But not all competition is the same. There is competition when the global economic pie is growing; and there is competition when it is stagnating or declining. And in recent months signs are growing that new forms of more intense, aggressive inter-capitalist competition are emerging as the global economy continues to slow in general, and even stagnant and slide into recession in a growing number of countries.

Competition in 'good' times of steady economic growth occurs within certain generally accepted rules of capitalist competitive behavior: permitted, and even expected, are inter-capitalist competition over who can cut costs and prices the most or fastest to grab another capitalist's market share, who can get a bigger investment foothold in their competitor's home market, or get a competitive product faster to market, who can leverage new production technologies faster, or who can get one's government to provide a better tax cut, better manipulate free trade to open up foreign direct investment into another capitalist's local economy, and so on.

Governments always have played a key role in the inter-capitalist

competition game. But the forms of assistance that governments undertake in support of the competition game also can change over time: manipulating domestic tax policy, lowering interest rates, cutting benefits costs, and assisting companies in holding down wage gains, are all typical measures governments employ on behalf of their home-grown capitalists (and electoral campaign contributors) in 'good' times. Such measures represent enhancing capitalists' competitive positions at the expense of their domestic working class, consumers, and/or wage earning taxpayers. But there are still other potential measures, ways for 'taking away' shares of income not only from workers but from other capitalists outside the home market, i.e. in other countries and economies.

As the 'good' times have transitioned to 'bad' in recent decades, and especially since 2008, the rules of the competition game have been changing—not only with regard to 'taking away' income from workers and consumers, but from gaining income at the expense of foreign capitalist competitors.

When the rules of the competition game between capitalists break down altogether, the result is war—i.e. the ultimate form of inter-capitalist competition. The two World Wars of the 20th century immediately come to mind. The fight for colonies and resources was particularly obvious in the case of the First World War, while the Second War was the consequence of unresolved issues left over from the First World War, as well as the consequence of the economic collapse of global capitalism in the 1920s and 1930s.

More recent and on-going, USA led wars in the middle east this century are also testimony of the periodic resort to war and military conflict on behalf of national capitalists interest. The Middle East wars starting in 1990 and intensifying in the early 21st century, have been fundamentally about ensuring resource availability to USA and the other advanced economies, especially oil.

Memoirs of key members of the US economic elite after the 2003 invasion of Iraq have admitted that the Iraq invasion was fundamentally about oil—even if that acknowledgement by US politicians and the press still has not been forthcoming.

More contemporary still, there's the USA direct intervention to pull off a coup d'état in the Ukraine last year, and then subsequently the setting up of USA neocon-cum-shadow bankers to run that country's economy that took place last December 2014.

Competition by war may be forbidden within and between the advanced economies, but Ukraine is viewed as an acceptable 'border conflict' outside the 'no military economic competition zone', at least to the USA. To the Europeans, on the other hand, the Ukraine is viewed as more internal to the zone. Hence, they are more nervous about the conflict.

The related case of Russia is even more interesting. The Europeans are more nervous than the USA about the new 'rules of the competitive game' in the case of Russia. Those new rules mean severe economic sanctions to undermine Russia's economy. Strongly favored by the USA, for Europeans economic sanctions are considered risky. Not only because of the reverse impact those sanctions are having on their European economies, but also because of the potential precedent setting they represent. If Russia is within the 'no military competition' zone, as many Europeans see it, then to economically compete with Russia by means of sanctions is a dangerous precedent. Like competitive devaluations, economic sanctions can cut both ways. Both competitors can resort to the same, and neither typically prevails in the end economically.

Furthermore, where do sanctions stop? What if Greece refuses to abide by the European Troika's demands for a new debt agreement? What if Greece unilaterally leaves the Eurozone? Are economic sanctions against Greece a proper response to force them to pay up the \$270 billion Greece owes the Eurozone bankers and governments should Greece leave?

Recent wars in the Middle East, Ukraine, and elsewhere have not involved military conflicts between the advanced economies of North America,

Europe and Japan. Instead, what they represent is the advanced economies beating up on local emerging market capitalists and their governments, as the former maneuver to secure key interests on behalf of their respective capitalist classes at the direct economic expense of those emerging markets.

Obviously, inter-capitalist competition by means of military conflict between the advanced economies (USA, Europe, Japan) is not on the global agenda today. Not even close. It is reserved for those countries and economies outside the advanced economies' orbit. But the rules of the competitive game within and between capitalists in the advanced economies, rules that that were in effect in previous years, also appear to be fading.

New rules are emerging. More accurately, the old rules are breaking down over what's 'off limits' in terms of acceptable forms of inter-capitalist competition within and between the advanced economies. The advanced capitalist economies are thus entering a stage—a kind of competitive 'no man's land'—where new and more aggressive forms of competition between them are emerging.

In between the one extreme of government intervention on behalf of home-grown capitalist interests in the form of direct military conflict—and the other of advanced economy governments engaging in normal competitive measures (such as domestic tax, trade, monetary, and wage policies on behalf of their respective capitalist interests)—lay a 'middle ground' in which new forms of inter-capitalist competition that are more confrontational are emerging, but which are yet short of direct violence and war. Not the 'normal' forms of competition based on trade, technology, cost reduction, etc., and not yet military confrontation to secure economic interests, but something in between in terms of intensity and aggressiveness.

Some of the more obvious forms of this new, more aggressive, intensifying capitalist competition include the following:

- The USA government going after the European banks by levying and extracting multi-billion dollar fines and by introducing measures making it more costly for Euro banks to do business in the USA market—both measures of which are undertaken in order to boost the poor economic performance of US commercial banks.
- The European governments, in a tit-for-tat response, going after USA tech companies, requiring multi-billion dollar equivalent payments in taxes, levying fines, demanding organization divestment and break ups of the US companies in Europe, in an effort to make their own European tech companies more competitive with USA tech giants like Google, Microsoft, and others.
- The eruption of the global fight between the US shale gas/oil producers and the OPEC oil producers, led by Saudi Arabia and its neighbor oil emirates.
- The massive Quantitative Easing (QE) programs introduced by Japan in 2013 and 2014, and the Eurozone's imminent QE in 2015—both programs of which designed to gain exports at the direct expense of other capitalist economies (including each other) and to stimulate capital inflows from other economies into their own to boost their stock and bond markets, make up for failing Euro bank lending, and promote foreign direct investment into Europe from Asia, China, and emerging markets.
- The increasing use of economic sanctions as a means to drive competitors out of targeted regional markets, and open up the same to one's own capitalist producers

Since the 2012 national elections in the USA, the Obama government has been leading the charge on behalf of major commercial banking interests in the USA against Eurozone banks in particular. Fines for having violated US rules have been levied heavily on Euro banking counterparts, especially on Swiss, French and even UK banks—most notably recently the giant UK bank holding company, HSBC.

The USA has also mobilized its central bank, the Federal Reserve, in the effort. The Fed is about to employ the heretofore unprecedented tactic of subjecting the Euro banks to US 'stress tests' for the first time, to force the Euro banks to set aside more capital. This is allegedly to ensure against future financial crises. But that's only the cover. Forcing the Euro banks to set aside more capital means less competitive lending to USA banks. Two of the largest Euro banks—Deutsche Bank and Banco Santander, the largest Euro bank in terms of assets—are expected to fail the Fed's imminent stress test. Previously, the USA allowed Europe to conduct its own stress tests, which it accepted. And both Deutsche Bank and Santander passed Euro stress tests late last year. But they likely won't pass the US Fed's.

If the Euro banks fail the US tests, it is possible their lending limits in the USA economy will be curtailed. That in turn will allow US banks like JP Morgan, Bank of America, and others to pick up their business. Less for Deutsche means more for JP. The Euro banks' test failure could also mean less investment in Euro banks by US stock investors, thus boosting the stock values of US banks.

Not to be outdone, the Europeans have launched an offensive of their own against US tech companies. The primary target is Google. Europe sees Google not only as an obstacle to it building its own tech industry, but as a threat to various Euro industries in the future, as Google plans to expand into new markets. Google threatens the Euro advertising and publications industries as well. The fact that the company manipulates Euro tax rules to avoid billions of tax payments also irks Europe, not to mention its central role in USA direct surveillance of the Euro population and even its governments. In November 2014 the European Parliament took the unprecedented vote to break up the company in Europe.

Other USA tech companies like Apple, Facebook, Amazon and Uber are also targets, given their well-known tax avoidance schemes. The UK even announced it was introducing its own 'google tax'. Not only US tech companies, but US corporate giants like GE and Exxon, and many US pharmaceutical companies, regularly manipulate tax rules to avoid paying both US and European governments hundreds of billions of dollars every year. But the intensity and broad-based European offensive against US tech and other large corporations would not likely have occurred, were it not for the USA's parallel and unprecedented offensive against European banks. In short, capitalists and their governments within the advanced economies are now targeting entire industries in order to improve the competitiveness of their respective industries as the threat of a continued global slowdown appears more likely.

In times past, such extreme forms of government-assisted corporate competition would have been quietly worked out between US and Euro representatives. But in a world of slowing economic growth, declining government spending and revenues, and different degrees of austerity fiscal policies, major offensives against entire industries by different sectors of the advanced economic elites are now being launched—with the major participation and direction of their respective governments. This is something new, a disregard for prior 'limits' and competitive rules of the game.

Yet another major event that represents a disregard of prior 'competitive rules of the game' is the eruption of the intense economic conflict last year between the major oil producing states of OPEC, especially Saudi Arabia and its emirate neighbors, on the one hand, and the new fast growing shale oil and gas interests in the USA. In the past, the Saudis and other OPEC players would not risk a collapse of the global oil market, which is potential, in order to counter the strategic competitive threat posed by the shale revolution, which is centered largely in north America. The Saudi's are consciously driving down the price of oil in the short run, in the hope of driving the shale companies into bankruptcy. The extreme response by the Saudis and OPEC to the shale competition not only threatens global oil and other commodity prices, but also the global financial market in corporate junk bonds.

In the past, the very great risks that the current Saudi offensive poses to the very stability of the global capitalist system would not have occurred.

Understandings would have been quietly worked out behind the scenes. But in a global economy slowing and an already naturally falling demand and price for oil, the stakes for the Saudis and all of OPEC are high. Inter-capitalist competition is thus assuming new and more destabilizing forms.

The resort to extreme forms of quantitative easing by the central banks of Japan and the Eurozone marks another new form of competition. Since 2010 both the Japanese and Eurozone economies have been the worst performers globally, each slipping in and out of repeated recessions. The political systems of both are in turn beginning to fray and fragment. Both of these sectors of the advanced economies region of the global economy, representing perhaps \$20 trillion in annual GDP, recognize they cannot continue on their present economic and political paths much longer. Given that both Japan and Eurozone are heavily dependent on exports production to regenerate their domestic economies, and equity and bond markets, both have introduced massive central bank liquidity injections in the form of multi-trillion dollar equivalent QE programs. The goals are several. But the main objective is to drive down the values of their currencies, the euro and the yen, in order to 'de facto devalue' by means of monetary policy. It is hoped the devaluation will lead to cheaper exports, export growth, and an export-driven economic recovery.

But what their desperate QE initiatives fundamentally means is that Europe and Japan have engaged in government-assisted programs, aimed at 'stealing' global export market share from other capitalist economies, both in the advanced economy sector, as well as from China, the BRICs, and emerging markets in general. Their QE programs represent a desperate competitive move, after their prior policies for five years have proved dismal failures, as their economies sink further into stagnation or worse. Were it not for the economic desperation now engulfing these two important wings of the advanced economies region of the global economy, their shift to 'competition by competitive devaluation'—a development not seen since the 1930s—would not be occurring.

A final area of emerging new rules for inter-capitalist competition is the emergence of greater resort to introduce economic sanctions as a competitive measure. The best case is Russia today, and the US-led sanctions. It should not be misunderstood: the sanctions on Russia are in the last analysis an economic competitive measure, not a politically motivated initiative. Behind the sanctions is the USA objective of driving Russia out of the European economy. Europe was becoming too integrated and dependent on Russia. Not only its gas and raw materials, but trade relations and money capital flows were deepening on many fronts between Russia and Europe in general prior to the Ukraine crisis that has provided the cover for the introduction of the sanctions. Russia's growing economic integration with Europe threatened the long term economic interests of US capitalists. Strategically, the US precipitated coup in the Ukraine can be viewed, therefore as a means by which to provoke Russian military intervention, i.e. a necessary event in order to deepen and expand economic sanctions that would ultimately sever the growing economic ties between Europe and Russia long term. That severance in turn would not only ensure US economic interests remain dominant in Europe, but would also open up new opportunities for profit making for US interests in Europe and Ukraine as well.

In summary, the economic offensives by the USA and Europe impacting entire industries, not just companies, represent a new phase in global inter-capitalist competition within and between the advanced economies. This industry for industry tit for tat is something new in terms of inter-capitalist competition within the advanced economies. The fight over global energy market share, between the advanced economies' once reliable OPEC partners, signals another major qualitative change in global capitalist competitor behavior. It represents not only a new kind of qualitative clash in the energy markets, but one that raises the risk of multiple threats to the global financial markets in general. Monetary policy-driven currency devaluation and export competition by exchange rate manipulation also reflects a desperate resort to new competitive strategies within the advanced economies not seen since the 1930s depression—a strategy that failed in that former period and likely extended the depression period, and a strategy that will likely have similar effects on the global economy today.

Capitalists have begun fighting over a smaller export economic pie. That fight has set in motion global currency wars, and a crash of interest rates into negative territory as well, the consequences of which may prove highly risky and are yet unknown. Finally, the resort to economic sanctions as a inter-capitalist competitive measure, while taking the apparent form of a political event, in fact also represents a shift to a more risky long term form of inter-capitalist competition between entire macro-regions of the global capitalist economy.

zcomm.org

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## **We don't want flowers, we demand rights!**

### **The women's struggle is the struggle of the working class!**

Flávia Ribeiro and Juliana Meatus Translation with Bing 8 March 2015

Currently we live a world crisis, in which, in several places of the planet we see how the capitalist system has explored further the working class from the austerity measures. We women are the first to suffer with the investment cuts in public policies, we have the worst wages, and we're at the top of the list of discarded from the labour market, with unemployment.

Unfortunately these attacks suffered by women, take place in different places of the world. In the United States, the center of capitalism, according to Socialist Alternative-American session of the CIT-between 2007 and 2011, 765 thousand workers were dismissed in the public sector in response to the crisis, 70.5% of these were women. In addition, with the budget cuts in education, many poor, black children were unable to access to schools in the country causing fall on the mother and women should stay at home taking care of their children.

### **Austerity policy affects women**

In Europe, the austerity policies were implemented more aggressively in proportion to the crisis on the continent. In the United Kingdom, due to cutting costs, the public sector was forced to cancel the exams of prenatal care, breast-feeding support programmes, and there was no day care closings. In Greece, with the economic crisis, there has been an increase of 30% of unemployed women in the country, and consequently increased the number of complaints of domestic violence, because they began to spend more time at home, also increasing the double workday with informal jobs.

Examples like these show how the most vulnerable sectors are the first to be hit in the crisis. However, the attacks on the fundamental rights of women, also happens in our country.

In Brazil, the last 8 March, thousands of feminists took to the streets across the country denounce the contradiction between the billions spent by Government Dilma to the completion of the World Cup and a cent directed to improving the lives of women in Brazil. A shameful Cup, less by the score of the game and more for the final result, World Cup which has taken the lives of workers, the removal of thousands of families, increasing absurdity of rents and the cost of living in General, stimulating tourism and sexual exploitation of women, as reported by feminists throughout the year.

### **Empty promises of Government Dilma**

During the presidential campaign, the marketing strategy that built figure of Dilma rousseff as a strong woman, and imbued in the fight against the social injustices, in anything resembling its everyday political practice.

The earlier years of his Government already gave us enough evidence about the disinterest in extinguishing the inequality, and to which place of importance for women policy is relegated. It is not enough to elect Dilma, even if she's a woman, since us working women we're tired of empty promises and no longer have any illusion that President. We have to recognise that Dilma not represents, as well as the workers ' Party is no longer worthy to bear this name.

Such a contradiction has become increasingly apparent with the first steps of your new mandate, for example, to present the Ministry of finance to Joaquim Levy with the option by the fiscal adjustment and removal of rights, as well as the Ministry of agriculture for Kátia Abreu, known enemy of social movements and the ruralist countertop wing which recently stated there in Brazil folwark.

In this March 8, there's not much to be presented by the President unless a package of adjustments, or evil may. The announcement of cutting pensions for death and the increase in working hours in order to have the right to unemployment insurance hits us full. Many women widows, pensioners are those which guarantee the livelihood of every family, these pensions will be cut or reduced to half, longer life. The increase in working hours to access the right to unemployment insurance, six months to a year and a half, in practice makes the request of the benefits for the most vulnerable sectors, since data show a greater unemployment among women. According to data from the last PNAD, 56.9% of the total number of us unemployed.

#### **1% of GDP to combat violence.**

Violence remains daunting, we experience today a reality of femicide. Every 2:0 a woman is killed every 10 seconds a woman is raped. Only 10% of Brazilian municipalities have Special police stations for women (DEAMs). On January 7, 2015, the President issued Decree No. 8389 showing the sectors that do not suffer budget cuts until the restructuring of the Government in March 2015. In this Decree, Dilma presents that the Secretariat of policies for women will receive only the value of 4 million reais, though not discloses the values needed for investment and maintenance to ensure that the programs developed by the Secretariat, as the dial 180, or the women's police stations across the country that minimally put the Maria da Penha Law into practice, albeit with many problems.

Worth pointing out that, if not clear whether this value will be for the whole year of 2015, it is tiny compared with other years. In 2012 more than 750 billion was used to pay off public debt and 265 million was what the Government has promised to invest in Brazil without Violence Program (2013-2014), and it didn't happen. Thus, we don't see improvements for women such as refuges, Specialized police stations, medical physical and sexually assaulted women, reference centres, or houses of Resocialization to aggressors, as was submitted by the federal Government.

In addition, were also cut investments in health, causing many women don't get more access to prenatal monitoring, for example. In the year 2014, 33 women were arrested for illegal abortions, in which these prisons are concentrated in the Southeast (RJ-15 arrested, SP-12, and MG, a). A given outrageous since these women were framed in article 124 of the Penal Code, created in 1940. It is clear that women who suffer most from the criminalization of abortion are young, black, with low education and low income, since this is the profile of the ground. We need urgently to decriminalize abortion in our country, to guarantee the life and safety of all our women.

So wide open, the new measures demonstrate the option by the neoliberal policies of escalation, an exit that favors the bankers, contractors and ruralistas, and generates attacks on working class abandoned to its fate and increasingly suffocated by having to pay for the crisis via austerity. Against these attacks, we want to 1% of GDP invested in public policies for women, opposed the privilege potentiated to banks this year of crisis.

#### **Women in the fight for a socialist society**

In this March 8, we need to remember that we have a woman in power does not represent working women. Is the woman of adjustments, friend

of banks, protection of large estates. The fiscal adjustment package, the budget cut in various social areas contrasts to figures and data which state the situation of violence, insecurity and vulnerability in living the vast majority of working women and young people of this country. So, we want to boost the struggle of women and build outputs to break with oppression and this capitalist system, our role is to:

- Organize and unify the feminist left to face the next attacks and strengthen our struggle;
- Build the campaign by 1% of GDP for combating violence against women driven by Women in Struggle;
- Fighting jointly with other sectors and with the Front for popular reforms, against the adjustments and the contrarreformas;
- The legalization of abortion;
- Against the lesbophobia, transphobia and sexism.

[www.lsr-cit.org](http://www.lsr-cit.org)

### **Não queremos flores, exigimos direitos! A luta das mulheres é a luta da classe trabalhadora!**

Flávia Ribeiro e Juliana Meato 8 de março de 2015

Atualmente vivemos uma crise mundial, em que, em diversos lugares do planeta vemos como o sistema capitalista tem explorado ainda mais a classe trabalhadora a partir das medidas de austeridade. Nós mulheres somos as primeiras a sofrerem com os cortes de investimento nas políticas públicas, temos os piores salários, e estamos no topo da lista das descartadas do mercado de trabalho, com o desemprego.

Infelizmente esses ataques sofridos pelas mulheres, acontecem em diferentes lugares do mundo. Nos Estados Unidos, o centro do capitalismo, segundo a Alternativa Socialista - sessão estadunidense do CIT - entre 2007 e 2011, 765 mil trabalhadores foram demitidos no setor público como resposta à crise, 70,5% destes eram mulheres. Além disso, com os cortes orçamentários na educação, muitas crianças pobres, negras não conseguiram acesso às escolas do país fazendo com que recaia sobre as mães e mulheres a obrigação de ficar em casa cuidando de seus filhos.

#### **Política de austeridade atinge as mulheres**

Na Europa, as políticas de austeridade foram implementadas de forma mais agressiva proporcionalmente à crise no continente. No Reino Unido, em consequência ao corte de verbas, o setor público foi obrigado a cancelar os exames de pré-natal, programas de apoio à amamentação, e houve fechamentos de creches. Na Grécia, com a crise econômica, houve um aumento de 30% de mulheres desempregadas no país, e consequentemente aumentou o número de denúncias de violência doméstica, pois, elas passaram a ficar mais tempo em casa, também aumentando a dupla jornada de trabalho com trabalhos informais.

Exemplos como estes evidenciam como os setores mais vulneráveis são os primeiros a serem atingidos na crise. Contudo, os ataques aos direitos fundamentais das mulheres, também acontecem no nosso país.

No Brasil, no último 8 de março, milhares de feministas foram às ruas de todo o país denunciar a contradição entre os bilhões de gastos pelo governo Dilma para a realização da Copa do Mundo e nenhum centavo direcionado para melhoria da vida das mulheres brasileiras. Uma Copa vergonhosa, menos pelo placar do jogo e mais pelo resultado final, Copa que custou a vida de operários, a remoção de milhares de famílias, o aumento absurdo dos aluguéis e do custo de vida em geral, o estímulo do turismo e exploração sexual de mulheres, tão denunciados pelas feministas ao longo do ano.

#### **Promessas vazias do governo Dilma**

Durante a campanha presidencial, a estratégia de marketing que construiu a figura de Dilma como uma mulher forte, ex-guerrilheira e imbuída na luta contra as injustiças sociais, em nada se assemelha com a sua prática política diária. Os anos anteriores do seu governo já nos deram provas suficientes sobre o desinteresse em extinguir a desigualdade, e para qual lugar de importância a política para mulheres é relegada. Não basta eleger Dilma, mesmo ela sendo uma mulher, já que nós mulheres trabalhadoras

estamos cansadas de promessas vazias e já não temos mais nenhuma ilusão nessa presidenta. Temos de reconhecer que Dilma não nos representa, assim como o Partido dos Trabalhadores não é mais digno de carregar esse nome.

Tal contradição tem se tornado cada vez mais evidente com as primeiras medidas do seu novo mandato, como por exemplo, ao presentear o ministério da Fazenda para Joaquim Levy com a opção pelo ajuste fiscal e retirada de direitos, bem como o ministério da agricultura para a Kátia Abreu, inimiga conhecida dos movimentos sociais e pertencente à ala da bancada ruralista a qual afirmou recentemente não haver latifúndio no Brasil.

Neste 8 de março não há muito o que ser apresentado pela presidenta a não ser um pacote de ajustes, ou de malvadezas. O anúncio do corte das pensões por morte e do aumento do tempo de trabalho para que se tenha o direito ao seguro desemprego nos atinge de cheio. Muitas mulheres viúvas, pensionistas são as que garantem o sustento de toda família, essas pensões serão cortadas ou reduzidas à metade, deixando de ser vitalícias. O aumento do tempo de trabalho para acessar o direito ao seguro desemprego, de seis meses para um ano e meio, na prática inviabiliza a solicitação dos benefícios para os setores mais vulneráveis, já que dados comprovam um desemprego maior entre as mulheres. Segundo dados do último PNAD, somos 56,9% do total de desempregados.

### **1% do PIB para combater a violência!**

A violência continua sendo assustadora, vivenciamos hoje uma realidade de feminicídio. A cada 2 horas uma mulher é morta, a cada 10 segundos uma mulher é estuprada. Somente 10% dos municípios brasileiros possuem Delegacias Especiais da Mulher (DEAMs). No dia 7 de janeiro de 2015, a presidenta lançou o decreto nº 8389 apresentando os setores que não sofreriam cortes orçamentários até a reestruturação do governo no mês de março de 2015. Nesse decreto, Dilma apresenta que a secretaria de políticas para as mulheres receberá apenas o valor de 4 milhões de reais, porém não se divulga os valores necessários para o investimento e a manutenção para os programas desenvolvidos por essa secretaria, como o disque 180, ou as delegacias das mulheres em todo o país que minimamente colocam a Lei Maria da Penha em prática, ainda que com muitos problemas.

Vale apontar que, mesmo não estando claro se esse valor será para todo o ano de 2015, ele é ínfimo se comparado com outros anos. Em 2012 mais de 750 bilhões foi utilizado para pagar a dívida pública e 265 milhões foi o que o governo se comprometeu a investir no Programa Brasil sem Violência (2013-2014), e isso não aconteceu. Assim, não vemos melhorias para as mulheres como as Casas-Abrigo, Delegacias Especializadas, assistência médica às mulheres agredidas física e sexualmente, Centros de Referência, ou Casas de Ressocialização aos agressores, como foi apresentado pelo governo federal.

Além disso, também foram cortados investimentos na saúde, fazendo com que muitas mulheres não consigam mais acesso ao acompanhamento do pré-natal, por exemplo. No ano de 2014, 33 mulheres foram presas por abortos clandestinos, em que essas prisões se concentram no Sudeste (RJ - 15 presas, SP - 12, e MG, uma). Um dado indignante visto que essas mulheres foram enquadradas no artigo 124 do Código Penal, criado em 1940. É evidente que as mulheres que mais sofrem com a criminalização do aborto são jovens, negras, com pouca escolaridade e baixa renda, visto que esse é o perfil das réus. Precisamos urgentemente descriminalizar o aborto em nosso país, para garantir a vida e segurança de todas nossas mulheres.

De forma escancarada, as novas medidas demonstram a opção pelo acirramento das políticas neoliberais, uma saída que favorece os banqueiros, empreiteiros e ruralistas, e gera ataques à classe trabalhadora abandonada à sua própria sorte e sufocada cada vez mais ao ter de pagar pela crise via austeridade. Contra estes ataques, queremos 1% do PIB investido em políticas públicas para as mulheres, contrapondo a privilégio potencializado aos bancos neste ano de crise.

**Mulheres na luta por uma sociedade socialista**

Nesse 8 de março, precisamos lembrar que temos uma mulher no poder que não representa as mulheres trabalhadoras. É a mulher dos ajustes, amiga dos bancos, protetora dos latifúndios. O pacote de ajuste fiscal, o corte orçamentário em várias áreas sociais se contrapõe aos números e dados que constata a situação de violência, precarização e vulnerabilidade em que vivem a grande maioria das mulheres trabalhadoras e jovens deste país. Por isso, queremos impulsionar a luta das mulheres e construir saídas para romper com a opressão e este sistema capitalista, nosso papel é:

- Nos organizar e unificar a esquerda feminista para enfrentar os próximos ataques e fortalecer nossa luta;
- Construir a campanha por 1% do PIB para o combate à violência contra a mulher impulsionada pelo Movimento Mulheres em Luta;
- Lutar conjuntamente com outros setores e com a Frente pelas reformas populares, contra os ajustes e as contrarreformas;
- Pela legalização do aborto;
- Contra a lesbofobia, transfobia e machismo.

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## India: Kashmir - Betrayal through coalition

Lal Khan 6 March 2015



If the armed struggle, religious fundamentalism, nationalism and other such notions of people's freedom in Indian occupied Kashmir have failed to deliver any respite to the oppressed masses, the rhetoric of 'democracy' and 'development' are equally no solution. In reality they are mere deceptions. The PDP's coalition with BJP is nothing but a blatant betrayal and an insult added to injury for the Kashmiri masses that voted for the PDP in the recent elections, making it the largest party in the Kashmir state assembly.

After months of negotiations following an election in December, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu fundamentalist Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and its regional rival, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), have agreed to form a coalition government, in a state where youth and the oppressed have been fighting Indian rule for almost seven decades.

BJP president Amit Shah announced the 'deal' after meeting PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti in New Delhi, saying the two parties had resolved most of their differences. "In a few days, Jammu and Kashmir will have a BJP and PDP alliance government", Mr Shah told reporters. Mehbooba Mufti sounded more cynical than ironic: "PDP and BJP have formed joint agenda for development. This alliance is not for power-sharing but it is to win the hearts and minds of the people of Jammu and Kashmir". The BJP won 25 seats in the elections to Kashmir's state assembly in December, a feat unthinkable just a year ago. But the Hindu nationalists fell short of a majority, as did the PDP, which took 28 seats. The strong showing was seen as the BJP extending its grip on the country after Mr. Modi's landslide general election victory in May.

Both parties benefited from widespread public discontent against the state's former ruling National Conference party over its handling of devastating September floods that killed more than 200 people in Kashmir. The disputed region was placed under New Delhi's direct rule in January after the two parties failed to agree on key and prickly issues. The PDP has long demanded the removal of a draconian law in Kashmir that gives Indian forces sweeping powers to search, enter property and shoot on sight, and which is seen by critics as a cover for human rights abuses. The BJP has said the law was needed to halt militants fighting for Kashmir's independence or for its merger with Pakistan. The fighting has left tens of thousands of people dead, mostly civilians.

The results of the elections to the Legislative Assembly of J & K, declared on 23 December 2014, opened new horizons for the BJP regarding the capture of power through complicity with dubious elements in Kashmir. The intrigues and deception of BJP's Kashmir accomplices are a curse for the masses. If the coalition succeeds, this crime will pave the way for the

saffronisation of, and the brutal intrusion by corporate vultures into, the Kashmir Valley. This will result in the extortion of the economy and the devastation of the environment. The BJP as a coalition partner with the PDP will acquire a foothold and rulership over the Valley's electorate, despite such rulership being flatly denied it by a unanimous verdict of rejection.

It is not a coincidence that in the aftermath of the poll results, the RSS paper, 'Organiser', reprinted its editorial of 15 January 1948 titled "Kashmir: The Spiritual Home of Hindus... The Maharaja is more sinned against than sinning. The Hindu kingdom is one of the oldest in world history and is an indissoluble part of the cultural hegemony of the Hindustan". On 4 January 2015 it wrote: "For J&K, it is the beginning of real democratic integration... BJP has now entered into the power politics of the State, as it is the second largest party with 25 seats. Its aim of 44+ seats failed but in the coming six years, no party or coalition in power can ignore the strength of BJP. However, the Party has missed a good opportunity as it has lost 9% of its support from May 2014, when BJP got more than 32% of votes in the 2014 parliamentary elections. It had at least the opportunity to get all 37 seats in Jammu and 4 seats in Ladakh. If that had happened the Party, without even getting a seat in valley, would have come into power on its own, with minor adjustments".

The PDP leaders had nothing but praise for Vajpayee throughout the campaign. Their rhetoric of having 'reservations' about forming a coalition with the BJP was a mere ruse. The BJP was not deceived. The hung Assembly provided an excuse and Mufti immediately came out for the BJP. What followed in public was a spurious charade to dispel any doubts in the party rank and file. In the PDP's election manifesto it was written: "The Self Rule document will be the guiding framework for Resolution. Closer ties across the Line of Control. Make borders irrelevant". The BJP is simply going to backtrack from any promises it has made to secure the coalition deal. Its wily chief Amit Shah is too devious even for the PDP leaders. The PDP leadership went into this coalition in the first place due to its lust for power and plunder. However, the 'development' tonic of the BJP will prove to be poison for the working people of Kashmir. Apart from its superficial rhetoric of 'Hindutva' chauvinism, the real designs of the BJP are to aggressively push through policies in the interests of the profits of its real backers, the Indian and Imperialist corporate bosses. The PDP will end up with just as much responsibility for the misery that these policies of capitalist extortion and exploitation will inflict upon the Kashmiri masses. This coalition of opportunism and reaction will face a mass revolt sooner rather than later.

The secular nationalists have collapsed after abandoning their left-wing ideas and were terrified of any mention of socialism in their programme. In the past, leaders like Maqbool Butt unambiguously rejected the capitalist path of independence while advocating socialism. The Islamic fundamentalists were also quickly exposed by their brutality towards the ordinary Kashmiris and by the partial withdrawal of support for them by the Pakistani state under the pressure of US and British imperialism. There is a seething hostility and revulsion against the BJP in spite of its 25 seats, achieved through electoral manipulations and the rhetoric of development. The Indian state can never win the hearts and minds of ordinary Kashmiris within the present system. Kashmir's political elite has proved to be subservient to the Indian and Pakistani bosses for its own opportunist ambitions of plunder and privilege. This has come at the cost of excruciating class and national oppression of the masses in this serene but tragic land. All sections, from the Islamists to the secular nationalists, have been exposed in the eyes of the youth and the masses.

For the masses across the Line of Control in the Pakistani controlled 'Azad Kashmir', not only is freedom elusive, but the vast majority of the population is suffering in poverty, misery and deprivation. Large sections of the youth have escaped this 'Azadi' for the menial jobs on offer in the Pakistani cities and the scorching heat and brutal regimes of the Gulf States. Those remaining are in a relentless quest to flee. But despite of the repression and tyranny inflicted upon the Kashmiri masses by the ruling classes of the subcontinent, the Kashmiri youth have shown extraordinary resilience. The recent victory of Comrade Yousaf Tarigami from Kulgam in the state assembly elections, and the resurgence of the

JKNSF with a Marxist leadership across the LoC, are some of the signs of an optimistic future of the struggle and revolutionary perspectives for the movement in Kashmir. These sparks of defiance against these oppressive states and the capitalist system can inspire and ignite a revolutionary inferno throughout the South Asian subcontinent.

<http://www.marxist.com/india-kashmir-betrayal-through-coalition.htm>

## China: Capitalism is pushing back women's rights

### Wage gap has widened and sex discrimination in the job market is rampant

Vincent Kolo (chinaworker.info) 4 March 2015

China Central Television's gala to celebrate the Lunar New Year is reportedly the most watched television programme in the world. It is broadcast live on 189 state-run channels and the viewing audience, despite falling in recent years, is more than 600 million people. The four-and-half hour spectacle is also shamelessly sexist, with this year's programme aired on 18 February hitting a new low in the opinion of women's rights activists and many others who have spoken out on China's vast but tightly policed social media.

The gala shamelessly discriminated against and made fun of women. Are the directors taking us back to imperial times when women had to bind their feet? This was just one of thousands of angry posts on Weibo, China's version of twitter, after this year's gala. A feminist inspired petition has slammed the show as 'poisonous' pointing out it made included 44 jokes at the expense of women "C single women as 'leftover' and female civil servants as 'gold diggers' (prepared to hop into bed with their male bosses to gain promotion). These protests are fresh evidence that a new generation of women activists is emerging in China, protesting against domestic violence and discrimination in the job market. In several cities female activists have staged protests by occupying men's toilets, to draw attention to the lack of facilities and longer queues for women. This, remember, is under a hardline dictatorship that clamps down fast on any protests.

The furore surrounding the annual TV gala throws a spotlight on a much bigger problem. The social position of women is being pushed backwards as part of the wider social counterrevolution that has occurred in China, with capitalism replacing state planning and recreating rampant inequality between rich and poor, city and countryside, eastern and western regions.

#### Wage gap widens

The market economy has led to increased gender inequality since the 1990s, noted feminist writer Lijia Zhang (China File 11 June 2014). This is reflected in the widening wage gap between women and men, a development that runs counter to international trends where wage differentials have narrowed although they still disfavour women. According to official statistics urban women in China in 2010 earned on average 67.3 percent of men's earnings, down from 78 percent in 1990. In the countryside, women make just 56 percent of men's wages.

Women white-collar workers face a wall of sexist attitudes and open discrimination. Even the New York Times (20 February 2015) acknowledges that, 'In the office, Socialist-era egalitarianism has been replaced by open sexism, in some cases reinforced by the law.' The newspaper quotes Chinese feminist Feng Yuan, 'Women's status has not improved, and in some areas has regressed.'

#### Some facts that illustrate the negative trend:

A 2010 survey showed that 69 percent of employers set gender conditions when recruiting staff, despite this being illegal. It is common for advertisements to specify that 'only men need apply', or only 'attractive women'.

Female participation in China's labour force is high by world standards, but the proportion of urban women in employment has declined from more than 77 percent two decades ago to 61 percent.

Rural farmland title deeds are mainly in male hands, with less than a fifth of these contracts including wives' names. In the event of divorce

women are often left empty-handed.

Millions of Chinese undergo cosmetic surgery each year. In Beijing, female senior high school and college students make up over 80 percent of plastic surgery patients – a fact that is undoubtedly linked to intense pressure in the job market through the widespread use of physical appearance requirements in job advertisements.

Discrimination against women in the job market is now common and quite open, despite this being illegal. Employers hardly bat an eyelid about running openly sexist job advertisements because such reactionary attitudes have become socially acceptable. A survey last year by People's University in Beijing showed that when an identical resume was sent to job agencies but with a different sex, male graduates had a 39.2 percent higher chance than female graduates of being called to an interview. The figure for postgraduates rose to 53 percent. As in every society such gender attitudes invariably come from the top, from the ruling layer, as exemplified by CCTV's New Year Gala shows.

The People's Daily even featured a photo exhibition entitled "beautiful scenery" showing women hostesses working at the 18th Congress of the ruling Communist Party (CCP) in 2012. The unmistakable message from this is that women provide decoration while men make the decisions. Socialist blogger, Wang Linyu says capitalism is profiting from the idea of "leftover women" and preying on the anxieties and family pressures associated with a woman not finding a partner. More than one hundred dating websites have sprung up in China and in just the first quarter of 2014 this market was worth 490 million yuan (US\$78 million) according to Bloomberg Businessweek (18 August, 2014). "They are trying to stigmatise and marginalise the so-called leftover women to make more money" says Wang. "A related trend is the boom in schools of female virtuosity (校花班花) which promote feudal ethics to serve today's capitalist society."

### Revolution and counterrevolution

During the Maoist era of state planning such blatant discrimination was checked by the role of the state which, despite the downside of massive bureaucracy, allocated all jobs and therefore acted to narrow the gap between women's and men's work, pay, and social standing. Alongside state ownership and regulation there was tremendous social pressure from women, reflecting a significant feminist current within the Chinese left, and from the radicalised population, to cast off the old patriarchal-feudal ways. In 1950, Mao's government banned arranged marriages and the concubine system, and made divorce easier for both sexes. This was one of the most dramatic governmental shake-ups in the field of marital relationships ever attempted.

These changes did not amount to full equality for women, nor could this be described as "socialism" as the CCP claimed. But despite Mao's dictatorial rule – something anathema to real socialism – the crucial existence of a state-owned and planned economy opened an important door towards women's emancipation which the subsequent capitalist counter-revolution is trying to close.

Gender discrimination is if possible even worse on the factory floor than in the office. A survey of more than one million internet recruitment postings found that while overall more than ten percent openly stated a gender preference, this rose to 23 percent for jobs that did not require a college education.

### Women workers

Women in both office and factory employment face illegal pressure to sign "no pregnancy" clauses, to undergo pregnancy tests, and even sign pledges not to marry. When a woman worker becomes pregnant it is not uncommon for a boss to reassign her to uncomfortable, arduous work or long hours to pressure her to quit. It is widely feared that the government's recent relaxation of the "one child policy" to allow more urban couples to have a second child can actually blowback against women, increasing discrimination in the job market. Sexual harassment is if anything even more flagrant in factories than among white-collar staff. In a 2013 survey by the Sunflower Women Workers Centre, 70 percent of women factory workers in Guangzhou said they had suffered sexual

harassment, with 32 percent reporting unwelcome physical contact and 25 percent receiving obscene phone calls or messages.

Yet as the past year's strike movements show, women factory workers are anything but the servile worker bees the employers imagine. With the number of strikes doubling in 2014 compared to 2013, women workers came to the fore in many struggles and not least the massive Yue Yuen conflict of one year ago. This was China's biggest strike in three decades and women footwear workers made up 70 percent of the strike force, dispelling any notion they are less determined than their male co-workers. These developments are grounds for great optimism that China's fledgling women's movement can link up with the unfolding struggles of the working class to build a force that will overthrow the current system and destroy the roots of women's oppression once and for all.  
<http://chinaworker.info/en/2015/03/04/9655/>

## Occupations mark the beginning of a new wave of Dutch student struggle

Zowi Milanovi 4 March 2015

The student struggle has flared up in Amsterdam. In a period of a few weeks, two university buildings have been occupied. At the moment of writing, the building of the executive board of the University of Amsterdam (UvA), the famous Maagdenhuis, is being occupied by students. Their struggle is against the efficiency-oriented top-down management, for which the profit motive is more important than the interests of students and lecturers.

The movement is based around a manifesto called the New University. This manifesto demands an end to the current top-down model of university management, in which the members of the executive boards are appointed by so-called supervisory boards, in turn composed of people appointed by the Ministry of Education. Many members of the executive boards in effect had no relationship with academia and come from business management positions, where they have learned to think in terms of efficiency - in other words: "how can we maximise profits". The New University wants to replace this model with a democratic model, where students and professors elect the university board.

The manifesto doesn't stop here. It also calls for an end to the current model for allocating funds, and for an end to temporary contracts for university staff (around half of university staff are on "flexible" contracts). In practice, the current efficiency-based allocation model means that only those studies that benefit the market merit funds from the university. The effects of this can be seen in the latest plans of the UvA, according to which the humanities faculty will be downsized and several unprofitable language studies will be discontinued. At the same time, other faculties have been given so much money that they don't know what to do with it, spending it on marketing in order to compete with other universities. So much for efficiency! In late 2014 these developments led to the Humanities Rally movement, which mobilised the humanities students and lecturers through demonstrations and general assemblies.

This problem is not limited to the UvA. In the Erasmus University of Rotterdam, there have been plans to shut down the faculty of philosophy. Indeed, the university named after the humanist philosopher Erasmus will have no philosophy faculty if the plans continue. One wonders what the author of "The Praise of Folly" would say if he were alive today!

### Occupation of the Bungehuis

The occupation of the Bungehuis on 13th February was an important step forward. There have been other short occupations of university buildings over the years as well, but this was the first to present a manifesto which clearly expressed the students' and lecturers' demands. The occupation was popular among the students, and within a few days more than 100 university professors had declared their support. The occupied building was used for all kinds of workshops and discussion groups with students and professors, while decisions were made democratically through general assemblies.

It is no accident that the occupation took place at the Bungehuis. The management is planning to sell this old university building to a real estate company, Aedes Real Estate, who will wish to turn it into a Soho House: an extremely expensive club and hotel which would attract the creative class to Amsterdam - in reality, the international super-rich. Amsterdam has become increasingly expensive in the last years, especially the city centre, and the university's management is contributing to this trend through real estate speculation.

The reaction of the executive board only inflamed the situation. They were only willing to engage in dialogue on condition that the students immediately leave the building. They were even threatening the occupiers with fines of €100,000 per day! Their excuse was that the students were obstructing the university staff on their way to work. In reality, the researchers could reach their rooms without trouble; in fact, many of them supported the students' demands. When the local broadcaster AT5 was willing to give a platform for dialogue between the executive board and the students, the executive board refused. They went to court and on February 19th the judge ruled in a summary procedure that the occupiers had to leave, or would be fined €1,000 per day. The fines for the first days were paid by donations from sympathising organisations.

This conduct led to a hatred of the executive board, especially its chairman Louise Gunning, who has become a symbol of the arrogant, neoliberal and authoritarian way that the university is being managed. Incidentally she is also on the company board of Amsterdam Schiphol Airport, where the same management tactics and flexible contracts are used to exploit the workforce. The arrogance of Gunning and the board have even led many bourgeois commentators to criticise the way the conflict was handled, as the sympathy for the occupation was only growing. Support was given by the Socialist Party, trade unions representing the staff of various universities, the general education union and the main union federation FNV, as well as many student groups and professors. Solidarity also came from the airport workers of Schiphol Airport, who have also experienced Gunning's methods. Solidarity extended internationally as well, with the famous left-wing professors Noam Chomsky and Judith Butler declaring their support, as well as student organisations in other countries, and even the Turkish metalworkers' union Birlesik Metal-Is.

The mayor of Amsterdam tried to mediate, but as the talks failed the building was evicted on February 24th by the police, with a crowd outside in solidarity blocking the road to delay the police reinforcements. In total, 47 students were arrested, and were cheered as heroes as they were put into police vans. The Bungehuis was evicted, but the movement was far from finished.

### **Occupation of the Maagdenhuis**

The eviction of the Bungehuis did not administratively solve the problem for the UvA executive board. On the contrary, it only reinforced the image of an undemocratic, outdated executive board, which does not care about its students. The next day, a solidarity demonstration was called, with about a thousand students and sympathisers attending. The demonstration through the centre of Amsterdam ended in front of the Maagdenhuis, the building where the UvA executive board is located. This is a historical location. In 1969 it was occupied for four days by the student movement, which in fact also demanded more democratisation and participation of the students in the executive board. Since then this building has been occupied shortly for a few times, in order to protest against policies from the executive board or the national government.

As the demonstration reached the Maagdenhuis, and nobody from the executive board was even willing to show their faces, there came increasing calls from the crowd to occupy the Maagdenhuis. The mood was really in favour. At every student demonstration that ends in front of the building, or passes along it, one usually finds a small group of radicals that try to persuade others to occupy the building. These attempts normally fail, as these small groups do not connect to the mood. However, this time the mood was different. At a certain moment people started to climb the steps of the building and shouting slogans, which was well received by the

rest. The security guards tried to block it, but were forced to let more and more people on the stairs. After a while, the crowd forced their way in and the guards were powerless. The police outside could not intervene as well, so they had to accept it. The local broadcaster AT5 went along inside, and the first general assembly of the occupying students could be followed through alive online stream.

The Maagdenhuis was visited soon by Louise Gunning. Her message was that dialogue was possible, but only if the students immediately leave her building. This tactic was used before with regard to the Bungehuis and immediately was rejected. Of course the students were in for dialogue with the executive board, but only in the Maagdenhuis itself. She also said that the students should go to the ministry of education in The Hague, as it was them who were behind all the problems. While it is certainly true that the national government is responsible for the framework in which all these problems arise and the battle is a national one, it was the UvA executive itself which was responsible for most of the worst policies. When a student asked Gunning if they could count on her support if they went to The Hague, she refused to answer that question and it was clear that she was playing games with the students. After the rejection by the students of her plans, the UvA executive sued the students again.

Meanwhile the Maagdenhuis is run like the Bungehuis before, with many discussions, workshops, film screenings, and talks with public figures who sympathise with the students. The comedian Freek de Jonge, who was present at the original occupation in 1969, visited the building, and also Emile Roemer, leader of the Socialist Party in the parliament. This all makes it harder to portray the students as a small group of violent radicals who use force to push their will on the majority. In fact, the opposite is the case and the occupation has been peaceful. For example, at the general assembly it was decided that the security guards were permitted to stay in the building, that they were free to take whatever they wanted from the food and drink donations, and that they even could participate in the assembly if they wanted.

The latest developments are that the university executive has offered the students a concession, in the form of one student representative at the board. This was rightly rejected, as the representative would only have a minimal amount of decision power as a minority, and the executive would try to frame him or her as a “partner” in the decision-making process.

Instead of giving in, the right step has been taken to extend this struggle to the national plane. On Sunday 1st March, the Maagdenhuis has been visited by representatives and groups from other universities, to hold a national assembly about extending the movement nationwide. As it is unsure how long the building will be occupied, this was the right step to make.

### **The struggle has only just begun**

The occupations in Amsterdam have put the problems of the students in the spotlights. It's now time to bring this movement on a national level. An initiative similar to the Humanities Rally has been started in Rotterdam, and New University branches have been set up at the VU University (the other university in Amsterdam) and the university of Groningen (RUG). The conference on 1st March has been a big step forward as well, as it was attended by students from Groningen, Nijmegen, Leiden, Rotterdam, Maastricht, Wageningen, Utrecht and Delft who share the positions of the New University. Further branches have been set up now in Leiden and Maastricht. Professors from the two universities in Amsterdam will meet with trade union representatives this coming Thursday, to discuss strike actions against the flexible contracts.

It is clear from all this that the struggle has only just begun. The consciousness of an important layer of students and professors has leaped forward. The demands of the movement are on a high level. Its orientation towards a collaboration with the labour movement is very positive. In fact these student struggles could have an electrifying effect on the broader labour movement itself too, as the trade union leadership in the last months has carefully expressed that it would be necessary to have a more confrontational approach towards the bosses and the government, after years of holding back the movement according to a social agreement with

the bosses.

The official student unions have played a shameful role, tail-ending the movement. In recent years, the national student union LSVB has played the role of a consultative partner of the government and the political parties, always trying to seek allies in certain political parties, MPs or senate members in order to make backroom deals or block proposals, instead of mobilising the students and seeking allies in the labour movement. In 2011, when students mobilised against a plan to give €3,000 penalties for students that studied too long, the student union gave students the illusion that liberal party D66 was their ally, while the party only wanted to reject this plan in order to implement other cuts in student funding. When this austerity plan finally was abolished as result of a deal between the government and centre-left opposition parties, it was only the case in order to pass a different reform in which the student grants would be replaced by loans. The friends of the students, D66, GreenLeft and the Labour Party, all agreed with this. The LSVB mobilised the students only in late 2014, after the proposal had passed parliament, through a top-down last-minute call to action without mobilisations from below. Instead of the union raising the level of the students, the students had to find out themselves the hard way how they were being betrayed by their friends. The bottom-up mobilisations of the Humanities Rally and New University are a big step forward in comparison with how the national demonstrations against cuts in higher education from the government have been mobilised. It is now necessary to bring these methods of mobilisation to a national level.

### **Perspectives**

The increasing encroachment of capitalist management techniques into higher education is no accident. Neither is it simply the result of neoliberal ideology being dominant. These management techniques represent an increased effort to adapt as many students possible to the whims of the free market. The current crisis of Dutch capitalism has meant that the government and big business have been seeking to adjust the output of universities to the demands of the labour market. Although youth unemployment is about 15% now, some high tech industries are short of personnel. The result is that universities and government allocate more money for certain profitable studies, while the unprofitable ones need to fuse in order to survive. Meanwhile, through the replacement of the student grants by a national loan system, the government seeks to discourage young people from picking studies with less job opportunities, an austerity measure that especially hits the working class and lower middle class students. This shows that the efficiency-based management techniques and the national austerity measures are two sides of the same coin. While the New University focuses on democratic control and the fight against capitalist management, there should be discussions about broadening the movement by including demands like the abolishment of tuition fees and the loan system.

What we are witnessing is a reawakening of the student movement. The calls to end capitalist management and install democratic control are important demands. The solidarity from the university personnel and the orientation towards seeking an alliance with the labour movement, are important steps forward. In fact, this is quite different from 1969, when there was a mood of hostility towards the professors, who were generally conservative and would never view themselves as part of the labour movement. Now it is clear, with all the flexible contracts, that they are part of the working class and suffering from the same exploitation as other workers. If they go on strike, this could be the beginning of a new wave of labour struggles as well.

It's time to continue the struggle by linking it with general student issues like the abolishment of tuition fees and the loan system. As Socialist Party leader Emile Roemer correctly said, this struggle for more democratic control should not be limited to the universities, but should take place at all layers of society. However, real democratic control is not simply a matter of electoral mechanisms. It can only be genuinely possible when the capitalist class loses its control over the economy and the state. In that sense, the struggle for a democratic university can only be part of a broader struggle, the struggle for a democratic socialist society.

For democratic university boards elected by students and university personnel, and subject to recall  
Stop the capitalist management techniques at the universities  
Big business out of the university  
End casualisation: all personnel on “flexible” contracts to be hired on permanent contracts  
For a free and public education: end cuts in higher education, abolish tuition fees  
Spread the movement to all universities and schools: for a national democratic coordinating committee of delegates (subject to recall) elected from schools and faculties assemblies  
No to fines and victimisation  
Students and workers unite!  
[www.marxist.com](http://www.marxist.com)

## Boris Nemtsov - a symbol of the Right

Artem Kirpichenok 2 March 2015



Mainstream media have presented Boris Nemtsov as an anti-Putin “liberal” oppositionist. In reality he was part of the oligarchy that began to emerge after the collapse of the Soviet Union, but had fallen out of grace with the main clique that took over. Here Artem Kirpichenok in St. Petersburg gives a very different point of view from within Russia.

Boris Nemtsov with former president Boris Yeltsin  
After a twenty year delay Boris Nemtsov’s fate finally caught up with him. A gang of hit men, a cold body lying on the ground, a screaming mistress and investigators frantically working in the rain: in the “free” nineties this kind of scene was a common sight in most Russian cities.

Back then, the new so-called “democratic” elite was struggling for power, and to get their hands on other people’s property and well-paid positions. It did not do so through the denunciation of rivals to the NKVD, but by using bombs, sniper rifles and poison. Boris Nemtsov was able to avoid assassins’ bullets back then. It was only last night that he was gunned down by hit men, in year fifteen of Putin’s “stability”.

Undoubtedly, Boris Nemtsov was one of the symbols of the Yeltsin period. As a very young man he had an impressive career - from Boris Yeltsin’s advisor to Governor of the Nizhniy Novgorod region. In 1997 Nemtsov became Deputy Prime Minister. Using what modest forces and talents he possessed, he did all he could to build the “New Russia” that we know today out of the rubble of the USSR.

Sergei Borisov, researcher and author of an article titled “The current political regime in the Nizhniy Novgorod region: The making of the 1990s”, writes that an “informal alliance of the most influential, elite-generating corporations” had been forming around Nemtsov, made up the executive and legislative branches of government, local “siloviki” [representatives of police, state security and military forces], entrepreneurs and mass media owners.

In the opinion of sociologist Alexander Prudnikov, models of management and government promoted by Nemtsov represented a “technology of testing new elements of controlled democracy”. Subsequently this experience of the neoliberal “controlled democracy” was transferred from the Nizhniy Novgorod “test site” to Russia in its entirety.

Effectively, the foundations of the new Russian economy were being laid in Boris Nemtsov’s Nizhniy Novgorod. In those years, the press widely circulated reports about the governor’s relations with criminal boss Andrei Klimentyev; about the Bank of New York funds that mysteriously disappeared in Nizhniy Novgorod; and about Nemtsov’s long friendship with businessman and bureaucrat Boris Brevnov, who helped to destroy and sell off the Balakhninsk paper mill for a rock bottom price.

However, it must be noted that back then the “free” mass media were relatively unconcerned with such methods of business management. The

“democratic public” insisted that “state property is nobody’s property”, and that theft was necessary for the primitive accumulation of capital and the achievement of the glorious market-oriented future. At that time, the “crooks and thieves” [a common derogatory name given to Putin and his party by the opposition] were very much in favour of their current critics.

Holding a portfolio in the Russian government was the highest point in Nemtsov’s career. Boris Yeltsin himself, either jokingly or while drunk, spoke of his intention to make his namesake, Boris the Second, an heir to his tsarist crown. But it was quickly discovered that the crown was a little bit too big for him.

Nemtsov’s brief but scandalous stay in the Kremlin was characterised by the embezzlement of public funds from the OAO Unified Energy System of Russia; dilettantism; and laughable initiatives like the attempt to make civil servants use only automobiles produced in Russia.

On 26 December 1997, the Duma issued a statement describing Nemtsov as an irresponsible and poorly qualified politician, and advised Yeltsin to relieve him of his position. The president himself also understood that Nemtsov was not able to spread the authoritarian model he had created in the Nizhniy Novgorod region to the rest of Russia. This had to be done by a completely different person, who appeared in the political arena soon thereafter.

In 1999 Nemtsov stated: “For right-wing forces Putin is a fully acceptable figure. He is a hard-working, experienced and intelligent person, approximately on the level of Stepashin”. The former Nizhniy Novgorod governor repeated similar sentiments later again and again, claiming that Vladimir Vladimirovich [Putin] was the “most worthy out of all presidential candidates”.

As we know today, Boris Yefimovich [Nemtsov] committed a fatal mistake back then. A barely competent politician on a regional scale, without any connection to Putin’s St. Petersburg clique, had turned out to be of no use to the new authorities. After the defeat of the “Union of Right Forces” [Nemtsov’s right-wing neoliberal party] in the 2003 Duma elections, Nemtsov found himself left outside the official political field and started to play a role as one of the leaders of extra-parliamentary opposition. Owing to his former governorship and position of deputy PM, he became “the first in the village” of the liberal opposition, and began to be presented as a distinguished “advocate of democracy” and “fighter against corruption”.

The liberal public loved Boris Yefimovich [Nemtsov], seeing an image of a forever-new Russian politician in him. Unlike the former party bureaucrats with their dull drunken orgies in closed private dachas, Nemtsov was never too shy to demonstrate to the impoverished country that nothing that is human was alien to him. Father to all of his secretaries’ children and fond of orgies with elite prostitutes in Dubai, Boris Yefimovich could just take off to Davos using the funds of some Western company he had “helped” by privatising some valuable piece of state property. Even in his last hours he was accompanied by a 23-year old model.

Clearly vatniks and Soviets [derogatory terms used by Russian liberals to describe ordinary working class people who look back to the social gains of the old “Soviet era”, and who reject liberal ideology and who may presently have some illusions in Putin] were in no position to appreciate Nemtsov’s style. They did not hide their hatred towards this Russian Rafferty. Actually, even many of his liberal associates believed that the former governor was not at all beneficial for the Russian “opposition”, but rather discredited it with his past exploits and his visits to strip clubs. But after Friday night this is all in the past.

In the 1990s millions of ordinary working Russians passionately wished for Nemtsov, Chubais and Gaidar to meet their bullet or their noose somewhere by the Lobnoye Mesto, next to the Kremlin Wall. In the case of Nemtso, this wish has only now been realised. But in this death there is neither justice nor redemption. On the contrary, even with his violent death Boris Yefimovich managed to cause great harm to the country he lived in. Nemtsov’s assassination will inevitably lead to serious negative

consequences - a toughening of the Putin regime; an increase in activity by the liberal opposition, which now has its own Gongadze [Ukrainian journalist assassinated in 2000]; and a sharp deterioration of relations with the EU and the US.

And for all these “Games of Thrones” to which the prince of the Russian liberal elites - Boris the Second who never was - fell victim, it is the Russian workers who will be made to pay.

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## China's NPC meets with the super-rich in the spotlight

### More than a third of China's top 100 billionaires sit in the national 'parliament'

David Hundorf (China Worker) 3 March 2015

China's ornamental 'parliament' the National People's Congress (NPC) opens its annual session on Thursday in Beijing. The meeting will be followed assiduously by global media for signals about future economic policy as the world's second largest economy slows down amid mounting debt problems and industrial overcapacity. Rather than real debates and deliberations, the NPC and its 'twin' chamber the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) will merely rubber stamp decisions already thrashed out in the inner circles of the 'Communist' (CCP) dictatorship.

Nevertheless, as in previous years much attention will rightly focus on the participation of the country's financial elite at this year's gatherings. The Shanghai-based Hurun Report which monitors the fortunes of China's elite says that this year a record 203 of the 1,271 wealthiest Chinese - one in seven - are delegates to the NPC or its sister body. This tally includes five of China's 10 richest billionaires. As the Japan Times points out their presence at the annual meetings highlights, “the influence of the country's mega-rich”.

### Makes US government “look like paupers”

The fantastically wealthy five are drinks tycoon Zong Qinghou who is ranked third in China's billionaire listings, fifth-placed Pony Ma of Internet giant Tencent, and tenth-placed Lei Jun who heads mobile phone maker Xiaomi. The aforementioned are all NPC delegates. In the CPPCC sits solar energy tycoon Li Hejun, now ranked by Hurun as China's richest man, and sixth-placed Robin Li who owns internet company Baidu.

If a similar phenomenon was to be replicated in the United States it would mean billionaires Bill Gates, Larry Ellison, the Walton siblings (of Walmart) and Michael Bloomberg all sitting in Congress. But in the older capitalist 'democracies' the capitalist class generally prefer to rule more discreetly, behind a façade of well-bribed and 'lobbied' elected representatives of 'the people'. China's congressmen, without the fear of losing elections, make their American counterparts “look like paupers” noted Bloomberg News in a 2012 report. At that time, the net worth of the 70 richest NPC-CPPCC delegates was estimated at 565.8 billion yuan (US\$90 billion), which dwarfed the US\$7.5 billion net worth of all 660 top officials in the three branches of the US government.

### Wealth more than doubled

On the eve of this year's twin meetings, the Jilin-based New Culture newspaper reports that 15 of China's 100 richest people are NPC delegates and 21 sit in the CPPCC. The combined assets of these 36 individuals are around 1.2 trillion yuan (US\$191 billion) - more than Vietnam's GDP. By comparing these figures we can see how the billionaire elite in China have benefited from the pro-capitalist policies of CCP ruler Xi Jinping - more than doubling their fortunes in just four years:

■2012: Wealthiest 70 NPC-CPPCC members reported to be worth 565.8 billion yuan.

■2015: Wealthiest 36 NPC-CPPCC members reported to be worth 1.2 trillion yuan.

“Capitalists and landowners were persecuted in the early days of the Peoples’ Republic of China, with entrepreneurs only officially allowed to join the Communist Party during the 1990s leadership of Jiang Zemin,” noted the Japan Times.

Today, the billionaire-dominated CCP rules over one of the most unequal societies on the planet. The extreme wealth gap has become a major source of discontent which can cause political tremors in the period ahead.

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## South Africa’s Austerity Meets Opposition

Patrick Bond 3 March 2015



Twenty-five years ago this month, Nelson Mandela was freed from jail. But his party, the African National Congress (ANC), is having a miserable time. On February 12, President Jacob Zuma’s State of the Nation address was heckled - “Pay back the money”, referring to state subsidies to his rural mansion - by the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) opposition party. In the melee, police goons broke the jaw of one EFF member of parliament.

This week Finance Minister Nhlanhla Nene gave his maiden Budget Speech, bending over to demands by big business, bank economists and the ultra-rich. That meant ignoring anguished calls of poor and working-class people and those seeking ecological sanity, even though around 3000 angry leftist protesters from the new United Front marched to parliament against him.

The day before, Environment Minister Edna Molewa agreed to allow the country’s 120 worst polluters another five years grace period to comply with long-standing air quality legislation. This reversal on her promise to enforce the law six months ago left climate activists furious, for not only will SO<sub>2</sub> and toxins continue to soil the local air, but there is now far less chance of also cutting co-pollutants CO<sub>2</sub> and methane from the same firms.

According to Nomcebo Makhubelo, spokesperson for the Highveld Environmental Justice Network and Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance, “Not only has Eskom been granted postponements, but so has the largest [single point source] emitter of carbon dioxide in the country, Sasol.” The firm’s Secunda operation squeezes coal and gas to make liquid fuel, originally a technology developed in Nazi German and then by the apartheid regime to bust sanctions.

It is yet another instance of Molewa rolling-back what had once been impressive-sounding environmental regulations; instead, fast-track infrastructure legislation now trumps ecological values. Any pretence of Molewa addressing GreenHouse Gas emissions is now conclusively over, in the wake of last year’s attempts to justify her budget cuts in climate programming (including rudimentary emissions measurement).

Meanwhile, activists on the ecology, freedom-of-expression, Palestinian solidarity and internationalism beats were appalled when hundreds of revealing “Spy Cables” (leaked to Al Jazeera) blew wide credibility holes in South Africa’s State Security Agency and its allies. The whistle-blow, as devastating here as were Chelsea Manning’s and Edward Snowden’s, proves conclusively how Washington, London and Tel Aviv yank Pretoria’s chain from one direction, and Moscow and Beijing from another.

We’ve known of the relay between the imperial-subimperial capitals. But the week prior to Israeli Apartheid Week beginning in our major cities, revelations of Mossad’s brutal toying with the South African state and arms manufacturers stunned the society. In one illustrative case, Mossad allegedly threatened a cyber attack against South Africa if the government did not shut down an energetic Boycott Divestment Sanctions campaign.

But even greater danger to South Africa lurks in the form of an inevitable mugging by banksters. As Budget Day dawned on February 25, ratings agencies Moody’s, Standard & Poors and Fitch mulled over a downgrade to

junk status. On Business Day's front page, leading economist Iraj Abedian asserted that Nene would only satisfy the agencies by cutting civil service salaries and, for social grants, ensuring any increases came in "way below inflation."

Nene followed that advice, announcing "consolidation of government personnel numbers" and substantial cuts to the real social wage. The child grant was up a nominal 4.8% from 2014's average monthly \$27; the old age and disability grant rose 4.4% from last year's \$117; and the foster care grant increases just 3.6% from \$72. But inflation recorded last month for the lowest fifth of South Africans was 5.6% (and for all of us just 4.4%), as a result of the downward spike in petrol prices which probably won't continue. If instead you use 2014 average inflation of 6.1% and lower-end inflation above 7%, then indeed Abedian can celebrate that poor people took a whack, with Nene's grant increases "way below inflation."

As for the bloated bureaucracy, Nene is chopping the wrong part, according to the secretary of new left movement the United Front, Mazibuko Jara: "Previously frozen posts of teachers, health-care workers, technicians, etc. have now been done away with. This will seriously undermine the delivery of basic and essential services such as water, sanitation and electricity." There was also not a cent in the budget for a National Health Insurance program promised since 2007.

This is disastrous for the poor majority. Although one may debate World Bank staff about their dubious 2014 claim that South Africa's world-leading inequality has shrunk substantially thanks to state social spending, at least Bank staff say that cuts to social grants should be avoided. Yet they certainly helped create the austerity mood. A Moneyweb article last month was headlined, "A fiscal tightrope: World Bank warns South Africa to cut spending."

On the other hand, for the first time since 1995, a finance minister imposed a 1% personal income tax rise on those of us in the middle- and upper-classes (with above a \$1300 monthly income). Still, it's so minimal as to be mostly brushed off - aside from those suffering over-indebtedness to the point of "credit impairment," i.e., nearly half the borrowing population, according to Nene and the National Credit Regulator.

There appears no serious relief on that front, for Nene merely endorsed a process already underway in which, no thanks to a deregulatory Treasury which slept while unsecured loans soared, debtors are finally beginning to contest widespread abuse of "emolument attachment orders" (also called garnishee or stop-order payments).

But as US interest rates begin to rise in coming months, South Africa won't be far behind, given how vulnerable we are to capital outflows, in turn thanks to Treasury's steady exchange control liberalisation. That process began in earnest exactly 20 years ago when the early controls (the finrand) were abolished, akin to a ruptured economic condom, resulting in unsafe international financial intercourse.

Since then, the largest corporations and richest individuals have moved vast shares of national wealth abroad. Examples include Lonmin's Bermuda platinum marketing scam and De Beers' missing diamond invoices of \$2.6 billion from 2004-12.

Big corporations also celebrated the reduction of top primary tax rates from 48% in 1994 to 28% five years later. These were not touched in Nene's 2015 budget because so many other countries' corporate taxes were also ratcheted down to such low levels during the neoliberal era.

Nene is apparently deterred from hiking corporate taxes thanks to our excessive reliance on foreign capital inflows. That vulnerability is reflected in our foreign debt, which has doubled to \$140 billion since 2009 in large part so as to pay for profit outflows. Exchange controls could halt the rot but would alienate Nene's banker mates.

Meanwhile, Nene at his most benevolent permits the stampede of White Elephant infrastructure projects across the landscape to continue unimpeded by austerity barriers. Claims about the developmental state

were made in Parliament last week, mostly on behalf of coal mining house Exxaro, by Minister of Economic Development Ebrahim Patel. He's best remembered for arranging sunshiney eNews coverage for Zuma just prior to the 2014 election: hyping mega-projects in exchange for apparent regulatory favours.

Patel's first Strategic Investment Project is already sinking what will be tens of billions of dollars into climate-frying subsidies to lubricate coal exports via rail to the port of Richards Bay, which boasts the world's single largest coal export terminal.

Uh oh: China shrunk its demand for thermal coal imports 5% last year and the price crashed from \$140/tonne in 2011 to what Citigroup estimates will be just \$55/tonne this year. The state agency Transnet apparently didn't get the news, so in 2013 borrowed \$5 billion from the Chinese government to buy mainly Chinese-built locomotives for the Richards Bay run.

The single biggest White Elephant in terms of a site-specific project on Transnet's agenda remains the proposed South Durban "Dig Out Port": \$25 billion. Last week, international shipping consultant Jamie Simpson, invited by the municipality to keynote a packed workshop, recommended it be suspended indefinitely because of weak demand.

Transnet's group strategy general manager Irvindra Naidoo was furious. But he also confirmed that there's no serious "road-to-rail" planning underway for the millions of containers now on dangerous trucks leaving the Durban harbour - again thanks to the 1990s' deregulatory spirit that has left so much Transnet capacity idle.

The three languishing mega-power plant projects - Medupi, Kusile and Ingula - that Eskom cannot quite bring to fruition illustrate the risk of Patel's expensive obeisance to the Minerals-Energy Complex. Repaying the World Bank its \$3.75 billion for its largest-ever loan - mostly for Medupi, already five years late - should be rethought given lender liability on manifestly corrupt project. To his credit, Nene at least avoided any obvious commitment to the \$100 billion worth of dubious nuclear energy reactors likely to be bought from Russia, though he did endorse fracking.

Nevertheless, here in Durban, we continue to be trampled by White Elephant infrastructure. What with the cost of Transnet's explosive Durban-Johannesburg "pipeline to hell" replacement soaring from \$565 million in 2006 to \$2.09 billion today and still not complete; the \$1 billion farcically below-capacity King Shaka "aerotropolis"; two mostly empty world-class sports stadiums that even World Cup 2010 local organiser Danny Jordaan apologised for (amidst reports this week of a \$550 billion 2022 Commonwealth Games bid so reminiscent of Fifa follies); and ongoing municipal subsidies to the continent's largest convention centre.

Nationally, Treasury sloth is exemplified by Nene's gift of \$2 billion to Eskom, urgently required to buy diesel fuel so as to generate electricity costing \$0.26 kWh; yet 5% of the grid feeds BHP Billiton's smelters, for which they pay just \$0.01 kWh.

The new StatsSA report recalculates a basic basket of food and essential services and puts our poverty rate at 54% of society, not 46% as the state previously claimed. Contrary to the banker buzz, South Africa's state social spending is extremely low: just half what Brazil spends in relation to the size of the economy. On that standard measure, we're actually fifth from the bottom of the top 40 economies, even though our inequality is by far the highest, and getting worse.

Still more troubling, Treasury plans to steadily cut the size of welfare grant expenditure from 3% of GDP to 2.3% by 2040. At such low levels, these social policies are, like free basic electricity of just 50 kWh per household each month, best considered tokenistic.

In stark contrast, the top ten South Africans alone have shareholdings worth a conservatively estimated \$18 billion. In addition, 58 South Africans - including notorious arms deal advisor Fana Hlongwane - enjoy overseas Swiss bank accounts worth \$2 billion in HSBC, just one of the many Zurich

banks known for looting Africa.

With Nene following bankers' advice to squeeze the poor instead of demanding the rich "Pay back the money," more economic stresses down below will result, followed by more protests. In his meant-to-be-soothing State of the Nation address, Zuma confessed that last year, police counted a record 1907 violent protests (while activists say intolerant cops initiate violence, not them).

No surprise, then, that the police force got a major budget boost. But is this really the right moment for Nene to cut \$139 million in 2015-17 funding for municipal water supplies, urban settlements and rural household infrastructure?

Best known for his 25-second Youtube fall from grace in 2008, Nene may now be setting the stage for a more profound political crash. At some point these protests may aggregate into something akin to the Tunisian uprising which, at least temporarily, kicked out an unaccountable ruling clique and their crony-capitalist and unreformable-IMF allies. Local commentator Moeletsi Mbeki once projected that South Africa's "Tunisia Day" will come in 2020; but Nene appears to be speeding up that process: whacking the poor and instead allying so very closely to bankers and the unpatriotic bourgeoisie.

>[www.telesur.tv.net](http://www.telesur.tv.net)

*(Patrick Bond directs the University of KwaZulu-Natal Centre for Civil Society.)*

**isizuluUNene angakhetha: "Ukuthi kukhokhwe imali" noma acindezele abampofu**

NguPatrick Bond Yahunyushwa nguFaith ka-Manzi

Ngabe ungqongqoshe wezezimali waseNingizimu Afrika uzozibhekelela yini izikhalo zabampofu kanye nabasebenzi kanye nalabo abafuna umqondo ophusile mayelana nezemvelo, esikhundleni sokubhekelela izimfundo zabahwebi, amabhange kanye nabadla izambane likapondo?

Laba abangasemuva bakhulumela ukuncishwa kokusetshenziswa kwezimali - ukunqunywa kwebhajethi okunomsindo kakhulu kunalokho okwake kwazwakala ngaphambilini. Kulamasonto abalwa, amazwi amahwebi, abanikazi bamabhange kanye nabacwaningi beBhange Lomhlaba bathi uhulumeni vele unomlando oqgamile wokwazi ukusabalalisa izimali.

Kodwa bayayiziba eyokuxhasa kwePitoli noma kungaqondile ngqo kwizimbongi ngokwakhiwa kwezizinda ezidla imali eshisiwe, njengazizinda ezilokhu zithatha isikhathi ezintathu zokuphelela amandla kagesi zikaEskom - amandla amaningi kagesi eziwathola ngamanani ancishisiwe eya kwizimbongi zezokumbiwa phansi kanye nezokuncibilikisa - namo Kwichweba elimbiwayo leTransnet eliseThekwini kanye nesimo sezulu - imizila yesitimela eshisayo ihambisa malahle athuthelwa emazweni angphandle esuka eRichards Bay, okubiza izigidigidi ezingaphezulu kwamakhulua mathathu zamadola. Okubi kakhulu, okuzofanele kuchibiyelwe ngoR1 trillion ukwenza kwamandla kagesi akhiwe ngenuclear eyenziwe ezweni laseRussisa?

Ukugcwala kwezizinda esingangenisi mali lapha eThekwini, njengoba futhi kwaqhuma ipayipi lamafutha laseTransnet ukulungiswa kwalo okudla imali ebikade ingu6 wezigidigidi zamarandi osekufinyelela ku24 wezigidigidi zamarandi; okuyizigidigidi ezngu9 ngophansi kwemali okwakhiwa ngayo isikhumulo sezindiza iKing Shaka; izinkudla ezihlale zinganabantu zemidlalo ezisezingeni lomhlaba; kanye nokuqhubeka kukamasipala ukuthi elokhu exhasa iICC kanye nenkundla yamanzi esePoint.

"Ukuthi akukhokhwe imali" akufanele-nje kube ngokubhekiswa kumongamelo, kodwa abakhokhi bentela kufanele bakhulumele ukunikezwa kwamathenda ezimbongi zokwakha okunenkokhlakalo kanye nabezombusazwe abanokumosha.

Esikhundleni, amnikazi bamabhange basabisa ngokwehlisa amazing okubhekelela izizinda. Bafuna kuxhaswe kakhulu izizinda zezimbongi, futhi bathi uNene angake alinge-nje nyuse imali yokubhekelele abampofu,

phezu kokuba umbiko weStasSA othi, emva kokuba kabusha mayelana nebhasikidi wokudla kanye nezizinda ezibalulekile, ubek ubuphofu bakuleli kwizinga elingi54 emiphakathini, hayi u46 njengoba umbuso wawukade umemezele. Ezinye izibonelo:

- Umphathi weBrandSouthAfrica uSimon Barber kwiphephabhuku iForeign Policy: “Izikeleto zikahulumeni, ezisondelene nalezo zokuphela kombuso wobandlululo, azikwazi ukumelwa. Uma lokhu kuqhubeka, kuzofanele kukhethwe mayelana nokwandiswa kwezobudlelwane nobhululu besombusazwe evikela abangu16 wezigidi nangaphezulu kwalokho baseNingizimu Afrika futhi okwenza ukutshalwa kwezimali kudingeke ukuqhelisa okuvimbela lokhu okudingeka ngaphezu kwakho konke, ukukhula.”

- Uchwepheshe wezomnotho osesikhundleni esiphakeme eInvestec uBrian Kantor uthi: “ukukhokhiswa mazinga makhulu entela kulabo abahola kakhulu kuzozuzisa okuncane ngendlela yokuqoqa; kodwa okubalulekile kakhulu kuyobe kubukela phansi izindlela zokuthi labo abahola kakhulu balethe intela engaphezulu.”

- UJonathan Katzenellenbogen ePoliticsWeb wathi: “umbiko weBhange Lomhlaba uxwayise ukuthi uhulumeni akasenayo imali yokwandisa imali yesibonelo...ngenxa yokuthi inkulu imali uhulumeni ayisebenzisa kunezikweletu.”

- Udaba lweMoneyweb ngenyanga edlule lalinalemibhalo egqamile, “Ukuhamba ngomugqa wokusebenzisa imali ngaphezulu kwesikweletu: iBhange lomhlaba liqwashisa iNingizimu Afrika inqamule ukusebenzisa izimali.”

- UGoolam waseStandard Bank wabhala ngesonto eledlule wathi uNene “kufanele azenze onesibindi” ehlise amaholo ezisebenzi zombuso, anyuse iValue Added Tax - okuyokuba buhlungu kakhulu kwabampofu kunabacebile, ngokufanayo - bese exhasa izakhiwo zezimboniT.

Ngokungahambisani namahlebezi, ukusetshenziswa kwezimali ngezenhlalakahle okwenziwa yiNingizimu Afrika kuphansi kakhulu; ingxenye kokwenziwa yizwe laseBrazil uma kubhekwana nobukhulu bezomnotho. Nokujwayelekile, empeleni singabesihlanu kusukela phansi emazweni angu40 kwiminotho ehamba phambili, ngokusho kweOECD, noma-ke ukungalingani kwethu kukukhukazi, futhi kulokhu kushuba kakhulu..

Izintela zezimboni zethu zehla kusukela kumaphesenti angu48 ngonyaka ka1994 kwafika ngaphansana kwaku30 namhlanje. Noma-ke kunentela yamanani phansi, izimboni ziyaqhubeka zixoshe amasebenzi okuphindaphinde kabili isibalo sabangasebenzi emva konyaka ka1994, futhi akukaze kwehle kakhulu kusukela ngalesosikhathi.

Futhi okukhathaza kakhulu, isekela lomqondisi jikelele weSikhwama Sombuso uMichael Sachs uhlela kancane kancane ukunquma ukusetshenziswa kwemali yezenhlalakahle kusukela kamaphesneti amathathu kwiGDP kuya kwangu2.3 ngonyaka ka2040, ngokusho kwakhe ngesikhathi ethukka inkulumo kwingxoxo yeBhange Lomhlaba ngenyanga kaLwezi ngonyaka odlule.

Leyomali ibivele yehla kusukela ngonyaka ka1994; isibonelelo sezingane ngamaphesenti angu40 ngaphansi kwalokho esasiyikhona ngesikhathi sikahulumeni wobandlululo owawusebenzisa amadola ukukala lokhu, kanye futhi lemigomo yezenhlalakahle, njengogesi wamahala ongamakWh angu50 umuzi ngomuzi njalo ngenyanga, ukuluthwa kwabantu.

Ngabe kukhona, esikhundleni, umcebo okungathathwa kuwona phezulu? Abaphezulu kakhulu lapha eNingizimu Afrika banemali ebalelwa kwizigidigidi zamarandi ezilinganiswa ku250. Ngaphezu kwalokho, abangu58 balapha eNingizimu Afrika - okumbandakanya nalowo owaduma kabi kakhulu oluleka ngokudayiswa ngezikhali uFana Hlongwane - unamaccount amazweni aphesheya ebhange laseSwiss imali ebalelwa kwizigidigidi ezingu23 eHSBC, elinye-nje lamabhange elaziwa kakhulu ngokuntshontsha izimali zaseAfrika kwenziwa namabusi ababusa ngendlovuyangena kanye namasela. Lelibhange ngesonto eledlule lazama ukuvimbela iphephandaba iSunday Times ukuthi ikhulume ngalolulwazi.

Kokubili ukwunyuswa kwezintela ‘kubanikazi bomhlaba abangenandaba

nalelizwe' kanye nokulawulwa kokuhamba kwezimali zakuleli ukubayekisa ukuhambisa izimali zakuleli ngokungemthetho iyona ndlela abayibona ingcono kunokwenyusa iVAT kanye nokwehlisa izimali zesibonelelo.

Umangabe uNene elandela ukuboniswa ngabanikazi bamabhange, zizogcwala izinkinga zezomnotho, futhi kube nezibhelu eziningi. Kwinkulumbo yakhe eyayibonakala sengathi ithoba izinhliziyi eKhuluma Nesizwe, uJacob Zuma wavuma ukuthi kwakunesibalo semibhikilishi engu1905 enodlame eqoshwe ngumbutho wamaphoyisa, kwengaphezulu kwengu13 000 kwezenzeke ngoyaka odlule.

Ngesinye isikhathi lokhu kungagcina sekufana nokwenzeka eTunisia ngo2011, okwaholela okugxoshweni kubabusi ababengabhekeleli abampofu kanye nobhululu babo. Okunye kwalokho kwakungukunyuka kweValue Added Tax owakunxenxwa yiInternational Monetary Fundngo010, kwathi ngokuphela konyaka lapho udayisi wasegaqweni osemncane, uMohamed Bouazizi, ezishisa emva kokuba inqola yakhe iginqwe ngamaphoyisa, lokhu kwaholela kunguvukelwa kombuso eNyakatho neAfrika.

Umbhali nomhlaziyi uMoleletsi Mbeki uthi "usuku lwaseTunisia" lwaseNingizimu Afrika luzofika ngo2020; kodwa uNene kungenzeka enze lusheshe kuleliso uma eba ngubhululu futhi ebhekelea anbanikazi bamabhange kanye nabanikazi baomhlaba banganandaba nalelizwe.

(UPatrick Bond ungumqondisi esikhungweni semfundo ephakeme eNyuvesi yaKwaZulu-Natal Centre for Civil Society.)

## Nemtsov's death: 'Putin is the last person to be interested'

Interview with Dmitry Babich, (RT.com) 28 February 2015



**Dmitry Babich:** It's clearly a huge tragedy. It's a very cruel murder. But certainly I would not say that Mr. Nemtsov was in any way a threat to President Putin. He had absolutely zero chances of winning any elections at least since the 1990s, when he had some electoral successes. So to say that Nemtsov was killed in order to influence Russian policy on Ukraine, I think it's clearly an exaggeration.

**RT:** And of course, the last person in the world who was interested in this murder is President Putin, because it's quite clear how this story is going to be spun by the Western media.

**DB:** In general I would say that, if you look at history, whenever there is a deterioration of relations between Russia and the West, opposition figures, sometimes liberal politicians, are murdered under mysterious circumstances. And all of them at a certain moment had connections with powerful oligarchs, like Mr. Berezovsky - who is now also dead - and others. And these are always shady stories. So it's a tragedy of the Russian liberal movement that almost all of its leaders die violent deaths under mysterious circumstances.

**RT:** So, what about the reaction to Nemtsov's death? What are people saying out there?

**DB:** Liberal opposition leaders, people like Alexei Kudrin (former finance minister) and Mikhail Kasyanov (former prime minister), they all say this is a tragedy for Russia, that he was a great politician. I wouldn't quite agree that he was a successful politician, at least during the last 15 years of his political activity. But certainly, his figure is connected to the 90s. And various people have various feelings about this period. It was the period of, I would say, political youth of Russia, when we first got a taste of democracy, and Mr. Nemtsov is associated in our memory with that time - which was difficult, but also interesting. So I don't think a lot of people consider Mr. Nemtsov a hero, but certainly everybody has been made very sad and angry by the cruelty of this murder.

**RT:** Another opposition figure, Mikhail Kasyanov, has said that he has no clue who could possibly want Nemtsov dead. What do you think the

possible motives could be? We know that he was an opposition figure, a popular opposition figure. What could these motives be? We don't want to get too far ahead of ourselves, and we know this is speculation.

**DB:** Well I agree with former Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov that it is very difficult to guess who would be interested in this murder. Certainly, I would repeat my thought that President Putin is the last person to be interested in this kind of development. Nemtsov was not only a critic of Putin; he insulted Putin many times - in public, in the mass media. He was an open political opponent of Putin, to put it mildly. So having that person killed right now, of course it's a huge gift to Putin-haters in the West, who will immediately start spinning the story the same way they spun the story of the murder of Anna Politkovskaya, or the murder of Sergei Yushchenkov...These terrible murders were always blamed by the mainstream media on President Putin, although absolutely no facts would support those theories.

**RT:** Moving on down the road, what possible implications could we be seeing of Nemtsov's murder for the Russian political arena?

**DB:** Well I think the main implications will be in the way the Western press will react to it, because I don't foresee any significant changes in the Russian political landscape. Since the 1990s, Nemtsov was not a successful politician. He was not particularly popular among the general public. Just about six months ago, he won a small regional election in Yaroslavl, became a deputy in the local legislature. Before that, for about 10 years, he could not win a single election. So, most of the implications will be in the media sphere, how the Western media will play this terrible tragedy, especially in the context of the war in Ukraine, which the Western media also blames on Putin and on Russia, I think quite unjustly.  
[newcoldwar.org](http://newcoldwar.org)

## Libya: War-torn country becoming new hub for IS activities

### Libyan people bearing the brunt of NATO's fiasco

Serge Jordan (CWI) 27 February 2015



On February 15, a Libyan group acting allegedly on behalf of the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS), released a gruesome video. It was of the beheading of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christian workers held hostage by them since last December. While some technical experts have since argued that parts of the video, such as the backdrop of the beach of the port city of Sirte where these beheadings appear to have been staged, have been faked, the fate of these workers is likely sealed. Recent events have in any case brought to light how the Libyan territory has become a new ground for the IS project of geographical expansion.

This video of the beheadings immediately provoked retaliations from Cairo's military regime. Egyptian fighter-jets launched a series of airstrikes in Darna, a city under effective IS control since last year. Despite official claims of targeting "training camps and weapons caches", seven innocent civilians were killed in heavily populated areas of the city during the course of the operation. Last Friday, a group of militants claiming loyalty to IS killed another 42 people in three suicide car bombings in Qubbah, a small mountain town in eastern Libya, in apparent response to the Egyptian air strikes. More Egyptians have also been taken hostage since. About 15,000 workers have reportedly fled Libya back to Egypt in the last couple of days, fearing further retribution.

This recent show of forces marks a new escalation in the violence which has gripped Libya in recent years.

### Egypt's role

The Egyptian rulers' pretext of avenging the blood of the Coptic workers killed by IS is farcical. For decades, the Coptic minority in Egypt has been enduring numerous abuses, repression and scapegoating by the ruling class. For all its posturing, the Egyptian state is also the custodian of the very economic system which pushes hundreds of thousands of Egyptians to try and escape poverty and unemployment by seeking jobs abroad. Despite

many leaving, it is estimated that over 700,000 Egyptian workers still currently live in Libya.

Many of them, coming from the poorest areas of Egypt, work in low-paid and precarious jobs to sustain their families back home, despite the appalling security conditions. As reported by Reuters: "In the Egyptian village of Al-Our, about 200 km (125 miles) south of Cairo, it is easy to see why young men take the risk. There are no paved roads, clean drinking water or adequate health care."

The military intervention of the Egyptian army on the Libyan battlefield is not new; the regime, in collaboration with the Emirati government, has carried out several airstrikes before. Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi seeks to export his battle between brutal dictatorship and religious extremism on to Libyan soil, to divert attention away from the growing crisis of his regime, and to whip up the fractured prestige of his army - responsible for mass murders, torture and other brutal methods of repression against political opponents. Sisi also hopes to use the airstrikes as a launch pad for installing a like-minded authoritarian regime on Egypt's western borders.

Egyptian generals, along with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, have thrown their weight behind Libyan General Khalifa Haftar, an ex-officer of Gaddafi's army. He broke with Gaddafi's regime at the end of the 1980s to defect to the United States, and has worked closely with the CIA ever since. Haftar is an aspiring dictator who thinks that an iron rule is the only way to sort out the country's problems. "Eliminating the Islamist threat", with whom he fought side-by-side during the war against Gaddafi, has become his new mantra.

Haftar's army, composed of many residues from the old regime's military, until now has been in a precarious alliance with the so-called 'official' government of Libya. This government, which has the blessing of Western imperialism, is now based in the Eastern city of Tobruk, close to the Egyptian border. It was thrown out of the capital Tripoli in August 2014 by Libya Dawn. This is a loose network of Islamist-leaning militias allied with brigades from the north-western city of Misrata and with officials of the former Parliament, the General National Congress.

Libya Dawn has since established a competing government and parliament with the backing of the Qatari and Turkish regimes, and is controlling Tripoli and a few chunks of the western side of the country.

In reality, both these 'governments' are barely able to impose much order beyond the cities where they are based. The country is breaking apart into an intricate patchwork of fiefs controlled by local militias, often based on tribal or regional affiliations, fighting for territories and influence.

The idea often propagated in the media of a battle between an 'Islamist' and a 'secular' government is over-simplistic. The Saudi and Emirati monarchies, who are backing the Tobruk-based government and General Haftar's campaign, are not models of secularism themselves. Libya has become the scene of a bloody battle between rival power centres backing competing militias, supported by various outside players using the country as a stage for a new version of the proxy wars engulfing the region. Oil wealth and weapons have become much more important bargaining chips for these militias and their political backers than principled considerations of any sort.

### **General Haftar**

For these reasons, shifts in existing loyalties are probable in what appears to be an extremely volatile situation. Among other things, tensions are developing between the weak, exiled rulers of Tobruk (so weak they had to retreat for a time to a Greek car ferry on the city's harbour!) and the would-be military strongman Haftar. Haftar is building support for military rule, boosted by Egypt's cash and weapons. He might aim to sideline his previous allies to impose a dictatorial statelet in the eastern part of the country, installing himself in power.

### **Another failed State**

In 2011, Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi warned that if toppled, he

would be replaced by “tribalism, Islamic extremism and anarchy”. This warning was thrown out as a threat against all those daring to challenge his regime, but succeeding developments have proved him right. Yet this was not inevitable. The lack of a viable left-wing alternative to Gaddafi’s rule allowed what was initially a popular uprising to be derailed. While signs of regionalisation and city-based differences in the protest movement existed from the start, in part inherited from Gaddafi’s divide-and-rule system of favours and retributions, the subsequent military intervention by the NATO powers paved the way for the colossal disaster that we are witnessing today.

Three years ago, the Obama administration and its French and British counterparts heralded the toppling of Gaddafi as a humanitarian triumph and a new model for Western intervention. NATO officials even declared that the mission in Libya had been “one of the most successful in NATO history.”

But as the CWI highlighted at the time, the NATO forces never intervened in Libya with the aim of coming to the rescue of the Libyan people. The aim was to turn the tide of the mass revolutionary uprisings which had started in Tunisia and Egypt and had caught them off guard, to sideline the most popular grassroots elements of the anti-Gaddafi rebellion, and to impose a regime more subservient to the interests of Western oil giants and multinational corporations. This was even though Gaddafi’s clique had cozied up to Western governments and to neo-liberal reforms in the last decade of his reign.

For this purpose, Western powers did not hesitate to provide training, weapons and money to notorious Al Qaeda-linked jihadists. Some of the most prominent trainers of rebel forces in 2011 included militants who had been imprisoned at Guantanamo. This included, as revealed by the New York Times back in April 2011, the notorious Abu Sufian Bin Qumu, a founding member of the Salafist militia Ansar al Sharia. This group is held responsible for the deadly attack on the US consulate in Benghazi in September 2012. Its Tunisian branch also organised the assassination of two prominent left-wing political leaders in 2013.

While the demise of Gaddafi was welcomed by significant layers of the Libyan population, this was done through a mass bombing campaign that caused large-scale civilian killings and destruction on the country’s infrastructure. It was also through the promotion of a myriad of unaccountable militias, of pro-imperialist “free market upstarts” keen to do business with the West, and of religious fundamentalists ready to use their newly acquired influence to bite the hand that had fed them before.

On the toppling of Gaddafi, the CWI commented in October 2011: “If this had been purely the result of struggle by the Libyan working masses it would have been widely acclaimed, but the direct involvement of imperialism casts a dark shadow over the revolution’s future”.

The CWI argued against those on the left such as the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty (AWL) or the so-called Marxist professor and USFI supporter Gilbert Achcar, who had stood in favour of imperialist intervention in Libya under the guise of preventing Gaddafi from committing atrocities against his own people. Figures from Claudia Gazzini, a journalist for the Middle East Research and Information Project, have exposed the fallacy of such arguments: “the death toll subsequent to the seven-month NATO intervention was at least ten times greater than the tally of those killed in the first few weeks of the conflict”.

Revealingly, the same “left interventionists” have since been totally oblivious to the horrors and sufferings generated by the policy they supported at the time, which has made life for ordinary Libyans far worse than what it was even under the tyranny of Gaddafi.

Libya has now become a source of instability for the whole region, a regional magnet for the training and harbouring of jihadist fighters, as well as a flourishing market for weapons, drugs and human trafficking. According to the UN, at least 400,000 people have been internally displaced by fighting across the country, with as many as 83,000 people living in camps, schools and abandoned buildings. Over a million Libyan

refugees have fled to Tunisia. Several reports indicate that the vast majority of the Libyan exiles who had returned after Gaddafi's fall have left as well.

The country is facing an unprecedented level of violence. Targeted assassinations and torture have become commonplace; migrant workers are subject to horrific abuse; and a lot of basic services are dysfunctional if they have not collapsed all together. "Your friends in Britain and France will stand with you as you build your democracy" were the words of British Prime Minister David Cameron as he visited Benghazi with ex-French President Nicolas Sarkozy in September 2011. Yet, all Western embassies in Libya have now packed up and gone, incapable of even guaranteeing the security of their own staff.

### **Islamic State**

Several armed radical Islamist factions in Libya have declared their recent allegiance to IS, as the latter has gained supporters in some key parts of the country. Religious fundamentalist groups admittedly existed in Libya prior to 2011, but their influence was relatively limited. Sectarian killings, such as perpetrated against the Egyptian Christian workers, is a recent phenomenon.

The calamitous state of the country, the free fall in living standards, the huge resentment against the actions of Western imperialism, and the massive amount of weaponry available in the country have all provided a breeding ground for IS-type jihadists. It is no accident that the coastal town of Sirte has arguably become a stronghold of IS militancy. The birthplace of Gaddafi and once a relatively prosperous city, Sirte has been reduced to ruins by intense NATO bombings.

### **Socialist programme needed**

Only formed by the Italian colonial power in 1934, Libya is facing the possibility of violent break-up. The toppling of Gaddafi has given birth to a multitude of little tyrants, mercenaries and warlords carving up the country. The added intervention of various foreign actors is exacerbating existing tensions and heightening the possibility for more bloodshed.

The Libyan people, the poor, the oppressed and the workers, need to build wherever possible independently-run organisations that can help them bring back on the agenda a collective struggle for their most vital and pressing needs. They will need to confront all those forces basing themselves upon any form of economic plundering, corruption and violent suppression of the people.

Such a struggle would need to be equipped with a programme standing for full and equal democratic and social rights for all, repudiating any form of discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, religion, tribe, regional or city affiliation.

The potential for ordinary people to challenge the rule of reactionary militias has been expressed on a number of occasions in the last period. The setting up of democratically organised, accountable and non-sectarian workers and poor people's defence committees in the neighbourhoods could assist in giving a more organised expression to this struggle, and in protecting communities from the rampaging violence from multiple sides which is ripping the country's apart.

The Libyan people need to be able to determine their own future. Any further meddling and military intervention by regional and western powers needs to be vigorously opposed. The drums for a new international military intervention have been beating from some European quarters -even though it is rather likely that Western governments will try to avoid a new military campaign in the country at this stage.

These powers have clearly demonstrated that they are no friends of ordinary Libyans. As revealed by the first wave of revolts and revolutions that swept through the Middle East and North Africa in early 2011, only in the masses of the working class, the youth and the oppressed of other countries will the Libyans find a genuine ally in their struggle for social and political change.

A “neat” military coup on a national scale is unlikely, seeing the state of erosion of the Libyan state machine. But a section of the military wing led by General Haftar and his clique could exploit the despair and the fear of jihadists among large sections of the Libyan population to try and impose some form of military rule in the eastern side of the country.

However, as shown by the growing violence in the Sinai Peninsula and other parts of Egypt, the butcher-like methods of repression of Sisi, that his henchman Haftar wants to emulate in Libya, will only lead to further terrorist blowbacks. This will not address any of the problems faced by the Libyan people.

Mass action from the grassroots is necessary to oppose jihadists’ atrocities, corrupt militias, military adventurers, and the broader, nightmarish scenario of a violent disintegration of the country.

Importantly, a struggle for decent jobs and better living standards, for adequate and functioning infrastructure and services needs to take centre stage, in order to cut across the social basis of support for religious extremism. Independent trade unions need to be built in the workplaces to defend migrant workers and all workers’ rights, to fight for better wages and working conditions. Such unions can play a pivotal role in resisting the spread of racism and religious sectarianism.

Eventually, the Libyan people should strive for a government based on representatives of workers and poor and all oppressed layers of society, elected via democratic structures in the workplaces and communities.

By refusing any deal with big business and any privatisation of Libyan assets, by bringing back under public ownership and democratic people’s control the massive gas and oil reserves and other resources, a plan could be outlined for rebuilding the country to offer a better future for all Libyans.

[www.socialistworld.net](http://www.socialistworld.net)

## Keep South Africa’s lights on with renewable energy

Patrick Bond, (Counterpunch )16 February 2015



After an explosive start to his State of the Nation Address last week, South Africa’s President Jacob Zuma turned to nuclear, coal, fracking and offshore drilling projects - but what about the country’s free sunshine, wind and tides?

Last Thursday night in Cape Town’s Parliament hall, South Africa’s newest and cheekiest political party, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), fought gamely but lost their two dozen seats for the evening. They were expelled during the State of the Nation speech when making what they termed a ‘point of order’: asking whether President Jacob Zuma would ‘pay back the money’ (about \$20 million) that the state illegitimately spent on upgrading his rural mansion. As police ushered them out with extreme force, seven were hospitalised, one with a broken jaw.

The society only saw the fracas on journalists’ cellphones later, because the SABC public broadcaster refused to screen the floor, panning only a small area where the Parliamentary leadership were gesticulating for police action. Showing surprising technical prowess but extremely weak political judgment, Zuma’s security officials had jammed cellphone and Wifi signals in the hall just before the event began, creating outrage by opposition Members of Parliament (MPs) and journalists alike. The centre-right Democratic Alliance then walked out in protest against armed police having cleared out the EFF MPs.

The dust settled 45 minutes later, with Zuma chortling and African National Congress (ANC) MPs cheering, and most observers sickened by the spectacle.

Still, much more important news would follow, though in the dull tone

that Zuma reserves for formal speeches. Given the country's fury at electricity load-shedding - near daily outages of 2-4 hours - many were relieved that a substantial 14% of Zuma's talk was dedicated to this theme: 'We are doing everything we can to resolve the energy challenge.'

Listen more closely, though. Aside from building three huge coal-fired power plants, two of which are mired in construction crises, the other long-term supply strategy, accounting for one in six of his words on energy, is nuclear. By 2030 a fleet of reactors is meant to provide 9600 MW. Today we have 42 000 MW installed, of which 39 000 comes from coal. But the economy uses just 30 000 at peak. What with so much capacity unavailable, load-shedding is set to continue for at least the next three years.

To truly 'resolve' not defer the challenge will require a huge roll-out of public investment. The \$2 billion Zuma promised the electricity parastatal Eskom on Thursday is only a fraction of the vast bills we can see on the horizon, including \$28 billion for just two of the three projected coal-fired stations, Medupi and Kusile. Together they will deliver 9600 MegaWatts capacity, which comes in at \$3 million/MW for construction only, i.e. not including ongoing costs of coal and maintenance, nor the vast environmental damage from these mega-projects' mega-pollution. Local water, land and air are being poisoned by coal, and climate change will be exacerbated by 30 million annual tonnes of CO2 emitted by each of the coal burners.

One reason for the high cost is the mounting repayment liability for the World Bank's largest-ever loan, for \$3.75 billion. South African environmentalists, community activists and trade unions, as well as Business Day newspaper and the Democratic Alliance, opposed the loan five years ago; were there justice, it should now be considered 'Odious Debt'.

One reason they were united was what the public protector had in 2009 termed Medupi's 'improper' conflicts of interest involving Eskom chairperson Valli Moosa. Though he was on the ANC Finance Committee at the time, Moosa approved Hitachi as the main supplier of the \$3.3 billion boilers, knowing that the ANC's Chancellor House had a 25% share of its local subsidiary.

That share was secretly sold to a mainly internal management team last July. But by all accounts the ANC investment was a fiasco, even top leaders including then Treasurer Matthews Phosa and Public Enterprises Minister Barbara Hogan admitted.

The ANC is very good at winning elections, but its boiler-making skills need improvement: no fewer than 7000 welds required repair last year, which was one of the main reasons for the three-year delay in firing up Medupi. Further delays are anticipated due to a failure to properly test the boilers with sufficient steam pressure.

Next comes nuclear. The cost of \$100 billion for 9 600 new MW of power - a guestimate at this stage - does not include ongoing expenses for uranium, transport and permanent safe storage. Illustrating the financial risk, the main French company bidding for SA's attention is Areva, the world's largest nuke builder - a company facing potential bankruptcy after its credit rating was cut to junk status in November.

Another huge risk is obvious: corruption. Last Thursday, Zuma proclaimed 'a fair, transparent, and competitive procurement process to select a strategic partner or partners to undertake the nuclear build programme.' Hmmmm. Replies Moulana Riaz Simjee of the Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute, 'This nuclear deal poses an enormous corruption risk. It is happening in secret and will make the arms deal look like a walk in the park.'

With prescient timing, the Mail&Guardian last week exposed a Moscow foreign ministry website which provides details about the extent of the nuclear deal that Zuma had already cut with Vladimir Putin six months ago. The contract indemnifies Russian suppliers from any nuclear accident liabilities and gives 'special favourable treatment' for taxes.

A durable concern with nuclear energy is safety because three of the world's most technically advanced countries - Japan, Russia and the US - conclusively demonstrated its catastrophic danger at Fukushima (2011), Chernobyl (1996) and Three Mile Island (1979).

When SA's only nuclear power plant, Koeberg, was hurriedly shut down in 2006 due to 'human instrumentality', as Minister of Public Enterprises Alec Erwin initially described the 'sabotage' (actually, just a loose bolt), he drew attention to the nuclear energy proliferation threat: the damage a dirty bomb can do if waste gets into terrorists' hands.

Indeed, the real Koeberg sabotage was carried out in 1982 by ANC Umkhonto we Sizwe soldiers under the command of fabled Communist Party leader Joe Slovo. The bombings caused \$45 million worth of damage just prior to the plant's launch, a major blow against apartheid.

But post-apartheid security forces were also humiliated, twenty years later, when Greenpeace activists snuck into Koeberg using dinghies, climbed a seawater pump building and unfurled banners to illustrate the ease of entry - and resulting danger to Cape Town - were the nuclear plant to again come under attack.

Greenpeace continues vibrant anti-nuke protests, this month bringing the ship Rainbow Warrior to local ports and last week, once again unveiling its opponents' security lapses by disrupting the opening session of Cape Town's 2nd Nuclear Industry Congress Africa with a banner hang declaring, 'Nuclear investments cost the earth.'

Other civil society activists work hard against nuclear: to name a few, the National Union of Mineworkers' Sibusiso Mimi, Mike Kantey from the Coalition against Nuclear Energy and, in Jeffreys Bay where one of the world's greatest surf waves is threatened by a proposed power plant, Trudy Malan from the Thyspunt Alliance.

Such citizen advocacy helped halt South Africa's zany Pebble Bed nuclear experiments, in which a generator was meant to be collapsed on top of pebble storage units after its life span, saving storage costs. But regrettably \$1.5 billion of taxpayer funding was wasted, mostly under Finance Minister Trevor Manuel's nose (his successor Pravin Gordhan pulled the plug).

In 2005, Earthlife Africa and the Pelindaba Working Group had a duel with former President Thabo Mbeki over the nuclear danger. Mashile Philane and Muna Lakhani were amongst those who discovered high radioactivity near Pelindaba nuclear instrument calibration site a few dozen kilometres west of Pretoria.

According to geologist Stefan Cramer, radiation readings at Pelindaba were 200 times higher than naturally occurs, and moreover, within a few meters of a housing project. Radioactive ores were buried in shallow concrete containers, with an open gate and inadequate warning signs.

This humiliated Mbeki at a bad time, just prior to his receiving the United Nations Champion of the Earth award in New York. He attacked the environmentalists' 'reckless statements' as 'totally impermissible.' His energy minister, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka (who is now UN Under-Secretary-General and head of UN Women), threatened Earthlife with legislation against 'incitement' and 'the spreading of panic-causing information.'

Within hours, however, the Nuclear Energy Corporation of South Africa confirmed the problem by constructing a new fence and putting up hazard signs. 'I admit that the fence around the area is not up to scratch,' said spokesperson Nomsa Sithole.

Thank goodness for the civil society watchdogs because, likewise, Zuma has a penchant for risky energy. Last Thursday he again endorsed fracking shale gas drilling in the sensitive Karoo region (by Shell, which recently was forced to pay Nigeria \$5 billion to clean up oil spills). He also repeated last July's commitment to the allegedly 'game-changing' Operation

Phakisa Ocean Economy initiative: proposed oil and gas drills by ExxonMobil and a dodgy Burmese company several kilometers off KwaZulu-Natal's beautiful coastline, in the dangerous Agulhas current at depths of up to 3.5 km.

Karoo fracking and KZN's offshore oil drills are opposed by three winners of the Goldman Environmental Prize for activists: Bobby Peek (1998), Jonathan Deal (2013) and Desmond D'Sa (2014). But waning profits from extraction may prove to be the decisive factor: huge drilling costs and potential ecological liabilities, during a period of depressed oil and gas prices.

And the much-vaunted Chinese market for imported coal, which companies used to justify their toxic pockmarking of Limpopo, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal provinces, collapsed 5% last year, with further decline expected as China's growth both slows and greens.

We really don't need this risky behaviour. In three years from 2013-15, at least 2500 MW of renewable energy capacity will have been constructed in South Africa. According to Simjee, 'Eskom itself has completed the construction of the Sere Wind Farm, which is already delivering 100 megawatts to the grid, well ahead of its intended launch in March this year.' Sere's cost is just \$2.3 million/MW, far below all competitors, with no operating expenses aside from occasional maintenance.

These are supply-side enhancements, and will take time. For more rapid relief, on the demand side it appears Eskom is overdue in addressing wastage by the minerals and smelting corporations. The Energy Intensive Users Group's 31 members use 44% of our electricity, and their Resource Curse has diminished the integrity of South African politics, economics, society, public health and environment.

Instead of endorsing nuclear-powered corruption, the moment is surely nearing for the state's phase-out of subsidised energy to foreign corporations? The capital-intensive, high-energy guzzling firms need to be replaced by civil society's low-energy, high-employment 'Million Climate Jobs' campaign alternatives.

Big cuts are possible: apparently, Eskom CEO Tshediso Matona insisted that the largest firms chop power consumption by 15% on Thursday so as to prevent embarrassing load-shedding during the Zuma speech.

But to get there, between Zuma's business-as-usual speech and Finance Minister Nhlanhla Nene's February 25 budget, civil society will have to step up the pressure dramatically.

Practically, that puts greater pressure on the new United Front of metalworkers and their social movement allies who are planning national demonstrations that day. What they demand will hopefully become common cause in the citizenry: ecologically sane, economically affordable and socially just access to clean energy.

This is yet another issue area that needs vital attention, amongst so many others. But for those aiming to breed a herd of nuclear White Elephants in coming years, maybe the opening theatrics before Zuma's speech can resonate; maybe the EFF's insistent call to, 'pay back the money', will prove a deterrent to those with nuclear fantasies.

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**Akugcinwe iNingizimu Afrika ikhanya nagamandla kagesi avuselelwayo - noma abantu bafakwe ebungozi bamandla kagesi aphehlwa ngenuclear?**  
NguPatrick Bond Umhumushi nguFaith ka-Manzi

Emva kokungaqali kahle kweNkulumo Yombuso ngeviki eledlule, uMongameli waseNingizimu Afrika uJacob Zuma uvele wakhuluma ngezinhlelo zenuclear kanye nezokumba phansi okwenziwa olwandle lwalapha - kodwa-ke kuthiwani ngelanga lalelizwe lamahala, umoya kanye namagagasi?

NgoLwesine olwedlule ehlo yasePhalamende edolobheni laseKapa, iqembu elisha ceke lezombusazwe futhi elidelelayo, iEconomic Freedom Fighters (EFF), yalwa okwakubonwa nguwonkewonke kodwa yalahlekelwa izihlalo zayo ezingaphezulu kweshumi nambili ngalobobusuku. Baxoshwa ngesikhathi seNkulumo Yombuso ngesikhathi benza lokhu okwaziwa ngokuthi phecelezi 'ipoint of order': bebuza uMongameli uJacob Zuma ukuba ngabe 'uyoyikhokha yini imali' (cishe iizigidi ezinamashumi amabili zamadola) imali umbuso eyawusebenzisa ngokungekho emthethweni kwenziwa kabusha isikhondakhondla somuzi wakhe emakhaya. Ngesikhathi amaphoyisa esebakhiphela ngaphandle ngendluzula amangalisayo, abayisikhombisa bangeniswa esibhedlela, oyedwa walimali ebusweni.

Umpahakathi wabona kuphela ukuphazamiseka komakhalekhukhwini bezintatheli emva kwalokho, ngoba imbono yokusakaza yaseNingizimu Afrika iSABC tyanqaba ukuthatha izithombe phansi, ilokhu iveza kuphela indawo encane lapho ubuholi basePhalamende babekhombisa abezombutho wamaphoyisa. Bekhombisa ukuba namandla ngezobuchwepheshe kodwa isinqumo esibuthakathaka ngezombusazwe, izikhulu zezokuvikela zikaZuma zavimbela omakhalekhukhwini ehlo ngaphambi kokuqala komcimbi, okwacasula kakhulu Amalunga Amaqembu Aphikisayo ePhalamende kanye nezintatheli ngokufanayo. Elinye iqembu eliphikisayo iDemocratic Alliance labe seliyaphuma likhonondela abombutho wamaphoyisa ababehlomile abakhiphela ngaphandle Amalunga asePhalamende eEFF.

Konke lokhu kwaphela emva kwemizuzu engamashumi amane nesihlanu, uZuma emamatheka futhi Amalunga AsePhalamende kaKhongolose emhalalisela, kwathi abaningi ababebukela bemangaliswa ababekubonile.

Kodwa-ke, izindaba ezibalulekile kakhulu zazisazolandela, noma-ke ngezwi eliduma uZuma ahlale elisebenzisa uma ethula izinkulumo ezinjengalezi. Njengoba izwelonke lidinwe lifa ngenxa yokunqamuka kwamandla kagesi - okwenza cishe zonke izinsuku kusukela kumahora amabili kuya kwamane - abaningi bakhululeka ukuthi amaphesenti ayishumi nane enkulumo kaZuma ayebhekene mayelana naloludaba: 'Sizama konke esingakwenza ukuxazulula ingqinqmbq yamandla kagesi.'

Kodwa-ke, sondela ulalele. Ngaphandle kokwakha lezizinda ezinkulukazi zamandla kagesi aphehlwe ngamalahle ezintathu, ezimbili zazo ezikhungethwe yizikinga kwimboni yezokwakha, neye indlela ethatha kude yokulethela abantu izidingo, okungamandla enuclear. Ngonyaka ka2030 inwqaba yeziphehli iyobe ibhekelele ukuletha amamegawatt ang9600. Namhlanje sinama megawatt angu42 000 afakiwe, angu39 000 aqhamuka emalahleni. Kodwa umnotho usebenzisa angu30 000 ngesikhathi esiphhezulu. Njengoba kungekho zizinda zokumumatha, ukunqamuka kwamandla kagesi kusazoqhubeka mhlawumbe iminyaka emithathu ezayo.

Ngakho-ke 'ukuxazulula' ngempela hayi ukuyiziba lengqinamba kuyodinga ukutshala kakhulu izimali kwizidingo zomphakathi. Izigidi ezimbili zamadola uZuma azithembise imboni yamandla kagesi uEskom ngoLwesine yingxenyane encane kakhulu kwizindodla zezimali esikwazi ukuzibona ngale, okumbandakanya nezigidigid ezingamashumi amabili nesishagalombili zamadola kwizinda ezimbili kwezintathu zokuphekhla amalahle, imedupi kanye neKusile. Kanye kanye lezizinda ziyokwazi ukumumatha amaMegawatt angu9600, abiza amadola ayizigidigidi ezintathu iMegawatt ukwakhiwa nje-kuphela, okusho ukuthi akuhlanganisi ukubiza okuqhubekayo kwamalahle kanye nokusimamisa, noma ukucekela phansi okukhulu okwenzeka kwezemvelo okuqhamuka kulezizizikhondlakhondla zezinhlelo ezingcolisa umoya. Amanzi asendaweni, umhlaba kanye nomoya kulokhu kungcoliswa, kanye nokuguquguquka kwesimo sezulu kuzoqhubeka phambi kushube kakhulu ngenxa yamathani ayizigidi ezingamashumi amathathu esisis esingcolisa umoya iCO2 ephafuzwa yilabobhawula bamalahle.

Esinye sezizathu zokubiza kakhulu kanye nokunyuka kokukhokhelwa kesikweletu seBhange Lomhlaba esiyimali eyabolekwa okuyiyona enkulukazi, u3.75 wezigidigi zamadola. Izishosho zezemvelo zaseNingizimu Afrika, zizishosho zemiphakathi kanye nezinhlangano zabasebenzi, kanye nephephandaba iBusiness Day kanye neqembu lezembusazwe iDemocratic Alliance, laphikisana nalemali eminyakeni emihlanu edlule; kwakungubulungiswa, ufthi manje sekufanele kubizwe

ngokuthi 'Isikweletu Esimbi'.

Isizathu sinye esasibenza babe nokuhlanganyela wukuthi umvikeli womphakathi wathi ngonyaka ka2009 iMedupi kwakuwuhlelo olungenabo ubulungiswa okumbandakanya nosihlalo weEskom uValli Moosa. Noma-ke wayeseKomidini LikaKhongolose Lezimali ngalesosikhathi, uMoosa wanika iHitachi imvume yokuthi kube yiyo eletha obhayela ababiza izigidigidi ezintathu zamadola, ebe azi kahle ukuthi iChancellor House kaKhongolose yayinamasheya angamaphesenti angamashumi amabili nanhlanu kwigatsha lalenkampani ezinze kuleli.

Lawomasheya adayiswa ngokuyimfihlo kwithimba elilawulayo ngenyanga kaNtulikazi ngonyaka odlule. Lokukutshala kwezimali okwenziwa nguKhongolose kwaba yisiphihli, ngoba ngisho nabaholi abaphambili abambandakanya ngalesosikhathi owayengumgcinimafa uMatthews Phosa kanye nowayenguNgqongqoshe Wemisebenzi Yomphakathi uBarbara Hogan, bavuma.

Ukhongolose muhle kakhulu ekuphumeleleni okhethweni, kodwa ubuchwepheshe bakhe bokwakha obhayela budinga ukuba ngcono: cishe obhayela abangaphezulu kwezingulungwane eziyisikhombisa babedinga ukukhandwa ngonyaka odlule, okwakungesinye sesizathu sokubambezeleka ngeminyaka emithathu ngokushisa kweMedupi. Okunye ukumbambezeleka okwaqhubekayo kulindelekile ngenxa yokwehluleka kokuhlola ngendlela obhayela ngokwanele.

Okulandela sekuyi-nuclear. Lokhu kubiza ikhulu lezigidigidi zamadola kumaMegawatt angu9600 amasha amandla kagesi - okusaqagelwa njengamanje- okungahlanganisi izimali eziqhubekayo zisetshenziswa kwi uranium, ezokuthutha kanye nendawo yokugcina evikelekile. Enza isibonelo mayelana nokulachithwa kwezimali, imboni eyayihamba phambili ifuna ukuthi Iningizimu Afrika iyamukele iAreva, ekuyiyona enkulukazi ukwakha inuclear, lemboni ibhekene nokungabinazi mali emva kokuba ukuba kwezikweletu kwayo kusesimweni esibi kakhulu ngenyanga kaLwezi ngonyaka odlule.

Okunye futhi okunobungozi kakhulu kusobala: NgoLwesine olwedlule, uZuma wamemezela ukuthi 'indlela enobulungiswa, esobala futhi enokuncintisana yokukhetha uzakwethu ozobhekana nohlelo lokwakha inuclear.' Hmmm. Kuphendula uMoulana Riaz Simjee weSouthern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute, 'Lesisivumelwano senuclear siza nobungozi obukhulu benkohlakalo. Lokhu kwenzeka ngemfihlo futhi kuyokwenza isivumelwano sezikhali kube yihlaya.'

Enagthi yayibhulile, iphephandaba iMail&Guardian ngesonto eleldlule lavela obala iwebsite yomngango wezangaphandle ezweni eMoscow enolwazi ukuthi isivumelwano mayelana nenuclear uZuma wayesesenzile kudala noVladimir Putin ezinyangeni eziyisithupha ezedlule. Lenkontileka inemibandela yokuthi izimboni zaseRussia ezizobe zilethat izidingo zokwakha inuclear zingakhokhi lutho uma kwenzeka ingozi futhi zinikwa namalungelo athile mayelana nentela.

Okukhathazayo okungathatha isikhathi mayelana namandla enuclear ukuvikeleka ngoba amazwe amathathu anobuchwepheshe obusemazingeni aphezulu emhlabeni wonke - iJapan, iRussia kanye neMelika -akhombisa ngobungozi bayo eFukushima nonyak aka2011, eChernobyl ngonyaka ka1996 kanye neThree Mile Island ngonyaka ka1979.

Ngesikhathi sesizinda okuyisona kuphela senuclear saseNingizimu Afrika, iKoeberg, yayivalwa ngokushesha ngonyaka ka2006 ngenxa yomuntu thizeni, njengoba uNgqongqoshe Wezimboni Zombuso UaLEC Erwin aqala achaza ngokuzunywa (empeleni isipikili esasintengantenga), wenza ukuthi abantu baqaphele ukusabalala kwengozi yenuclear: umonakalo webhomu elingcolile lingenza uma ukungcola kungahlala ezandleli zamaphekulazikhuni.

Empeleni, ukuzunywa kwangempela kwaseKoeberg kwenziwa ngumbutho wezempi kaKhongolose uMkhonto Wesizwe ngaphansi kokuyalelwa ngulowo owayengumholi weqembu lamaKhomani sis elalidume kakhulu uJoe Slovo. Ukubhonjwa kwadala umonakalo owabiza izgidigidi ezingamashumi amane nanhlanu ngaphambi kokuthi lesisizinda sethulwe, okwaba yinkinga

kakahulu kombuso wobandlululo.

Kodwa ezombutho ezabakhona emva kombuso wobandlululo nazo futhi zaphoxeka, eminyakeni engamashumi amabili emva kwalokho, ngesikhathi izishoshovu zeGreenpeace zikwazi ukungena eKoeberg zisebenzisa imikhumbi emincane, zagibela kwisakhiwo esimpompa amanzi olwandle zase zibeka izingqwembe zikhombisa ukuthi kwakulula kangakanani ukungena - lokho kwaholela ekubeni iKapa engozini - lapho-ke lesisizinda senuclear saqala saba nokugxekwa.

iGreenpeace isaqhubeka nokuba nemibhikilisho ehlabahlosile, kulenyanga iletha umkhumbi iRainbow Warrior kumachweba asezwani futhi ngesonto eledlule, futhi ukuvezwa obala kokuhanjelwa isikhathi kwezokuvikela kwenziwa ngabaphikisayo abaphazamisa ukuvulwa kwenkulumo eyayisedolobheni laseKapa ye2nd Nuclear Industry Congress Africa kunombhalo owawulenga umemezela ukuthi, 'Ukutshala izimali kw nuclear kucekela phansi umhlaba.'

Ezinye izishoshovu zemiphakathi zisebenza kanzima zimelene nenuclear: ukusho-nje ezimbalwa, uSbusiso Mimi weNational Union of Mineworkers, uMike Kantey oqhamuka kwinglangano iCoalition against Nuclear Energy bese kuthi, eJeffreys Bay lapho amagagsi amakhulukazi okutshuza emhlabeni wonke abhekene nokumosheka ngenxa yisizinda ekuthiwa singakhiwa samandla, ngokukaTrudy Malan oqhamuka kwiThyspunt Alliance.

Lokhukulelwa ubulungiswas okuvela kwizakhamizi kwasiza ukuthi kumise ukuhlolwa kw nuclear eNingizimu Afrika, lapho Such citizen advocacy helped halt South Africa's zany Pebble Bed nuclear experiments, in which a generator was meant to be collapsed on top of pebble storage units after its life span, saving storage costs. Okubi ukuthi imali eyizigidigidi ezingu1.5 zamadola intela eyayikhishwa yizakhamizi zakuleli yachitheka, enkulu ngaphansi kokulawula kukaNgqongqoshe Wezezimali uTrevor Manuel's nose (kwathi owalandela emva kwakhe wakunqamula lokhu kuchitheka kwezimali uPravin Gordhan).

Ngonyaka ka2005, iEarthlife Africa kanye nePhelindaba Working Group babanokuqophisana kanye nowayenguMongameli kuleli uThabo Mbeki mayelana nobungozi benuclear. UMashile Philane kanye noMuna Lakhani babengabanye kwalabo abathola ukuthi kunobungozi obukhulu eduze kwasePhelindaba esizindeneni senuclear esingamakhilomitha ambalwa uma usuka empumalanga nePitoli.

Ngokusho kuka Stefan Cramer uchwepheshe kwezokumbiwa (phecelezi igeologist), ubukhona bobungozi ababekuhola ePhelindaba babungaphezulu kwamakhulu amabili kunokujwayelekile, futhi-ke, kusondelene ngamakhilomitha ambalwa kunalapho kuhlala khona abantu. Obunye balobungozi babugqutshwe kumacontainer kasimende angazikile kakhulu, kanye nesango elivuliwe kanye nemibhalo yezixwayiso eyayinganele.

Lokhu kwamphoxa ngesikhathi esimbi uMbeki, ngaphambi-je kokuthi ahlolunyiswe ngomklomelo iUnited Nations Champion of the Earth edolobheni laseNew York. Wahlasela izishoshovu zezemvelo 'ngobudedengu bezinkulumo zazo' njenge'zazingamulekelekile'. ungqongqoshe wakhe wezemandla, uPhumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka (manje oseyiUN Under-Secretary-General kanye nomholi weUN Women), wasabisa iEarthlife ngezemthetho mayelana 'ngokubhebezela' kanye 'nokwandisa ulwazi okudala ukukhathazeka.'

Emva kwamahora ambalwa. kodwa-ke, iNuclear Energy Corporation of yaseNingizimu Afrika yaqinisekisa lenkinga ngokwakha ucingo olusha kanye nokufaka izexwayiso ngobungozi. 'Ngiyavuma ukuthi ucingo esizungeze ngalo kulendawo alulkho esimweni esifanelekile,' kusho isikhulumi salemboni uNomsa Sithole.

Siyabonga ngenxa yengqapheli zemiphakathi ngoba, njengolindelekile, uZuma naye unomkhuba wokuthanda ezamandla kagesi ezinobungozi. NgoLwesine olwdlule waphinde futhi waxhasa ukumbiwa kwegesi yeshale esigcemeni saseKaroo esinokuzwela (kwimboni yakwaShell esasanda kuphoqwa izwe laseNigeria ukuthi ikhokhe izigidigidi ezinhlanu zamadola

ukuhlanza ukuchithwa kwayo amafutha). Waphinde futhi ngonyaka odlule ngesibophezelo asenza ngenyanga kaNtulikazi kwiOperation Phakisa Ocean Economy enokushintshashintsha: ukuhlongozwa kokumbiwa kwamafutha kanye negesi kwenziwa yiExxonMobil kanye nemboni yaseBurman edume kabi endaweni engamakhilomitha ambalwa usuka endaweni enhle kakhulu eduze kolwandle eKwaZulu-Natal, endaweni enobungozi futhi eAgulhas ngokujula ngamakhilomitha angu3.5.

Ukumbiwa kwaseKaroo kanye nokumbiwa olwandle kufunwa amafutha eKZN kuphikiswa ngabaklonyeliswa ngendondo iGoldman Environmental Prize abathathu abayizishosho: uBobby Peek (1998), uJonathan Deal (2013) kanye noDesmond D'Sa (2014). Kodwa ukungcipha kwenzuzo kwezokumbiwa phansi kungase kube nomthelela omuhle: ukubiza kakhulu kokumba kanye nokukhokhiswa ngezemvelo, ngesikhathi lapho amazing okubiza kwamafutha kanye negesi engaphansi kwengcindezi.

Kanti futhi nemakethe yasezweni laseChina eneqholo kakhulu ngokulanda amalahlale kuleli, izimboni okuyikhona ekushoyo ukuzivikela ngokungcolisa ngobukhulu ubungozi zizfundazwe zaseLimpopo, eMpumalanga kanye naKwaZulu-Natal, kwawa ngamaphesenti amahlanu ngonyaka odlule, kanye nokuqhubekela phambili kokwehla njengoba kwakulindelekile njengoba ukukhula kwezwe laseChina kwehla futhi seliqala lelilizwe libhekele ukusebenzisa okubhekelela imvelo.

Ngempela asikudingi lokhu kwenza okunobungozi. Eminyakeni emithathu kusukela ngonyaka ka2013 kuya ku2015, mhlawumbe amamw angu2500 kamandla kagesi ezinziwa kabusha azobe esakhiwe eNingizimi Afrika. Ngokusho kukaSimje, 'UESkom uqobo useqedile ukwakha ipulazi lomoya eSere, eselikhijia amamegawatts ayikhulu, okungaphambili kunokukwaziswa kwayo obekuhlelelwe inyanga naNdasa kulonyaka.' Ukubiza kweSere ngamadola ayizigidi ezingu2.3 million/MW nje-kuphela, okungaphansi kakhulu kwazo zonke izimboni ezincintisanayo, ngaphandle kokukhokhela okwenizwayo kodwa kukhokhela ukulungiswa okwenziwa inkathi nenkathi.

Lokhu ukwenza kangcono ukulethe amandla, futhi kuyothatha isikhathi. Ngoba ukuze kube khona ukusizakala, njokufuneka kwamamandla kagesi kubonakala sengathi iEskom kufanele ngabe kade yabhekana nokusetshenziswa ngokumosha okwenziwa yizimboni zezokumbiwa phansi kanye nezokuncibilikisa. Amalunga angu31 eEnergy Intensive Users Group asebenzisa amaphesenti angu44 kamandla ethu kagesi, futhi Lesisiqalekiso Sesokumbiwa Phansi sesiqede ukuhlonishwa kwezombusazwe, ezomnotho. ezempilo kanye nezemvelo kwaseNingizimu Afrika. Esikhundleni sokuxhasa inkohlakalo kuamandla kagesi ezeniwa ngenuclear, isikhathi sesisondele sokuthi umbuso uqale uqede ukuxhasa amandla kagesi kwizimboni zasemazweni angaphandle? Lezimboni ezithatha kakhulu imali, ezidla kakhulu amandla kagesi kufanele manje zishenxa bese kuqale kuba khona izindlela ezinye ezingadalwa amandla aphansi omphakathi ngomkhankaso weMisebenzi Eyisigidi Yesimo Sezulu.

Ukunquywa okukhulu kungenzeka: engathi, umphathi weEskom uTshediso Matona ugcizelele ukuthi izimboni ezinkulu zedlise ukudla kwazo amandla kagesi ngamaphesenti ayishumi nesihlanu ngoLwesine ukuze kungabikhona ukuphoxeka ngokunqamuka kukagesi lapho uZuma esethula inkulumo yakhe.

Kodwa ukuze sinfuinyelele lapho, phakathi kwenkulumo kaZuma ehlale ibhekelele abezimboni kanye nenkulumo kaNgqongqoshe Wezezimali uNhlanhla Nene ngabhajethi mhlazingu 25 kuNhlolelanja, imiphakathi kuzofanele ufake kakhulu ingcindezi.

Okungenzeka. okungafaka kakhulu ingcindezi kubasebenzi bensimbi benhlangano enstsha iUnited Front kanye nabalingani babo bezinhlangano zemiphakathi abahlele imibhikilisho ezweni lonke ngalolosuku. Abakufunayo sethamba ukuthi kuyona yinto edingwa yisososnke isakhamuzi: okubhekelela ezemvelo, okungakwazi ukuthengwa kanye nokuthi kukwazi ukuthi kutholakale a amandla kagesi ahlanzekile kwinhlalakahle yabantu.

Lokhu ngokunye-nje okudinga ukuqaphela kwethu okuphuthumayo, ngale-nje kokunye. Kodwa kulabo ababhekene nokukhiqizwa kwezakhiwo

eingenanzuzo zenuclear eminyakeni ezayo, mhlawumbe okwenzeka ephalamende ngaphambi kokuthi uZuma athule inkulumo yakhe kufanele kudume kusabalale; mhlawumbe ukubiza kweEFF okugcizelelayo; 'ukuthi kukhokhwe imali', kunganaqnda labo amanamaphupho enuclear.

## Our Cherished Freedom of Speech Myth



Daniel Morley 20 February 2015

On February 17th Peter Osborne, one of the UK's most respected journalists, resigned from the Daily Telegraph and publicly condemned its practice of placing advertisers interests above those of the truth. As a conservative liberal, Peter Osborne is concerned that our famed and cherished 'freedom of speech' is being undermined by business interests. Freedom of expression is routinely and uncritically heralded as our society's proudest achievement to be defended at all costs. It is always assumed that, essentially, we possess this freedom, and it is only necessary to preserve it in one way or another. In truth, under capitalism there is no such thing as free expression nor a free press, for capital decides everything.

*"There is no such thing, at this date of the world's history, as an independent press. You know it and I know it. There is not one of you who dares to write your honest opinions, and if you did, you know beforehand that it would never appear in print. I am paid weekly for keeping my honest opinions out of the paper I am connected with. Others of you are paid similar salaries for similar things, and any of you who would be so foolish as to write honest opinions would be out on the streets looking for another job.*

*"If I allowed my honest opinions to appear in one issue of my paper, before twenty-four hours my occupation would be gone. The business of the journalist is to destroy the truth; to lie outright; to pervert; to vilify; to fawn at the feet of mammon, and to sell the country for his daily bread. You know it and I know it and what folly is this toasting an independent press. We are the tools and vassals of the rich men behind the scenes. We are the jumping jacks, they pull the strings and we dance. Our talents, our possibilities and our lives are all the property of other men. We are intellectual prostitutes."*

John Swinton at a meeting of journalists on free speech, 1880

*"The coverage of HSBC in Britain's Telegraph is a fraud on its readers. If major newspapers allow corporations to influence their content for fear of losing advertising revenue, democracy itself is in peril...A free press is essential to a healthy democracy. There is a purpose to journalism, and it is not just to entertain. It is not to pander to political power, big corporations and rich men. Newspapers have what amounts in the end to a constitutional duty to tell their readers the truth."*

Peter Osborne, Why I have resigned from the Telegraph, February 2015

In November 2014 the mysterious so-called Guardians of Peace hacked into Sony Pictures demanding the cancellation of its film *The Interview*. This demand, backed up by vague threats, was at least partially successful, as we all know. This notorious incident predictably sparked a tidal wave of righteous indignation that our 'cherished', 'inalienable' and 'most noble' universal value of free speech could be successfully undermined from outside, from a dark and ignoble place where the light of Western reason does not reach - North Korea. Leading politicians, journalists and broadcasters and not a few Hollywood execs were all unanimous on this score, each equally aggrieved that the artists at Sony Pictures should suffer a tragic fate not unlike that of a North Korean citizen.

Framed in this way, the 'debate' then turned on the pivot of whether or not Sony was right to be intimidated, or should have put safety concerns aside for the greater good of artistic freedom - always assuming the film was nothing short of a labour of love for its auteur creators. At no point did any commentator venture to question whether we really have freedom of speech in our society, nor whether Sony Pictures, a multi-billion dollar corporate behemoth dedicated to profit and with the market share to drown out the voices of independent studios, really in any way represents our 'freedom of speech' today.

As Lenin succinctly summed up, "Freedom in capitalist society always remains just about the same as it was in the ancient Greek republics: freedom for the slave-owners. The modern wage slaves, owing to the conditions of capitalist exploitation, are so much crushed by want and poverty that democracy is nothing to them, politics is nothing to them; that, in the ordinary peaceful course of events, the majority of the population is debarred from participating in social and political life." In addition to the general conditions of class society i.e. the masses' poverty of time and income, "in practice the capitalists, the exploiters, the landowners and the profiteers own nine-tenths of the best meeting halls, and nine-tenths of the newsprint, printing presses". To that we may add that at least nine-tenths of the film and television production facilities and distribution channels are similarly privately owned by vast monopolies.

Private property is not just a right to something, but at the same time a denial of the right to that something for all others. The subordination of everything in our society to commodity production, to the buying and selling of goods and ideas, leads to the cumulative concentration of this private wealth in fewer and fewer hands, and thus the exclusion of the vast majority from the benefits of the 'inalienable' right to private property. Because bourgeois legality leaves aside all concrete matters of wealth and time, and moreover enshrines their inequitable distribution by defending the right to accumulate vast wealth, the freedoms to speech and association that it enshrines for all are in practice denied and mutilated for the vast majority.

Technically, we all have the right to express ourselves (leaving aside things such as publishing violent pornography etc), but in practice we find we do not have the economic resources to do so, and we are too bogged down in our hand-to-mouth existence to have the energy to do so anyway. Even being in, say, a band, involves a struggle for survival too burdensome for most to endure, and modern society is like a vast graveyard of artists starved of the necessary oxygen to ply their trade. In this way the market represents a far more efficient and subtle form of censorship and control than any clumsy state ever was.

Both Sony Pictures and their film *The Interview* are very useful case studies for freedom of speech in capitalist society today. Of course, the overwhelming majority of society has no actual freedom to produce a film and have it distributed; if we wish to do so, we must go to those with the resources. But, you will say, the market and its freedom give us choice, and thus we can 'shop around' for a studio who will make our film. But when we look closer, we find that the market in the film industry is not so free after all: the top 7 film studios have captured 88.3% of the market, the top 12, 96.4%. Sony was the fourth highest grossing studio of 2014, taking in \$1.2bn, or 12.2% of the market. These studios do not represent different artistic institutions constantly experimenting with various up-and-coming talents, but are vast capitalist enterprises unconcerned with

originality or giving a voice to the voiceless. Those more willing to experiment, occupy niches or express the real lives of the masses are starved of capital and constantly teeter on the brink of bankruptcy or irrelevance - positions 162 to 29 on the 'Studio Market Share' league table all capture 0.0% of the market (<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/studio/>).

The reality is that the behemoths such as Sony are not independent, private individuals whose free speech rights are at risk. In reality, these monopolies are the biggest enemies of free speech. Their dominant position, which they owe not to their outstanding contribution to culture but to the science of profiteering, allows them to exclude, drown out, rob and fleece the 'speech' of countless thousands of artists and journalists who don't 'toe the line'. How many decent scriptwriters have been rejected, or had their ideas stolen, how many promising bands have been denied airtime, record deals and performance spaces, and how many journalists ignored, by the big shareholders and their bureaucrats?

Furthermore, the scale of these film studio monopolies and the costs of their blockbusters have certain implications. Far from needing their freedom of expression to be protected, these monopolies are directly involved in the very centre of power and its propaganda in the West. One less reported outcome of the hack into Sony was a series of emails between its executives, in which it was revealed that a CIA agent had not only looked over the script of *The Interview*, but that, possibly under CIA pressure, and certainly with its approval, the script was altered not by the film's artistic leaders but by Sony executives! This was the all-important change of the film's assassinated antagonist to being North Korea's head of state Kim Jong Un! Previously the plan had been to use a pseudonym for obvious reasons, but as the *Daily Beast* reports, Marisa Liston, Sony's senior vice president of national theatrical publicity, wrote in a leaked email that the film's directors Seth Rogen and Evan Goldberg "mentioned that it was a sony [sic] executive that told them to not use a fictitious name, but to go with kim jon-un [sic]" after "a former cia agent and someone who used to work for Hilary [sic] Clinton looked at the script".

The *Daily Beast* also reports other leaked "emails that show that a senior U.S. State Dept. official consulted with [CEO of Sony Pictures] Lynton on the content of the movie, and Ambassador Robert King, U.S. Special Envoy for North Korean Human Rights, provided advice on the film". *Z Magazine* adds that in other leaked emails "Michael Lynton reveals that he checked with "someone very senior in State," who confidentially, gave him the go-ahead for the filmic representation of the assassination of a living head of state—the first in U.S. film history."

The very scale, expense and certainly the subject matter favoured by major Hollywood studios requires high level collaboration with the state itself. Action film formulas are, as we all know, a favourite for these studios because they present easy-to-swallow, immediate excitement and offer an illusory escape to individual heroism for a population forced to live passive lifestyles. But such films are highly costly and tend to feature military hardware. Consequently, they require the equipment and 'help' of the US military to get made, and so

*"Blockbuster films made at major studios are required to pass the censors before they receive military support...The Pentagon and every branch of the Armed Services now help major studios shape, alter, influence ,and censor films for U.S. audiences. They have no hope of getting such government largess unless they first submit their scripts to Strub [head of US Department of Defence Entertainment Liaison Office], who openly admits that, "sometimes they require script changes as a condition of providing support.*

*"Strub also explains the real goals of military/media collaborations: "any film that portrays the military as negative is not realistic to us." In fact, "The Marine Corps' film office in Los Angeles contains a floor-to-ceiling shelf of files on films that asked for assistance but were never made, "most too expensive to produce without military assistance." In addition to vetting scripts before supplying the hardware, Strub's office carefully monitors the "creative" process once the film is in production. No on-set deviations from the content stipulations are allowed, a process that circumscribes independent improvisation or creative input that might*

*emerge in the collaborative process that is film production.” (Karen Andersen, Z Magazine 28.1.15)*

Thus when people describe US action films as like propaganda for US imperialism, they are more correct than they know. It is not just a question of a general, amorphous ruling class ideology penetrating the heads of filmmakers (though it is that too). Clearly the CIA and the Pentagon are directly involved in censoring and writing films to project the ideology they want. Their efforts at doing so are facilitated by the monopolisation of the film industry such that they can establish cosy relations with the few men who control Hollywood.

Josh Levin, the owner of a chain of cinemas in the US, joined the media industry’s self-congratulatory chorus about freedom of expression when defending his chain’s decision to screen the film,

“It isn’t very often, frankly, in this country that such a high profile potential abridgment of people’s free expression is in the zeitgeist [that presents] an opportunity for us to all, as a country and as a people, stand up and say we will not tolerate people being bullied out of free expression.”

The reality, as we can see, is directly contrary to this - giant media monopolies such as Sony have monopolised the airwaves and function as outlets for subtle state propaganda served as entertainment. The hue-and-cry about freedom of speech plays a role not unlike the name Ministry of Truth when given to the propaganda ministry in Orwell’s 1984. All those liberals who see the debate purely in terms of what ‘limits’ should be placed on free expression for the sake of security do little more than distract attention from the real point - that the free expression of Sony Pictures et al is only the free expression of its major shareholders and the US state at the expense of everybody else’s free speech.

The collusion of the state with the heads of giant monopolies is of course nothing peculiar to the film-industry, but is a natural and inevitable product of monopoly capitalism. This collusion and censorship is applied much more directly in our so-called ‘free press’ than in the entertainment industries for the obvious reason that it is here that ‘free speech’ can be most effectively curtailed.

There is a multitude of ways in which the British government censors the press - in particular by classifying information as a national security issue. It is common knowledge that the state has lost no time in exploiting the so-called ‘War on Terror’ to arrogate to itself more and more draconian powers to keep secrets and censor the press. However the aim of this article is not to deal so much with the state’s direct and explicit censorship of the press, which is the only restriction on free speech that liberals understand. Instead, this article is devoted to showing how the capitalist control of society and its means of communication prohibit real free expression for the masses and that this is achieved precisely through the greatest liberal freedoms of expression, association and private property. Suffice it to say that as Marxists we entirely reject the state’s attack on civil liberties.

A far more subtle and pervasive form of censorship is exercised by the state not against the press but in collaboration with it. The Defence, Press and Broadcasting Advisory Committee is “composed of representatives of the Ministry of Defence, the Home Office, and the Foreign Office, and of the newspapers, periodicals, and broadcasting news organisations. The chairman is a civil servant, the Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Defence. The press and broadcasting members select one of their number as chairman of their side of the committee. He acts as their spokesman at meetings of the committee and provides a point of day to day contact for the permanent secretary of the committee (the D Notice secretary), who is normally a retired senior officer from the armed forces.” (See source here)

This permanent committee is an example of the subtle shaping of reporting and journalistic opinion through gentlemanly intimacy - and as such requires the monopolisation of the media into the hands of a few powerful press barons who can easily be met with and leaned upon. The D

Notices this committee releases are not legally binding on the editors, yet the latter choose to obey them in almost all circumstances. The interests of the major media owners and the rest of the ruling class coincide in all important respects.

Thus in most cases direct censorship is unnecessary, clumsy and looks bad, far better instead to rely on shared interests, outlooks and 'friendship'. This strategy was cynically summed up in a 2014 Parliamentary debate on the future of the BBC's World Service, in which the decision to hand over control of this radio station to the BBC from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) was defended. Up till now, this radio station was directly controlled by the British state's foreign office in order to ensure it was used 'correctly' to promote the interests of the British ruling class; in defending the loss of this direct control, the parliamentary report was obliged to admit that the FCO is only relinquishing control in order to make the promotion of British ruling class interests more subtle,

*"The FCO's reluctance to be seen to influence the World Service is understandable, but we believe that it would not be in the interests of the UK for the BBC to lose sight of the priorities of the FCO, which relies upon the World Service as an instrument of 'soft power'. The Chairman of the BBC Trust will meet the Foreign Secretary annually to discuss the performance of the World Service. We asked the Foreign Secretary whether he would hold the BBC's feet to the fire in protecting the interests of the World Service, and he replied: I will always do that. We also note that, although there is no express provision under the new Agreement between the BBC and the Government for quarterly meetings between the FCO and the BBC World Service at Director level, Lord Williams was confident that meetings in future would probably be as regular as they have been in the past... We will continue to speak up for the BBC World Service and its role in projecting the values and interests of the UK across the world. We urge the Foreign Secretary to do the same. We are encouraged to hear that frequent contact between the BBC and the FCO is likely to continue. We were pleased to hear the Foreign Secretary say that he would always hold the BBC's feet to the fire in protecting the interests of the World Service. We urge him and his successors to honour that commitment."*

A general world outlook is forged in the shadowy world in which the powerful move. A very good example is the opaque Bilderberg Group, in which "120-150 political leaders and experts from industry, finance, academia and the media" meet annually and decide what matters in the world.

*"Most editors of the establishment Press in Britain, Europe, and the United States have attended Bilderberg Conferences. Some are even members of the international steering committee which governs Bilderberg.*

*"Included among them are William Rees-Mogg, [former] editor of The Times, Frank Giles, [former] foreign editor of the Sunday Times, and Andrew Knight, editor of The Economist. The biggest newspapers in Europe are represented: Germany - Die Zeit (Theo Sommer); France - La Monde (Michel Tatu); Italy - La Stampa (Carlo Sartori); Denmark - Berlingske Tidende (Niels Norlund).*

*"From the United States, Hedley Donovan, Henry Grunwald, and Ralph Davidson of Time have attended Bilderberg Conferences. So have Osborn Eliot, former editor of Newsweek, and Arthur Sulzberger of the New York Times. Joseph Kraft, James Reston, Joseph Harsch, George Will, and Flora Lewis, prominent political columnists of sound reputation, have all at one time or another participated in the conferences."*

We are often given the impression that the press is in constant struggle with the government, always exposing embarrassing scandals and harassing its representatives. But this is an illusion, most of these conflicts are based not on substance but in manufactured superficialities, and the general line of interest of the ruling class is not diverted from nor questioned. An example would be over the current crises in Ukraine and Iraq - government ministers will be 'harangued' by BBC or Sky News as to why they're not intervening more forcefully. Somewhere in the echelons of power, out of

all the debates between the movers and shakers of the ruling class, it is decided that the only debate that matters on this issue is whether the UK is intervening with sufficient force. Thus the TV news stations and newspapers focus any government criticism in this way and this way only.

In truth “newspapers like The Times or Le Temps speak the truth on all unimportant and inconsequential occasions, so that they can deceive the public with all the requisite authority when necessary” (Leon Trotsky, My Life). Recent British history has furnished no shortage of examples of this, most notably in the conscious manipulation of footage of the Battle of Orgreave in the miners strike, where the BBC reversed the video to give the impression that miners had attacked police officers, the exact opposite of the truth.

Where scandals do emerge and secrets are revealed, as is increasingly the case in Britain, this is either a result of unavoidable accident, or is an outcome of the splits and struggles amongst different sections of the ruling class. Veteran American journalist Max Frankel gives a very good account of the cynical and calculated way in which layers of the state manufacture and use secrets in their ongoing struggles for influence,

*“practically everything that our government does, plans, thinks, hears and even contemplates in the realms of foreign policy is stamped as secret and treated as secret. And then it’s unraveled by that same government, by the Congress and by the press in one continuing round of professional and social contacts and cooperative and competitive exchanges of information.*

*“The governmental, political and personal interests of the participants are inseparable in this process. Presidents make secret decisions, only to reveal them for the purposes of frightening an adversary nation, wooing a friendly electorate, protecting their own reputations.*

*“The military services conduct secret research in weaponry or to reveal it for the purpose of enhancing their budgets.*

*“Appearing superior or inferior to a foreign army. Gaining the vote of a Congressman or the favor of a contractor.*

*“The Navy uses secret information to run down the weaponry of the Air Force. The Army passes on secret information to prove its superiority to the Marine Corps.*

*“High officials of government reveal secrets in the search for support of their policies or to sabotage the plans and policies of a rival department.*

*“Middle range officials of government reveal secrets so as to attract the attention of their superiors or to lobby against the orders of those superiors.*

*“Though not the only vehicle for this traffic in secrets, Congress is always eager to provide a forum, the press is probably the most important.*

*“And in the field of foreign affairs, only rarely does our government give full information to the press for the purpose of simply informing the people. For the most part, the press obtains significant information bearing on foreign policy only because it has managed to make itself a party to confidential materials ... transmitting these materials from government to other branches of government as well as to the public at large.*

*“And that’s why the press has been wisely and correctly called the Fourth Branch of Government.” (<http://www.thirteen.org/>).*

In a bourgeois society, news and information are traded as commodities, and like all other commodities, the rich and powerful command far greater purchasing power than others. What does and doesn’t emerge as a story or scandal will frequently be a result not of free journalism and investigation but an outcome of cynical horse-trading amongst the powerful. The picture of the truth that we get is in this way distorted and delayed by the competing interests of the powerful.

It is interesting to consider how it is decided which news stories are 'hot' and from what angle they are to be spun. It cannot escape the notice of a close follower of the news that certain stories tend to dominate the headlines out of proportion with their actual importance, obvious examples being the enormous importance attached to the deaths of westerners over others and the obsession with essentially non-political one-off accidents such as the garbage truck which lost control in Glasgow recently. But not only this. As already mentioned, a clear line or framing of the debate exists across news outlets on all important issues, and serves to circumscribe in advance how the various crises of the capitalist world are thought of. Given the bourgeois press is not one state controlled monopoly but a complex of competing enterprises and journalists, how is this general 'line' this arrived at?

The starting point for any answer must be the private ownership of the of the media by a few individuals at the centre of capitalism's power sources, hence their presence on the Bilderberg Group, which in reality is just the best known of many similar secretive clubs.

In these clubs and in conversations between leading bourgeois figures a sort of narrative and set of shared goals are worked out. We have to bear in mind that this state of affairs has not suddenly emerged, that there is always an established history and context of certain prejudices, interests and general outlook amongst the ruling class which has developed over the centuries. All bourgeois individuals have grown up in a society already dominated by these tried-and-tested ideas, and they find them to be more-or-less useful in expressing their interests. Those new ideas which help express any new needs and interests of the ruling class will be voiced by this class' more prescient thinkers, and will stick precisely because they are useful.

Evidently the vast majority of articles and news items are however neither written nor edited directly by the likes of Rupert Murdoch. The transmission belt for bourgeois ideology into society is the struggle for careers and influence amongst the middle-class, especially its upper layers. Taking capitalism for granted, middle-class careerists seeking to climb the media's greasy pole cannot afford to question, at least not openly, the terms under which this struggle for influence is conducted - i.e. the ownership and domination of the media by the big bourgeoisie.

Self-interest is an extremely sensitive instrument, and the ambitious journalist can quite easily pick up on the prejudices, egos and interests that he or she needs to massage in order to get along, or at the very least, the issues and points of view that must be avoided. To pick just one example, in 2001 Sam Kiley resigned as The Times' Middle East correspondent, after which he reported to the Guardian that

*"Rupert Murdoch's influence over editorial policy at his most prestigious British title, the Times, is so great that journalists are censored by executives frightened of offending their proprietor*

*"Mr Murdoch's friendship with Ariel Sharon, Israel's prime minister, and Mr Murdoch's extensive Israeli investments led executives to extensively rewrite copy.*

*Middle managers flew into a hysterical terror every time a pro-Israeli lobbying group wrote in with a quibble or complaint, and then usually took their side against their own correspondent, he wrote.*

*Mr Kiley wrote that he was asked not to describe the killing of Israel's opponents as assassination, and was directed to use less emotive phrases such as targeted killing instead."*

All journalists and editors are constantly and acutely aware that their freedom to write and to edit depends entirely on the all-pervasive power of the owner to relieve them of their duties as and when they wish, and as a result self-censorship is routine and unquantifiable. Of course in all this nobody's freedom of expression has in any way been violated, and the surface appearance gives the impression of a 'free society'. But behind the scenes real power is exerted through the subtle and hidden threat of

joblessness hanging over all journalists should they express themselves a little too freely. Additionally, an even more subtle control on what is said is derived from the class background and outlook of most journalists. Even when writing 'freely', the middle or even upper class background of leading journalists colours their worldview and causes them to prioritise certain stories and interpret others in certain ways.

Under the control of media moguls, the press is subordinated to the dual needs of profit making and ideological indoctrination. Advertisers want papers to be sensationalist, superficial and eye-catching, and insofar as the owner uses the press to further their political agenda, superficial sensationalism is directed to support this agenda. Sometimes, these dual imperatives conflict, and the media is obliged to report on existing stories that may to some extent harm the interests of the owners, however a suitable spin on and limit to such stories is quickly found. But often these dual imperatives of profit making and agenda pushing coincide, which is not coincidental - dissenting views usually require more explanation, more factual proof and more thought and as such anything which 'goes against the stream' tends to be a harder sell as well.

An unusually clear proof of the screening out of 'difficult' stories has come to light in the last 24 hours. Peter Osborne, the highly respected journalist known for breaking the MPs' expenses scandal, resigned from his post as chief political commentator for the Daily Telegraph this month in protest at the newspaper's systematic suppression of any news which may harm the interests of its powerful advertisers, in other words it 'voluntarily' censored itself and did violence to 'free speech' in a subtle manner that is surely routine throughout the British press. His resignation letter is worth quoting at length,

*"Late last year I set to work on a story about the international banking giant HSBC. Well-known British Muslims had received letters out of the blue from HSBC informing them that their accounts had been closed. No reason was given, and it was made plain that there was no possibility of appeal. It's like having your water cut off, one victim told me.*

*"When I submitted it for publication on the Telegraph website, I was at first told there would be no problem. When it was not published I made enquiries. I was fobbed off with excuses, then told there was a legal problem. When I asked the legal department, the lawyers were unaware of any difficulty. When I pushed the point, an executive took me aside and said that there is a bit of an issue with HSBC.*

*"I researched the newspaper's coverage of HSBC. I learnt that Harry Wilson, the admirable banking correspondent of the Telegraph, had published an online story about HSBC based on a report from a Hong Kong analyst who had claimed there was a 'black hole' in the HSBC accounts. This story was swiftly removed from the Telegraph website, even though there were no legal problems.*

*"Then, on 4 November 2014, a number of papers reported a blow to HSBC profits as the bank set aside more than £1 billion for customer compensation and an investigation into the rigging of currency markets. This story was the city splash in the Times, Guardian and Mail, making a page lead in the Independent. I inspected the Telegraph coverage. It generated five paragraphs in total on page 5 of the business section.*

*"The reporting of HSBC is part of a wider problem. On 10 May last year the Telegraph ran a long feature on Cunard's Queen Mary II liner on the news review page. This episode looked to many like a plug for an advertiser on a page normally dedicated to serious news analysis. I again checked and certainly Telegraph competitors did not view Cunard's liner as a major news story. Cunard is an important Telegraph advertiser.*

*"The Tesco false accounting story on 23 September was covered only in the business section. By contrast it was the splash, inside spread and leader in the Mail. Not that the Telegraph is short of Tesco coverage. Tesco pledging £10m to fight cancer, an inside peak at Tesco's £35m jet and 'Meet the cat that has lived in Tesco for 4 years' were all deemed newsworthy.*

*“From the start of 2013 onwards stories critical of HSBC were discouraged. HSBC suspended its advertising with the Telegraph. Its account, I have been told by an extremely well informed insider, was extremely valuable. HSBC, as one former Telegraph executive told me, is “the advertiser you literally cannot afford to offend”.*

*“Executives say that Murdoch MacLennan [chief executive of the Telegraph] was determined not to allow any criticism of the international bank. “He would express concern about headlines even on minor stories,” says one former Telegraph journalist. “Anything that mentioned money-laundering was just banned, even though the bank was on a final warning from the US authorities. This interference was happening on an industrial scale.*

*“The Telegraph’s recent coverage of HSBC amounts to a form of fraud on its readers. It has been placing what it perceives to be the interests of a major international bank above its duty to bring the news to Telegraph readers.*

*“A free press is essential to a healthy democracy. There is a purpose to journalism, and it is not just to entertain. It is not to pander to political power, big corporations and rich men. Newspapers have what amounts in the end to a constitutional duty to tell their readers the truth.*

*“It is not only the Telegraph that is at fault here. The past few years have seen the rise of shadowy executives who determine what truths can and what truths can’t be conveyed across the mainstream media. The criminality of News International newspapers during the phone hacking years was a particularly grotesque example of this wholly malign phenomenon.*

Murdoch McLennan’s apparent anxiety and complete intolerance even for negative coverage of HSBC in minor articles reminds us more of a state-censor in a totalitarian regime, examining reports with a microscope should any hint of the truth have sneaked through. True, this censorship is not total, but just in one newspaper, and Peter Osborne has been free to expose this scandal elsewhere - at the cost of his job. But it reveals the subtle, hidden and constant way in which the powerful manipulate the news all without the formal restriction to anybody’s ‘free speech’ rights. Peter Osborne can say these things (on a relatively obscure website) thanks to his relative prestige as a journalist. Thousands of other journalists lack that luxury. Stories such as this should not be confused as examples of our freedom of speech, but rather of the bourgeoisie’s inability to control its own failing system.

Nevertheless we must not draw pessimistic and cynical conclusions about the propagandistic power of the press. It is both to the credit of the working class, and a proof of the unfree, distorted character of the media, that in spite of the systematic suppression of such beliefs in the media, big majorities in Britain support the renationalisation of the railways, utilities and banking system and believe that our society is far too unequal and dominated by big business.

In the US, for decades a huge proportion of society, at times even a majority, has favoured what is called a ‘single payer healthcare system’ - in other words, a nationalised healthcare system free at the point of use. All this despite it finding no echo or promotion whatsoever in the media. In Europe the popular conception of the US population regarding its healthcare is that the American masses do not know what is good for them and foolishly oppose free healthcare, but this is completely false. But the fact that the US media utterly fails to reflect this, that in no mass media outlet does this popular opinion on a crucial issue get expressed, reveals just how unfree the press is under capitalism.

Examples of these distortions can be multiplied at will. As I write these lines three muslims have been murdered in America for racist reasons (no doubt fostered by the media’s obsession with fear-mongering regarding Islam), and yet this is described in the media as a simple murder - one only has to ask how the murder of three white christians by a muslim would be presented in the media to know the answer and see the injustice. Actually, only a tiny minority of terrorist attacks and murders in the

West are carried out by muslims, and yet the media systematically gives the impression that 'all terrorists are muslims'.

There is a level of bias in the media that is so huge and systematic as to be equivalent to conscious propaganda. In Britain clear majorities have opposed, for decades, privatisation of the utilities, the railways and Royal Mail, and want to see much higher taxes on the rich to fund social programmes to alleviate inequality, and yet at no point in the past twenty years have any of these mass opinions been expressed by either the media or any mainstream party. This reveals that we do not live in a free or democratic society, but one dominated and controlled by the tiny minority of super rich.

The effects of this process are to narrow and to trivialise our culture. The more unequal our society gets, the harder it is for young people to afford rent and find venues and spaces in which to express themselves, the more commercialised and controlled our cultural output has become. There is a process taking place across the Western world of gentrification which is constantly being remarked upon. It is widely known that this is pricing out working class youth from the cities in which they grew up and is narrowing our cities' culture. It is common to hear frustrated complaints about endless fancy coffee bars and cupcake bakers catering to the moneyed minority.

An important part of this process is the systematic closing down of independent music venues. The frequency with which smaller venues are closing is scary, said Krissi Murison, editor of the music magazine NME to The Guardian. To pick a few examples in London from just the past few months - Madame Jo Jos, the famous indie club in Soho, has been shut down because its bouncers were involved in a fight - but really so that Westminster Council can get expensive flats built on the site. The Joiners Arms, one of the most popular and important gay clubs in London, has just closed, again for upmarket flat developments. The Horse Hospital, an independent set of studios for artists and a venue for screening films, is about to be closed because property prices and rent are too high.

The Horse Hospital has released the following statement which says infinitely more about the reality of 'free expression' in our society than all the saccharine celebrations of it we read in the pages of the mainstream press,

*"London is devolving rapidly into a culturally bereft corporate wasteland. It is being systematically cleansed of its cultural vitality, diversity and energy.*

...

*"People, institutions and future potentials are being priced out of this city which soon will only have a homogenous, thin layer of sanctioned and carefully monitored culture as its defining engine, this spells disaster for everyone. Transformation of all kinds relies on the possibility for the most coherent and powerful radical ideas to become tradition, without room for those ideas to even have a chance to be played out, what hope is there?*

*"We will continue our fight to stay here, we believe in this, however symbolic it may be."*

With each passing year the music industry narrows further and further. There are now only 3 major record labels in existence, and two recent studies have demonstrated that mainstream music has become blander and more predictable than ever before - scientists at the University of Bristol have developed software capable of predicting a given song's success with 60% accuracy. Not only did their algorithm manage to prove that pop music has been getting louder and louder (probably to compensation for its contrived character), but also that, since the early 2000s, pop music has become more and more conservative and predictable, such that the software was able to more accurately predict the success of songs from this period.

The Spanish National Research Council found the same phenomenon with different software. Its analysis of the chords, melodies and types of sound

revealed evidence of a progressive homogenization of the musical discourse...In particular, we obtained numerical indicators that the diversity of transitions between note combinations - roughly speaking chords plus melodies - has consistently diminished in the last 50 years (Reuters).

Major music labels have been exploiting the creative talents of musicians for generations. The history of pop music can be seen as a graveyard for artists ripped off by the bureaucrats of the major labels. Garry Shider, the legendary guitarist of Parliament-Funkadelic, whose songs sold millions upon millions, was entered into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1997. And yet, despite writing this hugely successful music, he could not afford his medical bills and so a special fund had to be created to pay the bills, but he died before sufficient money had been raised.

Sly Stone is another hugely successful and internationally famous funk musician. His manager took advantage of his vulnerability from drug abuse to convince him to sign over all his royalties to a company he chose, which amounted to stealing his fortune. As a result, Sly has been reduced to having to live in a van!

These two examples are from highly successful musicians; the position is far worse for the countless thousands of struggling underground musicians. The rise of internet streaming as a medium for music has significantly worsened the hand of small musicians, because internet giants like Pandora, Spotify and Google Music can lean upon their extraordinarily back catalogue of decades of popular music to crush new musicians. The internet makes all music immediately available, and in the face of that, any one artist's output is insignificant, so why pay them fairly? Pandora thus feels confident enough to propose The Internet Radio Fairness Act, or IRFA, which would "cut musicians' pay by 85 percent—reducing Pandora's royalty costs from 50 per cent to 10 per cent." "According to the Huffington Post: "In the third quarter of last year, Blake Morgan's songs were played on Pandora some 27,900 times. But the New York-based recording artist and label owner said he made only \$1.62 from the popular internet radio service."" (quoted from Joel Ang)

Vast media monopolies use their power, and the respective desperation of musicians and other artists, to buy up the copyrights to all kinds of acts of creation - novels, screenplays, albums etc. They can do this because the independent artists do not feel they can make it in the global market on their own - just using your copyright to prevent your work being stolen or plagiarised costs a huge amount in legal fees, thus they feel the need to sign up with those with the influence and financial muscle to do so. But once these rights are signed away, the owners can do what they want with them. They essentially pirate - legally - from the actual artists. Again, no one's democratic rights are formally violated in this process, but in practice, millions of artists are bullied out of their own copyrights and have their own labour's of love transformed into someone else's property. This is another reason why monopolies such as Sony, far from needing our support in the fight for free speech, are the enemies of free speech, for they have hoarded millions of copyrights to control, inhibit and manipulate our society's artistic output.

If anyone doubts the ferocity with which copyright laws, which exclude society from the use and exchange of its own intellectual products, are enforced, they need look no further than the tragic case of Aaron Swartz, a 'hacktivist' so appalled at the way in which universities and academic publishers profit from hoarding knowledge against those who create it, he simply hacked into JSTOR and downloaded its vast database of academic papers. Instead of using this to make a personal profit, he simply took advantage of the internet's incredible potential for socialising all human knowledge for the benefit of humanity by making this database free to download. Rather than incur a fine or a banning from academia, Aaron was hounded by the very highest level, the federal prosecutor, and was most likely to face a \$1m and 35 years in jail! Confronted with this appalling situation, Aaron took his own life in 2013. He is rightly regarded as a hero and progressive in the 'hacker' community, not interested in stealing for personal gain but for humanity's. The truth is that Aaron Swartz was a fighter for real free speech and was persecuted to the point of suicide for being just that.

In our society, there is no true freedom of speech, for it is a freedom only for those who command massive resources. Freedom in the lives of the majority is fleeting, illusory and a cruel irony - the freedom to consume what media the capitalists have deemed important or profitable, and the freedom to be exploited, whether as industrial workers, journalists or struggling musicians. A lucky few break through the tiny cracks in the system and these are held up as 'proof' of the freedom of the majority.

It follows that the only way to create a truly free society, one in which the majority have equal access to the facilities of the media and in which culture is produced for the sake of genuine human expression, whatever form that may take, is to treat all these facilities - newspapers, TV stations, websites, music venues and the education system - as social goods freely available to all and under the democratic control of the masses. But not only that. The enormous power of the ruling class stems primarily not from its ownership of the airwaves, but its control over production in general. The long working hours, the general condition of relying on the capitalists for employment so that we may live, and all the social insecurity this creates, inhibits our creativity and confidence, it impoverishes us literally and spiritually. In these conditions, there can be no talk of real freedom of expression. The expropriation of the media empires under democratic workers control as part of a general plan of production to meet social need - that is the demand of those who fight for real freedom of expression!

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## #AAPSweeps Delhi

Anand Kumar (CWI-India) 19 February 2015



The hashtag in a way symbolizes AAP's stunning victory in the Delhi Elections winning 67 out of 70 seats in the state assembly. It shows that neither corporate money nor media influence is a guarantee to victory, especially in times of heightened expectations amongst the working people. While opinion polls and critics alike clearly saw an AAP victory coming, but nobody expected such a near decimation of the BJP, left with just 3 seats and a duck for Congress!

Crowd-sourced funding, a dedicated volunteer base and effective use of social media by the AAP indeed played a crucial role in its victory. But more importantly AAP's relentless focus on issues such as high electricity bills, water woes, price rise, housing, health care and education struck a chord amongst the Delhi working people. Besides AAP's 49 day in office last year, where it did deliver on some of its promises (despite its limitations), has certainly not gone unnoticed. The fact that there was a perception of less corruption during AAP's rule has only strengthened the feeling amongst many that it truly stands by its name as the 'common man' party.

With the Aam Aadmi Party chief Arvind Kejriwal becoming the Chief Minister of the national capital once again, the question on everyone's mind right now - Will he deliver on all his promises?

### **Emperor defeated in his own backyard!**

Before getting into the nuances of AAP's politics and the question mark on its future prospects, it would be worthwhile examining the state of its enemy that has been routed, namely the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Nobody now disagrees that the real causative factor for the BJP's defeat falls squarely on the shoulders of its Prime Minister - Narendra Modi and his acolyte Amit Shah.

Just over 8 months into his first innings and Modi has already started to display all the trappings of power, without any achievement to show on the ground. A clinical obsession over self imagery (photo-ops & selfies) that was best showcased during US President Barack Obama's recent visit when Modi wore the '10 lakh suit' with his name written all over it. Such a shameless display of arrogance has not gone down well with many ordinary people at large, coming from a man who successfully sold the 'Chaiwala to

PM' card.

The iron grip that Modi-Shah duo maintain over their party has also started to take its toll. Their perceived electoral invincibility since 2002 probably went to their heads. In the four previous assembly elections last year, it was Modi wave all the way and no second rung leadership of the BJP was given the lead. Delhi was also destined to be that way, when Shah probably realized the mistake too late and brought a rank outsider into the party as its chief ministerial candidate. Kiran Bedi lost the elections in a seat that was a traditional stronghold of the BJP for the last two decades. BJP may even have got a respectable number in this elections had it been led by a local BJP leader like Harsh Vardhan (who was shifted to the center after last year general elections). Kiran Bedi experiment was an epic disaster.

The pernicious role of the Sangh Parivar cannot be forgotten either. Last 3 months has seen a barrage of fear mongering statements and rise in communal tensions allegedly meant to shore up Hindutva supremacy, which has only backfired. It has not only alienated a lot of middle class liberal supporters of Modi, it forced the minorities - Muslims, many Sikhs and Christians in Delhi to vote en masse in favour of AAP.

Negative campaigning, something the Sangh specializes in, was unleashed against Kejriwal by the party and its leader alike attacking his family, distastefully bringing his caste into picture and name calling him a naxalite, anarchist and so on. While such kind of low politics may have worked to some extent against the Nehru-Gandhi family last year, but in Delhi this only strengthened Kejriwal more and more, boomeranging against the BJP in the end.

And last but not the least, over 8 months of proxy rule in Delhi, the gap between development rhetoric and no real 'development' so to speak cannot be any more stark than in Delhi - the seat of power. No attempt was made to address any of the key concerns of the Delhi working people and Modi is being seen as only accessible to business tycoons like the Ambanis, Adanis or foreign leaders, than to the man on the street. To make matters worse, the BJP did not even publish a manifesto for the elections. Just a vision statement was comically read out by Kiran Bedi, each focus area indistinguishable from the other!

This was in complete stark contrast to Arvind Kejriwal led campaign. Not only was he seen as being accessible to everyone at all times, Kejriwal one-upped Modi by mimicking the latter's general election campaign strategy in many ways. If it was Modi's Gujarat Model there, here it was Kejriwal's 49 days, the outsider rhetoric was played to the hilt, if it was 'chiawalla' PM there, now it is 'common man' CM, both campaign saw personality politics played to gallery - 'Har Har Modi' to '5 Saal Kejriwal' songs and much more.

And in a role reversal, like Modi invited Nawaz Sharif and other regional leaders for his oath taking ceremony to show who is the new boss, Kejriwal turned the tables by inviting Modi (although declined by the latter) and his ministers to the CM oath ceremony, ironically on 14th Feb (Valentine's Day!). What's more, AAP has gone to the extent of giving opposition status to the BJP in assembly (something denied to Congress in the Lok Sabha).

Thus, it remains to be seen what these gestures towards Modi truly signify in AAP's journey towards the mainstream.

### **R.I.P. Congress (Delhi)**

Having ruled Delhi for 15 years and now with virtually no seat in the assembly, questions are once again being raised about the future of the party led by the aging Sonia Gandhi and her son Rahul Gandhi. All its traditional voter base has been transferred to AAP, while BJP's voter base remains intact to a larger extent.

While it may be too early to sound out the death knell of the Congress throughout India yet, but the organization is definitely in tatters and its leadership bankrupt. The entrance of AAP on the scene has only made the matters worse for the party. Yes, the AAP is yet to spread its influence throughout India and has a long way to go, but Congress is seen as

becoming increasingly irrelevant in the politics of North India.

## **AAP 2.0**

One thing is for sure, AAP has definitely learned from its mistakes in the past. All talk of anarchy or AAP trying its luck in other states like last time is not going to happen for the time being at least, as focus for the party right now shifts towards delivering its promises. There is no escaping for the AAP on this one. Not just the media or other rivals are watching its every move, but the working people who voted for it decisively are not going to remain passive if AAP fails to deliver.

A cursory look at AAP's Manifesto has promises that include: Swaraj (self rule) bill for devolving powers to local areas, halving electricity bills like last time, free water (upto 20 kiloliters) plus 14 lakh new connections for the low income sections, increased spending in education & healthcare, free Wi-fi, 8 lakh new jobs, regularization of contractual labour in government services, affordable housing, regularization of slums, 200,000 public toilets, controlling price rise, justice for the anti-Sikh riot victims, no FDI in retail, women safety through CCTV surveillance, fast track courts and citizen force etc., and other vague promises like promoting solar, reviving the Yamuna or reducing pollution etc. The most important promises and contentious as it would involve working with Central govt. include meeting the full statehood demand for Delhi and passing of the Jan Lokpal Bill.

While some of the promises are implementable, but whether AAP can seriously implement promises that could significantly raise the standard of living for the working people of Delhi is questionable. Unlike other states that have resources spread out in a much wider area and much greater powers, the problem for the AAP is its resource crunch and limited powers of the govt. However, much AAP sincerely tries there will always be financial crunch plaguing the government. That is where the limits of working within capitalism will be tested out and exposed. Unless AAP seriously considers taxing the wealthy to fund its somewhat socio-democratic programme, it will always fall short of its promises. Subsidizing will only make matters worse for the government.

This is not to say that all of AAP promises are actually pro-people. Jan Lokpal bill is a draconian measure, coupled with CCTV cameras are recipes for a surveillance state. And AAP has not said anything with regards to how it plans to reform state institutions like police, civil administration etc., if statehood were to be achieved. But at the moment these questions do not count as much as AAP meeting these demands first.

Working with the Modi govt is not going to be easy for AAP and efforts will be on to derail the AAP in every step of the way. Letting AAP implement on its promises would only end up de-legitimizing Modi. On the other hand, the economic policies of the AAP would be like any other govt elsewhere, attracting investors and slavishly follow neo-liberal economics with a cleaner conscience perhaps. While opposition towards capitalism is certainly not to be expected of AAP, but some of its elections promises would put it in conflict with the corporates and it remains to be seen how AAP chooses to play. A lot of pressure would definitely be exerted on the AAP by the ruling elite to dilute its programme.

On the other hand, the composition of AAP ranges between center left to center right. It will face pulls from various directions. For eg., nearly 2 out of 3 MLA's elected have assets more than Rs. 1 crore and 11 MLA have assets more than Rs. 10 crores, with the highest valued at Rs. 87 crores. Money speaks louder than words, there is no second guessing here as to where their true loyalties lie!

Prashant Bhushan, perhaps AAP's most left leaning leader (now sidelined) has raised concerns on candidate selections and recently stated that "Some people who were taken in the party from other parties are completely immoral ... fighting elections is a business for them" (Tol). So such careerists and opportunists can wreck havoc on the party's prospects in the future.

Expansion into other areas for the AAP is not going to be easy and depends on how successfully it can market its Delhi model. While opposition spaces

would definitely open up in many parts of India, given the way Modi is aggressively implementing neo-liberal reforms and this is bound to clash with various downtrodden sections of the society. Here again AAP's support is questionable, as it does not have a clear stance on nuclear power, nationality question, environment etc. In the near term, however, AAP might cautiously try to expand in its areas of influence like Punjab or some of the urban centers where it has lot of support amongst the middle classes. Here again success, as AAP strategist clearly know, would depend upon timing and issues that AAP takes up to project itself as the savior.

And finally, it is not going to be an easy ride for the AAP. Yes it has overwhelming majority in the assembly and stability of the government is guaranteed for the near term. But its support amongst the working people of Delhi will depend on how far AAP is willing to go the extra mile and any compromises with the ruling class on livelihood concerns will be seen as a betrayal leading to a possible backlash from its ordinary supporters.

#### **A New Re-alignment of Forces against Modi?**

This victory of AAP in Delhi is definitely a dent on Modi's image and a course correction is likely to be made by the Modi-Shah duo. With Bihar elections due later this year, Delhi mistakes are unlikely to be repeated. Modi has already started to make some noises that he will not allow religious intolerance and has personally ordered a probe into the attack on churches in Delhi recently. This is nothing more than a stop gap strategy to salvage the situation or else it could seriously end up damaging the prospects of the government in the long term. Attempts at hounding activists like Teesta Setalvad and her husband Javed Anand (who have been courageously fighting on behalf of Gujarat riot victims) and the recent release of police officers involved in fake encounters, 70 rioters from the post-Godhra carnage are all signs that deep down nothing really has changed.

An unexpected outcome of this elections is that spotlight on Modi will certainly come down and all media attention will now be focused on Arvind Kejriwal's govt. scrutinizing its every move. This would definitely afford them a breathing space to re-consolidate lost ground and hit back at the opposition when the time is ripe.

While regional opposition parties and left especially have hailed AAP's victory, but any question of them gaining back lost momentum is not going to happen. The regional parties like the Janata Parivar are a totally discredited lot and any opposition led by them can only be opportunistic to say the least. The worst off probably are the left parties like the CPI(M) that now see a new messiah in the AAP phenomenon for their equally discredited third front politics and learning nothing from the Delhi experience. And AAP is certainly not going to be seen in the company of these gentlemen. More than likely they would try to build upon the opposition vacuum and tap on to the youth potential that has been criminally discarded by these so called communist parties.

While certainly the stunning victory of AAP over BJP & Congress has to be welcomed by socialists/Marxists, as the juggernaut of extremely communal, Modi led BJP has stumbled if not halted. It is a sigh of relief in the midst of many doom-sayers who had erroneously started the phrases such as "fascism Indian Style" etc.

But, as the the two Communist Parties have started vaulting and singing shenanigans of AAP, it will be entirely wrong to put the eggs in this basket, with out any scrutiny. AAP in many ways is still an unknown quantity, and has declared policy to say that it refuses to be a LEFT party, and in the same breath speaks of Clean Capitalism. To recall one of its ideologues, the suave Yogendra Yadav quipped that " the two decades of neo-liberalism has not worsened the situation of the poor in India, they were poor even prior to reforms. What is required is Intelligent Management of Capitalism"!

Secondly, the AAP leadership refuses to see the 'Elephant in the Indian Closet'. Their deliberate blindness towards the complexity of CASTE, and attempts to push it under the carpet as of no consequence is something of a mind boggling strategy.

One can argue that politics has to go beyond Class & Caste in India, hence the new-political “experiments” should dare such bold initiatives, but as mentioned earlier regarding the grip of money bags within the party, the caste composition of the leadership is also alarmingly upper-caste.

In all its proclamations, it is now more than clear that AAP is surely claiming the space of what was Congress party’s domain, AAP is the 21st Century Congress reinvented. Yes, there are possibilities that it can be pushed to the left of centre, if not to the left it self.

All in all, an interesting period opens up once again after the lull following Modi’s victory in the last year general elections. This is not to say an opposition is about to break out against Modi’s policies, more likely opposition spaces will crop up in the coming period affording a platform where ideas of democratic socialism can boldly be raised and when limits of NGO inspired politics would have run its course.

[www.socialism.in](http://www.socialism.in)

## Chinese New Year highlights extreme class divisions

### Four billionaires ‘created’ every week while workers fight to collect their wages



China Worker 19 February 2015

The world’s biggest annual migration is under way with the majority of China’s 270 million migrant workers making their way home to provinces far from the cities where they live and work. According to official data more than 2.8 billion trips will be made in the next few weeks as China celebrates the arrival of the Year of the Goat. But while primarily a time of family reunions and celebrations, the holiday period also casts a light on social divisions and the extremes of wealth and poverty in modern China.

For the wealthy, despite a shakier economy over the past year, things have never been better. China’s 25 richest people have increased the value of their personal fortunes by a staggering 21.3 billion US dollars over the past six weeks. That is just the increase they have banked since 1 January according to a report from Bloomberg. To put this sum in perspective, the UN estimates that an additional 30 billion US dollars yearly would provide access to safe water to the entire planet. Diseases linked to unsafe drinking water kill an estimated 6,000 people per day worldwide. Vast areas of rural China also suffer from severe water pollution.

The surge in wealth for China’s super-rich is a result of the stock market boom - ‘niu shi’ - engineered by the policies of the so-called ‘Communist’ Party (CCP) dictatorship. With looser monetary policies and regulatory changes to favour financial speculation, the main Shanghai share index rose 60 percent during the Lunar Year of the Horse. The stock markets will be closed for a week during the Chinese New Year holiday but, based on ‘hot money’ flooding in, the stock market bubble is set to inflate further - before an inevitable correction.

Bloomberg News reports that the stock market boom and a string of initial public offerings (IPOs) created two dozen new dollar billionaires in China since the start of 2015. That’s an average of four new billionaires per week. The owners of an airline, a video-game developer and a chain of pharmacies are among this new financial elite.

### Upturn in strikes

Yet for millions of workers in China the past few weeks have been especially tough, with an increase in conflicts over unpaid wages. As the economy slows and former boom industries like mining and construction encounter hard times, the number of workers’ protests and strikes has tripled compared to the levels of one year ago, according to independent estimates. Non-payment of wages is one of the most common triggers of disputes.

The gigantic construction sector has been a particular flashpoint with its

40 million workforce comprised mostly of migrants employed in a crazy chain of sub-contracting companies who generally pay salaries once a year - just prior to the Chinese New Year. Almost one-third of strikes currently breaking out in China are in the construction sector. In early February, construction workers in Kunming blocked a main road and held up banners demanding a property developer handover their wages - earned with "blood and sweat," according to reports on social media. Dozens of similar protests have taken place in recent weeks. Some recent conflicts over unpaid wages have led to fatalities as reported from Guangxi and Shanxi provinces. The latter case attracted nationwide attention on social media. Zhou Xiuyun, the mother of a construction worker, was killed by police during a protest over wage arrears in December.

A 2014 study by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences found that 8 percent of migrant workers complained of being owed wages in the preceding year. This study found that half of these workers, or 4.3 percent of the total, said they had taken part in "mass incidents" (the official term for strikes and demonstrations) to pursue their wage arrears. These percentages, if reflective of the whole country, translate into 21.6 million and 11.6 million workers respectively.

The Great Wall separating rich from poor in China is highlighted by the stellar rise of construction company shares on the stock market - jumping 63 percent in the final month of 2014 - while construction workers are forced into sometimes desperate measures to obtain their hard-earned pay.

#### **'Left-behind children'**

A heartrending feature of the Lunar New Year holidays is the plight of China's 70 million 'left-behind children' (liu shou er tong). Through poverty and discriminatory laws they are forcibly separated from their migrant worker parents for most of the year. The start of the holidays mean that, as the Financial Times commented, "tens of millions of migrant children are just about to spend a week with their parents - and then say goodbye to them for another year. The Chinese dream is a tough taskmaster."

The hukou system, which divides the population between privileged 'urban' households and underprivileged 'rural' households, means that rural children are blocked from attending most urban schools. Many live with their grandparents or other family members, others are placed in boarding schools which have recently attracted widespread media criticism. "Students were often locked in classrooms for long periods to study by themselves," Caixin reported from one such school.

Almost 50 percent of left-behind children suffer from depression and anxiety, compared with 30 percent of their urban counterparts, according to a 2014 study funded by the Heilongjiang provincial government. "Left-behind children usually have inferiority complexes, lower self-esteem and lower confidence," the study's chief researcher reported.

As China's economy slows sharply - a process that is only partially revealed by official statistics - the working class will face new hardships and challenges in the Year of the Goat. Collective struggle and steps to build independent workers' organisations show the way ahead.  
chinaworker.info

## **Who profits from killing Charlie?**

### **A pro-style jihadist commando attack in Europe's heart. Cui bono?**

 Pepe Escobar (Russia Today) 10 January 2015

 Careful planning and preparation, Kalashnikovs, rocket-propelled grenade launcher, balaclavas, sand-colored ammunition vest stuffed with spare magazines, army boots, easy escape in a black Citroen...

And the icing on this particularly lethal cake: faultless Paris-based logistical support to pull it all off. A former top French military

commander, Frédéric Gallois, has stressed the perfect application of “urban guerrilla technique” (where are those notorious Western counter-terrorism “experts” when one needs them?)

Some said they spoke perfect French, while others maintained their command of the language was mangled and broken. Anyway, what matters is that they uttered the magic word: “We’re Al-Qaeda.” Better yet, they told a man in the street: “Tell the media that this is Al-Qaeda in Yemen,” which means, in American terror terminology, Al-Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula (AQAP), which had Charlie Hebdo’s editor/cartoonist Stephane Charbonnier (“Charb”) on a hit list duly promoted by AQAP’s glossy Inspire magazine. Accusation: “Insulting the Prophet Mohammed.”

And just to make sure everyone had the perpetrators implanted on their brain, the killers also said, “Allahu Akbar”, “We have killed Charlie Hebdo” and “We have avenged the Prophet.”

Case closed? Well, it took only a few hours for French police to identify the (usual?) suspects: French-Algerian brothers Said and Cherif Kouachi. The third man, the driver of the black Citroen, apparently 18-year-old Hamyd Mourad, then turned himself in with an ironclad alibi. So the third man remains a cipher.

They all wore balaclavas. The Kouachi brothers have not been captured, but the police seem to know very well who they are. Because they found an abandoned ID in the black Citroen (oh, the troubles of being a command in a rush...) How come they didn’t know anything before the carnage?

Right on cue, Cherif Kouachi’s bio was splattered all over the shop. He was on a global watch list. Along with six others, he was sentenced in May 2008 to 3 years in prison for “terrorism”; in fact unloading a dozen young Frenchmen via madrassas in Egypt and Syria to none other than Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the killed-by-an-American-missile former head of Al-Qaeda in Iraq and the spiritual father of Daesh/ISIS/ISIL.

Also right on clue, a full narrative was ready for mass consumption. According to French police “experts,” this could be an attack “ordered from abroad and executed by jihadists coming back from Syria that have escaped us,” or it could be “suburban idiots that radicalized themselves and concocted this military attack in the name of Al-Qaeda.”

Scrap option two, please; this was a pro job. And staying with option one, this points right at - what else - blowback. Yes, they could be Daesh/ISIS/ISIL mercenaries trained by NATO (crucially, France included) in Turkey and/or Jordan. But it might get even false-flag nastier. They could also be former or current French special forces.

### **Blast Islam, will travel**

Predictably, Islamofascism peddlers are already having a field day/week/month/year. For simpletons/trolls/hordes exhibiting an IQ worthy of sub-zoology, when in doubt, demonize Islam. It’s so convenient to forget that untold millions from Pakistan’s tribal areas, to street markets across Iraq, continue to feel pain devastating their hearts and lives as they are expendable victims of the jihadist mindset - or “kalashnikov culture”, as it is known in Pakistan - which has been profiting the West directly or indirectly, for decades now. Think ritual droning of Pakistani, Yemeni, Syrian, Iraqi or Libyan civilians. Think Sadr City witnessing carnage 10 times worse than Paris.

What French President Francois Hollande defined as “an act of exceptional barbarism” - and it is - does not apply when the West, France in the front line, from King Sarko to General Hollande himself, weaponizes, trains and remote-controls assorted mercenaries/beheaders from Libya to Syria. Oh yeah, killing civilians in Tripoli or Aleppo is perfectly alright, but don’t do that in Paris.

So this, in the heart of Europe, is what blowback feels like. This is what people feel in the Waziristans when a wedding party is incinerated by a Hellfire missile. In parallel, it’s absolutely impossible to credit that the sophisticated Western intel network had not seen blowback coming - and

was impotent to prevent it.

Of course the ultra-elaborate Western counter-terrorism expert network - so proficient at stripteasing us all at every airport - saw it coming; but in shadow warland, portmanteau "Al-Qaeda" and its myriad declinations, including "renegade" Daesh/ISIS/ISIL, are used as much as a mercenary army as a convenient domestic threat "against our freedoms."

### Who profits?

US Think Tankland, also predictably, is busy spinning the drama of an "intra-Muslim" split, which provides jihadists with a lot of geopolitical space to exploit - all this sucking the Western world into a Muslim civil war. This is absolutely ridiculous. The Empire of Chaos, already during the 70s, was busy cultivating jihadist/Kalashnikov culture to fight anything from the USSR to nationalist movements all across the Global South. Divide and Rule has always been used to fan the "intra-Islam", flames from the Clinton administration getting cozy with the Taliban to the Cheney regime - helped by Persian Gulf vassals - advancing the sectarian Sunni/Shiite schism.

Cui bono, then, killing Charlie? Only those whose agenda is to demonize Islam. Not even a bunch of brainwashed fanatics would pull off the Charlie carnage to show people who accuse them of being barbarians that they are, in fact, barbarians. French intel at least has concluded that this was no underwear bomber stunt. This was a pro job that happened to take place just a few days after France recognized Palestinian statehood. And just a few days after General Hollande demanded the lifting of sanctions against the Russian "threat."

The Masters of the Universe, who pull the real levers of the Empire of Chaos, are freaking out with the systemic chaos in the racket they so far had the illusion of controlling. Make no mistake, the Empire of Chaos will do what it can to exploit the post-Charlie environment - be it blowback or false flag.

The Obama administration is already mobilizing the UN Security Council. The FBI is "helping" with the French investigation. And as an Italian analyst memorably put it, jihadists don't attack a vulture hedge fund; they attack a satirical rag. This is not religion, but hardcore geopolitics. Reminds me of David Bowie: "This is not rock 'n roll. This is suicide."

The Obama administration is already mobilized to offer "protection" - Mob-style - to a Western Europe that is just, only just, starting to be diffident to the pre-fabricated Russian "threat." And just as it happens, when the Empire of Chaos mostly needs it, evil "terra" once again rears its ugly head.

And yes, I am Charlie. Not only because they made us laugh; but because they were sacrificial lambs in a much nastier, gruesome, never-ending shadow play.

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## It's the annual university strike season

### The funding dilemma obscures the need for a road map towards free higher education

Lukhona Mnguni (The Mercury) 10 February 2015

STUDENTS and journalists alike are dusting off their sneakers as they prepare for strikes. This has become an annual ritual in many universities. Clearly, something is wrong. The issue is funding for students who come from underprivileged backgrounds but are academically capable of pursuing their studies.

It is easy to dismiss these students as hooligans. At times students do not

exhaust internal options to get answers; however, there are no solutions coming from management in the different universities.

The cry from universities is that they do not have enough funds. The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) shares the same cry even though its budget has increased substantially in the last five years. What is to be done?

An important Report of the Ministerial Committee for the Review of the Funding of Universities, finalised in 2013, contains an important discussion on funding.

However, it continues on the dominant discussion on funding options, without taking the needed discussion - drawing a road map towards free higher education.

In the report, the Minister of Higher Education, Dr Blade Nzimande, highlights the importance of higher education as “a major driver of economic competitiveness in an increasingly knowledge-driven global economy”.

According to him there are two major points of crisis in the funding discussion. “Firstly, government funding has not kept pace with the growth of enrolments in the system. Secondly, it is often how resources are internally allocated within universities that exacerbates the challenges some universities face.”

To deal with increasing tuition fees, the minister believes there is a need to discuss in great detail “capping” of student fees. Yet universities will argue the impossibility of this, given the rise in costs to keep their systems well resourced.

In its Mangaung 2012 elective conference, the ANC decided on a bizarre resolution - a graduate tax.

This would be a tax on newly employed graduates, in an effort to raise funds for NSFAS to ensure greater absorption of financially needy students. In everyday discussions, people point to corruption and inadequate funds for NSFAS as the problem.

Thus, many believe that if NSFAS is corrected the funding problem will go away. This is not true, given the phenomenon of “the missing middle” - those who cannot afford fees but are not “needy” enough to receive NSFAS funding.

Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa in his executive summary of the report admits that “between 2000 and 2010, state funding per full-time equivalent (FTE) enrolled student fell by 1.1% annually, in real terms” and that “tuition fees per FTE student increased by 2.5% annually, in real terms”. This means to an extent the government owes students for having filled the gap as it abdicated on funding duties through these years. While the issue of funding is a pressing one, the Council on Higher Education in 2013 told us of the unimpressive throughput rates.

The number of dropouts in the system is significantly high, with only about 50% of students that register getting to graduate, whether in record time or not. Clearly, the system needs to improve on this, lest we keep funding an ailing system. Between 1994 and 2011 enrolments increased from 495 356 to 938 201 respectively. The National Development Plan envisages enrolment to be at 1.5 million by 2030, meaning that if dropout rates were still as high then, we would be scores of students for  
Is free education an outcome of a prosperous society or an ingredient towards its creation?  
setting up failure.

The idea of free higher education in South Africa is always received with great alarm. When one points to free higher education for citizens of countries such as Scotland, Norway and many parts of Germany and so forth, you are told that “we are not a developed country”. However, we must pose the question: Is free education an outcome of a prosperous society or an ingredient towards its creation?

If we could eliminate tuition fees for students, we would feed back into

the economy some spending relief for the many families that pay fees and increase their saving ability, while simultaneously keeping healthy account balances for all universities.

Free higher education would also accelerate the transformation of certain institutions such as the universities of Pretoria and Stellenbosch. Transformation in these institutions is not only frustrated by “historic cultural inheritance” but also by the fact that these institutions want to keep their student debt levels as low as possible. Universities like Rhodes (with just over 7 000 students) are now asking 40-55% of tuition fees as a registration fee. This is another strategy to ensure low student debt and higher operating funds. An institution such as UKZN (with the highest number of students at about 44 000) takes about 10% of tuition as the registration fee. The University of Johannesburg is around the same.

In 2010 on average, student fees accounted for 30% of income for institutions, while the government’s contribution had decreased to 41%.

For free higher education to be possible we need to discuss reorienting a part of broad-based black economic empowerment towards institutions being given stakes in corporate companies, instead of these enriching elites.

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## Egypt: Regime brutality on fourth anniversary of revolution

### Masses will regain confidence and willingness to fight

David Johnson, Socialist Party (CWI England & Wales) 11 February 2015



January 25th marked the fourth anniversary of the start of the revolutionary uprising in Egypt in 2011. Demonstrations of a few thousand quickly grew into a mighty nationwide movement of hundreds of thousands and then millions that swept aside Hosni Mubarak’s corrupt dictatorial rule.

Despite massive use of tear gas and live ammunition, his security forces were unable to crush the revolt. Soldiers refused to fire on the crowds. Workers and students, young and old, women and men, Muslims and Christians united against the hated regime. Clinging to power for 18 days, Mubarak was eventually forced out as a general strike began to develop.

Although the working class played a key role in the demonstrations and occupations of Tahrir and other city squares, they mostly did so as individuals - not as an organised class. The working class did not have a mass party, rooted in the major workplaces and able to patiently explain the next steps needed to take economic and political power from the ruling class.

Instead, the regime gave itself a hasty makeover to change its appearance. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) jailed their former leader, Hosni Mubarak, and his sons, Gamal and Alaa, charged with authorising the killing of demonstrators and corruption. All three have recently been released - a sign that the ruling class now feels confident enough in their counter-revolution to allow this.

Meanwhile, pro-democracy activists have been arrested and sentenced to up to 15 years in prison. However, the brutal reaction of police to this year’s relatively small anniversary demonstrations also shows anxiety by the regime. Armoured cars and barbed wire were used in Tahrir Square. At least 23 died and 97 were wounded.

Witnesses to the fatal shooting of a young mother, Shaimaa Al-Sabbagh, a member of the Socialist Popular Alliance Party, were themselves arrested. She was shot and killed, apparently by security forces, in front of scores of

people, while attempting to lay flowers commemorating those protesters massacred in 2011. Shaimaa Al-Sabbagh has since become a symbol of resistance to the Sisi dictatorship.

Zohdi El-Shamy, the vice-president of the Socialist Popular Alliance Party, was detained overnight on suspicion of being involved in Al-Sabbagh's killing, the reason apparently being that he appeared suspiciously anxious in video footage of the march. (Ahram Online 1.2.15)

Shooting demonstrators is a grim reminder of Mubarak's final days. The regime senses that workers and youth who made the 2011 revolution feel disappointed and demoralised at the outcome, but have not been permanently defeated. It aims to intimidate any opposition to prevent it from growing.

Another grim reminder of SCAF's rule were the deaths of at least 30 football fans after police, unprovoked, fired teargas and shot gun pellets on supporters waiting to enter a stadium in Cairo. While the full details of the Air Force Stadium Events on 8 February have yet to emerge, it should be noted that the Zamalek SC hard-core fans, the Ultra White Knights, were among those who fought hardest to oust Mubarak. Many were crushed last weekend, with the police being accused of using excessive force. Some apparently died from tear gas inhalation. This recalls the 2012 Port Said football massacre, in which over 70 Al-Ahly SC fans were killed. Zamalek Ultras regard last weekend's deaths as an act of revenge by the state and they posted a statement on Facebook: "We do not need to defend ourselves because the truth is clear. We are attending the funerals of the victims of your tyranny. Save your paperwork, for your trials have failed to achieve justice. It is time to hold our own trials."

After the January 2011 uprising, strikes and workplace occupations took place throughout the country as workers fought to win better pay and conditions, and to oust managers closely identified with Mubarak. Hundreds of new trade unions were organised, independent of the state-run Egyptian Trade Union Federation. Membership of independent trade unions grew from barely 50,000 to 2.5million within months.

### **Need for political movement**

Tragically, left parties did not link the strikes to a political movement to win power from the ruling class that still holds on to its ownership of banks, industries and land. Instead, alliances were formed with liberals, who wanted democratic rights but not to break with the capitalist system. 'Democratic constitution first - then elections,' was their main campaign throughout 2011.

While it is correct to fight for genuine democratic rights, workers need these to be able to fight for decent pay, jobs and housing. Weak Egyptian capitalism could not afford any of these. Linking the fight for democratic rights with the fight for decent living standards, and offering a socialist programme of action to win these, could have built mass support from workers and drawn behind them the youth, many of the middle classes and urban and rural poor.

Instead, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) mobilised support, despite their leadership, including wealthy businessmen, having held back from the struggle to overthrow Mubarak. However, the MB government of President Mohammed Morsi rapidly lost support as the economy worsened and democratic gains were attacked.

Many more strikes and protests took place. A mighty movement on June 30th 2013 - reputedly one of the biggest demonstrations ever recorded - led to the MB government's downfall. Although sections of the 'deep state' were involved in whipping up opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood, once again, power was in the hands of the millions on the streets. However the lack of a mass party to move forward to a workers' government with a socialist programme allowed General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi to step in and fill the vacuum.

A sign of the confusion present among some of the lefts was that Kamal Abu Eita became Minister of Manpower and Labour. A leader of the landmark 2007 strike of property tax collectors under Mubarak, he was

president of the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions until joining Sisi's government.

Sisi bloodily repressed MB protests, leading to 2,500 deaths. Having dealt with the Islamists, he rapidly cracked down on strikers, protestors and many leaders of the protest movements that became so prominent before, during and after the January 25th 2011 revolution. Critical voices were jailed, including journalists, charged with being members of the MB and terrorists.

Sisi portrayed himself as a 'strong man' who would stop endless protests and get the economy moving again so living standards could rise. There were initially few strikes or protests, as sections of the working class, exhausted by protests and fearful of brutal repression, kept their heads down. There appears to be a mood of deep disappointment - and even despair among activists - after three years of upheaval, with little apparently to show for it.

### **Sisi regime will be challenged**

But Sisi's regime is not like that of the radical nationalist regime of Nasser in the 1950s and '60s. Nasser balanced Egypt between world super-powers - the capitalist USA and Stalinist USSR - while the world economy was growing. In those circumstances he was able to provide some significant reforms, improving living standards.

Economic growth increased from 2.5% to 3.7% in the final quarter of 2014. This is nowhere near the rate required to provide jobs for young people, decent wages for workers or decent public services.

In recent months there have been signs that workers are once again beginning to flex their muscles again. Twelve thousand workers at the Egyptian Iron and Steel Company went on strike for a week in November; 6,000 workers at El Nasr Coke and Chemicals Company struck in December and 10,000 textile workers at the giant Mahalla factory struck for four days in January. (It was the Mahalla workers' historic strike in 2006 that announced the entrance of the working class into the struggle against Mubarak.) These workers have long been seen as among the most militant and best organised. In all three strikes, workers won concessions.

Significantly, on 15th December hundreds of steel workers held a protest outside the Cabinet in support of their demands. The government dismissed the company chairman, as the steel workers had demanded, which will increase the confidence of workers elsewhere. Sisi's claim to be governing on behalf of the Egyptian people will increasingly be seen to be hollow. Instead, his government will be seen as acting on behalf of big business, including the senior military officers that control substantial sections of the economy.

The coming year will bring more challenges for Sisi's regime. The conflicts across the Middle East have led to dangerous instability in Sinai, where the Jihadist terror group 'Sinai Province', formerly Ansar Beit al-Maqdis, has been active. They have transferred their support from Al-Qaeda to ISIS. A series of bomb attacks on 29th January left 29 dead. A trade union building in Port Said was one of the targets. Further terrorist attacks could threaten the modest revival of tourism that took place last year. Tourism from Russia is also threatened by falling oil prices and the growing Russian economic crisis, and continues to be hit by economic crisis in Europe.

Although Sisi still appears to have significant support, this will weaken and turn to open opposition as all the problems facing workers and youth continue. The working class has not been permanently defeated and will regain its confidence and willingness to fight for its class interests. The lessons of the past four years will be studied by workers and youth, with renewed determination to fight for the 2011 demands of 'bread, freedom and social justice'. The task is to build a workers' party that can link these demands to a socialist programme capable of ending the horrors of capitalism in Egypt and across the region.

[www.socialistworld.net](http://www.socialistworld.net)



Guy Howie 9 February 2015

Newly released figures show that the Chinese economy in 2014 experienced its lowest economic growth since 1990. Furthermore, the International Monetary Fund downgraded its 2015 growth projection for China from 7.1% to 6.8%. According to the Financial Times, 30 out of China's 31 provinces had missed their growth targets for 2014 - the only one which didn't was Tibet, by far the country's smallest regional economy.

Shanghai has even declined to project a growth target for 2015, after it fell a considerable 0.5% short of its 2014 target. Such figures illustrate the beginning of the end for China's 'miraculous' boom, as the reality of capitalist crisis is seeping through to the world's largest exporting economy.

### **Global crisis of capitalism**

In 2008, the world economy entered into an unprecedented crisis, yet the economy of the world's biggest producer for overseas markets, China, seemed to escape relatively unscathed.

After an immediate drop in the rate of GDP increase to 9.6% in 2008 from the previous year's 14.2%, the Chinese government embarked on a gigantic "economic stimulus package" equivalent to US\$586 billion. This represented a pledge comparable to that subsequently announced by the United States, but coming from an economy only one third the size. The injection of large quantities of funding by the state, especially credit, served to artificially cushion the economy.

The Chinese economy was not, however, immune from the global crisis, which resulted in a sharp fall in her exports. The state again stepped in with massive investments in infrastructure, which kept the economy going, although at a slower rate than before. This nevertheless had major consequences.

The most important was the build-up of massive overcapacity across the economy, and especially in construction and heavy industry. The state kept the process going despite the build-up of speculative bubbles, in property in particular.

The bourgeoisie internationally were mesmerized by the Chinese economy and claimed that it would drag the world economy out of the slump. However, as the Marxists said at the time, this programme only gave temporary relief at the cost of inflating gigantic bubbles in the economy. The property market soared and at its peak in 2010, the average house cost almost twelve times the average household income! This programme sustained the economy above 9% annual growth until 2012, by which point the property bubble was being deflated amid fears of it expanding to even more dangerous levels. Since then, China's annual growth rate has begun

to decline more rapidly.

This decline didn't appear to bourgeois economists to be too much cause for alarm, as a slower growth rate meant more "stability" and a "healthier" economy, after all. The rate of growth has been decreasing in line with projected government targets as well as IMF projections. Meanwhile wages have been increasing, meaning more money for consumers, thus boosting the internal market which they hoped would make up for the loss in exports.

So far China has avoided a sharp downturn. This is mainly due to the state pursuing a Keynesian policy to keep the bubble inflated. All this simply meant that the crisis had been put off, but not avoided. The longer it is put off, the harder the crash will be when it comes. No "market economy" can avoid the laws of capitalism.

### **Quantitative Easing**

Last July, The Economist happily reported: "Fears of a property crash, corporate defaults and austerity in the age of anti-corruption all came to naught. China's growth sped up in the second quarter, climbing to 7.5% year-on-year, smack in line with the government's official target." (The Economist, 16 July 2014)

Around this time, the Chinese government began to talk more regularly of a "new normal": the country adjusting to new, lower growth figures previously unthinkable for any of the national target-setters.

It seemed that they had avoided the "heavy landing" down from the peak of the boom that some economists had previously feared. In the past six months, however, investment has continued to fall at an increasing rate, and property prices have continued their downward spiral.

The once "responsible" bureaucracy has had to take drastic measures to bolster growth such as the introduction of quantitative easing by printing an extraordinary 500bn yuan (\$81bn) in September. According to The Economist, "The central bank did not actually announce the loan, doubtless because it did not want to look like it was going back on [Prime Minister] Mr Li's pledge to refrain from stimulus." (The Economist, 20 September 2014). But call it what you want, the facts cannot be changed. The Chinese bureaucracy is beginning to feel the constraints of the world economic crisis which is forcibly setting the agenda for its policies.

It has tried to deflate the property bubble and other unproductive financial bubbles. But still, before the final quarter of last year, the threat of a "hard landing" - i.e. a full-blown economic crisis - was great enough for the government to adopt the extreme measure of quantitative easing.

However, the result has not been what the government was hoping for. In fact since QE was introduced the Chinese economy has only slowed more quickly. While the state tried to control "a steady decline in growth", which means that it tried gradually lowering the flow of state funds into the economy, the market reacted by violently cutting back on investments. Thus from October to September investments fell from 1.05trn yuan to 662bn yuan in October. So fast was the fall in investments, that the bureaucracy had to discuss lowering economic expectations for this year.

Further government measures are expected this year to try and stem the tide: "While a lag is possible, generally I believe that targeted easing so far are [sic] not effective enough to support China's slowing growth momentum," said Shen Jianguang, chief Asia Economist at Mizuho Securities Asia Ltd, in Hong Kong. Shen said he expected conventional instruments such as RRR or interest rate cuts as soon as December." (Bloomberg, 14 November 2014)

### **The cost of excess capacity**

None of these measures are going to solve the main problem which is overproduction. As the growth in the US remains small and Europe is heading towards a slump, Chinese industry will lack a market for its goods. In these conditions, government stimulus can put off a crisis, but only at the risk of deepening it further once it comes.

The Chinese economy is moving inexorably towards a sharp slowdown. It is plagued with overproduction and what has been termed as zombie factories. Total investment in fixed assets increased last year by 15.7 per cent, the slowest pace since 2001. In December the red lights were blinking as factory profits decreased by 8%. “Excess capacity” (i.e. overproduction) is beginning to impact on manufacturing beyond levels the state can control. A vice-minister at China’s Ministry of Industry and Information Technology commented last month, As the economy enters a ‘new normal’, the industrial sector faces increased downward pressures, unreasonable structures, (and) weak innovation capability.

This “downward pressure” is mainly due to lack of demand. Productive capacity utilisation is down to 70 percent overall compared with 80 percent in the US. Combined with the immense mountain of debt which has been created by the government programmes, the basis is set for destabilisation of the economy.

For a whole period, like a cartoon figure that walks off a cliff but doesn’t immediately realise, the experience seemed to defy the facts. But the facts were bound to catch up eventually. As much as the government has attempted to whitewash this central problem with even bigger Keynesian experiments and stimulus packages, the brutal contradictions are coming to the surface.

The simple fact is that Chinese production has gone beyond the limits of the world market, and by attempting to expand their own internal market for greater investment and consumption, the Chinese state has rendered even more acute the contradiction between wage labour and capital. Yes, wages in real terms may be increasing, but, as we have reported earlier, the reality for many is that relative wages are now falling.

The majority have benefitted hardly at all from the speculative investments encouraged by the government, apart from slightly better conditions of slave-labour. While property prices have dropped significantly, they are still four times the average household income. The other side of the end of the property boom is that wage shortfalls in the construction industry are now a regular occurrence.

Workers in the coal-mining and steel industries, two of the sectors most affected by excess capacity, will realise the precarious nature of their employment as the government begins an assault on what is deemed as wasteful production. Up until now, what the state had to offer these labourers subsisting in terrible living and working conditions was reliable employment based on cheap credit.

Today, the official jobless rate remains at 4.1 per cent, but this figure lacks any credibility. Unofficial estimates put the figure closer to 20 per cent. Not least, some 274m rural migrant workers are almost entirely ignored by the job statistics. When most migrant workers lose their jobs they return home to the countryside, thus not appearing in the statistics.

The problem of unemployment is not a secondary question. Since 1989, the bureaucracy has been determined to create sufficient jobs for the millions entering the cities every year in an attempt to guarantee social stability and avoid popular uprisings. But if this begins to reverse, the bosses and the state will soon discover the real consequences of depriving increasingly emboldened industrial workers of their livelihoods.

Ripple effect of a Chinese economic downturn

China is now the world’s largest energy consumer, and only the US can compete in terms of overall industrial consumption of energy. Therefore, the increasing slowdown of its economic growth will have a major knock-on effect on other national economies, and the world economy as a whole. Countries such as Australia, New Zealand and South Africa will all see their raw material exports hit by China’s lowered growth projections and South America will be hit even worse.

China currently buys 40% of Chile’s copper, and already copper prices are down 11% after last week’s lowered projections of the IMF. The New York Times explains: “China’s voracious hunger for Latin America’s raw

materials fuelled the region's most prosperous decade since the 1970s. It filled government coffers and helped halve the region's poverty rate. That era is over. For policy makers gathered here last week for the International Monetary Fund's conference on challenges to Latin America's prosperity, there seemed to be no more clear and present danger than China's slowdown." (NY Times, 16 Dec 2013)

The recent fall in oil prices was also closely related to the world crisis and its reflection in the slowdown of the Chinese economy. In the past China's growth, together with its knock-on effect on Asia and beyond, was a key factor in avoiding a worldwide slump. Now that China has begun to slow down, and with the prospect of further declines in the coming period, it will turn into its opposite, becoming a major contributing factor to a world crisis of capitalism.

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## The media landscape in Brazil through the lens of Ukraine

Pedro Marin, Editor-In-Chief of Opera Revista, article published in Truthout.org January 26, 2015



Fourth estate, watchdog, ideology perpetuator - there are many labels for "media." In Brazil, the problem of the media is very similar to that in most countries. According to a Brazilian research study in 2014, about 65 per cent of Brazilians watch television every day. According to the same research, they watch about three and a half hours per day. We are the fourth highest country in per capita internet access; still, only 28 per cent trust websites. Twenty four per cent trust news shared in social media networks. Only 22 out of 100 trust blogs.

On the other hand, when we talk of television, 49 per cent believe the news there. And six families own 70 per cent of Brazil's media. All this means the traditional media still have the power to control minds.

The media - not only in Brazil, but in the entire Western World - aren't presenting the facts on Ukrainian civil war. Or, at very least, they choose the facts their public is going to receive. They call Ukrainians who don't support the February 2014 coup d'état in Kyiv "Russian-backed separatists" or even "terrorists." They make Russia look like an authoritarian empire while the empire that invaded Iraq tells Brazilians and its own people lies in support of fascists in Ukraine. Everybody in the media seems to have forgotten that the president who was ousted last February, Victor Yanukovich, was actually elected before he was kicked out of office.

In 2003, John Pilger asked Charles Lewis, an American investigative-journalist, "What if the freest media in the world had seriously challenged George Bush and Donald Rumsfeld over Iraq in 2003 and investigated their claims, instead of channeling what turned out to be crude propaganda?" Charles replied that had we journalists done our job, "there is a very, very good chance we would have not gone to war in Iraq".

### War on the Television Screen

Rede Globo is the biggest TV network in Brazil. Owned by Roberto Marinho, Globo Group was able to open its TV network in 1965 due to their support for the military regime that came into power in Brazil in 1964. The British film "Beyond Citizen Kane," directed by Simon Hartog, covers Rede Globo's history, influence and political connections. The documentary compares Rede Globo's founder Roberto Marinho to Charles Foster Kane, the character created by Orson Welles for the film "Citizen Kane."

On December 12, when talking about a United Nations report on the war in Ukraine, Globo's correspondent in Paris, Lucia Muzell, attributed the Malaysia Airline tragedy to "insurgents in East Ukraine," although it's still not at all clear who was responsible for that tragic event.

On July 18, Globo News anchor William Waack said that "about 300 people on board [the Boeing 777] were victims of a civil war stimulated and

conducted by Moscow”.

“Wars, as Vladimir Putin must know, have this characteristic... they end up gaining their own momentum. They are uncontrollable, unpredictable,” said the anchor.

### War on Paper

Folha de São Paulo, the most widely read newspaper in Brazil, sees much of its news on the Ukraine war actually written by foreign news agencies such as Reuters. Folha merely replicates what these agencies publish, meaning that what you see on Reuters about the civil war in Ukraine is probably what Brazilians are reading on Folha’s website. The articles are superficial. If the newspaper goes deeper in its analysis, it speaks of a “Russian invasion” of eastern Ukraine. There are no words to remind readers that Ukraine actually had an elected president before suffering a coup d’état and no images that would show the ultranationalist and fascists militias which are fighting on Kiev’s side. There is not much published in the newspaper or on its website about the massacre in Odessa last May, when fascists burned down a trade union building in the center of the city with people inside, killing dozens.

The infamous right-wing magazine in Brazil, Revista Veja, could scarcely do better, of course. Its cover page on July 30 showed a black light bulb and read, “Black-out on diplomacy: Silence on the crime against the Boeing committed by Russia [...]”. Of course, we know there is no evidence to prove Russia as responsible for the Malaysia Airline’s tragedy. But do Veja’s nine million readers know that? Not likely.

### Hope

Fortunately, there are people in this country actually practicing journalism. Independent media outlets have been growing in number Brazil during the last years. Opera Mundi, A Pública and Outras Palavras are examples of that. We at Revista Opera have succeeded in our fundraising campaign to send a correspondent to Eastern Ukraine. On the other hand, it’s a shame that we have to put on a crowdfunding campaign in order to do the work that people with fat paychecks are not doing.

[newcoldwar.org](http://newcoldwar.org)

## Syriza vs. the ‘Troika’: Greek Debt: Negotiations Heat Up

Jack Rasmus 5 February 2015



After barely a week following the Greek elections and Syriza’s victory, negotiations between the EU’s “Troika” of debt collectors – the International Monetary Fund (IMF), European Central Bank (ECB), and the European Commission (EUC) – and Syriza’s representatives have already begun to intensify.

Even before the elections and Syriza’s victory, threats were flowing from the Troika warning Syriza to abandon its demand that the Troika write off up to one-third of Greece’s 317 billion euro debt; that it continue with the Troika’s previously imposed debt payment structure agreed to by Syriza’s predecessor government; and that austerity programs continue to be implemented regardless of the hardship imposed on the Greek people after five years of economic depression.

The Troika are desperate. The northern European bondholders, investors, central bankers, and Euro bureaucrats that are the true faces behind the Troika, whose policies directly represent their interests, are confronted by a serious democratic challenge by the new Greece and Syriza government. A challenge that could spread like political wildfire throughout Europe if not contained.

That democratic challenge comes at a time when the Eurozone economy continues to weaken, deflation has set in, more northern and eastern European economies are slipping into recession, bond rates and yields are turning negative throughout the EU, currency instability is rising, USA demanded sanctions on Russia are biting deep into Euro business profit

margins, the Ukraine is in economic collapse and demanding billions more in IMF and EC bailouts, and the war in Ukraine is intensifying again. Not a small short list of major problems, by any means.

And now Syriza and Greece, threatening to upset what the Eurobankers and Eurocrats had thought was a stabilized Euro government debt repayment system, paid for by austerity plans that they thought were safely assured for years to come!

The core problem with the Greek debt issue is that Greece's current 317 billion Euro government debt is unsustainable and effectively condemns Greece and its people to a state of perpetual economic depression for decades to come should it remain in place. At 317 billion, the Greek government debt is nearly twice the GDP of Greece – officially 177 percent. No matter that 270 billion (85 percent) of the 317 billion euros are owed directly to the Troika itself – i.e. official agencies that could, if they wanted, write off much of the debt. No matter that Syriza's position is that its demand for one-third write off does not include the 24 billion owed to the IMF and another 54 billion owed to the ECB, but is targeting the 142 billion Greece owes to the European Commission and its European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) fund. And no matter that, even as Greek-Troika negotiations begin, the European Commission is approving debt write-offs for Croatia while refusing to do so for Greece.

Although there is no crisis deadline for a negotiated settlement until the end of February, at the earliest, the Troika nevertheless is adamant on refusing to forgive any Greek debt. To do so would open a Pandora's box of potential problems, as they see it. And that may be true.

Here's why: should the Troika agree to a partial Greek debt forgiveness – aka a write-off or haircut involving debt restructuring – it would set a dangerous (for them) precedent elsewhere. A write off would immediately result in not only a surge in Greek bond debt interest rates, which had already begun with Syriza's election, but would undoubtedly set off bond rates rises in Italy, Spain, and elsewhere. If they write off Greek debt, they would have to deal with demands for other debt write offs as well. Bond values would plummet across Europe – and thus register significant paper losses for wealthy bond holders, both public and private alike. A collapse of government bonds would likely spill over to corporate bonds, and then possibly to Euro stock markets in turn as well. The chain reaction would largely negate the Eurozone's recent move to inject \$1.3 trillion in quantitative easing money into the Euro economy – itself designed primarily to boost Euro investors financial profits and capital gains. A Greek debt write off, in other words, could reverse other efforts to boost investors' profits across the continent. So write-offs are the Troika's "red line," as they say.

The Troika faces other dangers in the Greek debt negotiations as well. A Greek debt agreement, write offs or no, raises the potential that other rapidly growing left and right political parties will be energized politically by any success Syriza may have in rolling back debt payments and/or stopping austerity policies imposed by the Troika in Greece and elsewhere. Not just the new Podemos party in Spain, but the right wing National Front in France, which would win national elections if held tomorrow in that country, or the UKIP party in the United Kingdom with elections there imminent, as well as other parties in Eurozone countries coming up for election. No doubt Euro politicians outside the Troika are keenly aware of the potential political consequences of the Greek debt negotiations and are whispering in the ears of the Troika's bureaucrats as they head into negotiations with Syriza.

Then there's another "economic front" that has the Euro bankers and Eurocrats currently on the defensive: that's the growing movement within the Eurozone for not only a reversal of austerity programs, but for a new initiative for government infrastructure investing. The country bastions of the Eurobankers – i.e. Germany and Netherlands – have attempted to co-opt this movement for more government investment by proposing what is called the "Juncker Plan" – i.e. a token limited government program of government spending. By agreeing to a Greek debt write-off, the Troika would give impetus to growing demands within Europe that governments step up their infrastructure and government spending in lieu of continuing

austerity programs.

And there's yet a fourth problem the Troika now faces: the Euro-wide business-driven initiative to force government to introduce structural reforms, in the form of so-called "labor market" restructuring. Those reforms directly target working class jobs, wages and benefits – as a way to boost worker productivity, the benefits of which would accrue almost totally to Euro businesses. Should too many Troika concessions be made in current Greek debt negotiations, the drive for structural/labor market reforms may slow as well, as working classes throughout Europe realize the Syriza example shows that resistance is not futile any longer.

But there are write-offs and there are write-offs. There are direct public declarations that part of the debt need not be repaid, i.e. is forgiven. And there is financial "smoke and mirror" engineering that amount to de facto write-offs in the long run, even though it appears write-offs are not taking place in the short run. And that's where negotiations most likely could be headed.

Syriza's pre-election position was always that one third of the Greek debt should be written off, targeting the European Commission's (Brussels) EFSF's 142 billion euro holdings of Greek debt. Writing off IMF and/or ECB debt has never been proposed by Syriza. Its leaders are savvy enough to know the Eurocrats at the IMF and ECB could never agree to write-offs. To do so would almost certainly implode the Eurozone financial system itself. But the European Commission and its EFSF is another story.

Syriza's program also includes halting the firesales of Greek public investments to predatory Euro and American vulture investors; raising the minimum wage back to pre-2010 debt levels, hiring back 10,000 needed government workers, stopping further cuts to pensions, and going after the tax fraud and avoidance by Greek businesses and investors which is notoriously rampant. In just the first week in office, Syriza has begun to reverse all the preceding elements of its austerity program, with more no doubt to come.

In other words, for Syriza, reversing austerity is the key strategic objective, even more important than immediate debt forgiveness. Only reversing austerity raises the possibility of a return to economic growth – which in the long run is the only way out of Greece's current perpetual debt trap. The debt restructuring is secondary; the end of austerity is primary. The former can be obtained via "smoke and mirror" financing; the latter must be real since the Greek people will immediately know if they are being "gamed" again by yet another political party. Syriza's political instincts are therefore correct to focus on dismantling austerity as primary.

At the beginning of this past week, Yanis Varoufakis, the new Finance Minister in the Syriza government, signaled to his Troika counterparts that debt forgiveness was not a priority – at least according to the business press. This immediately resulted in stock and bond markets recovering the major losses of the previous week when it appeared Syriza and Varoufakis were taking a hard line and that debt forgiveness was a prerequisite, a sine qua non, for negotiations. If true, as the business press reports, that Syriza and Varoufakis have dropped the debt forgiveness demand, what's the significance of this apparent basic shift in Syriza positions?

Last week Varoufakis toured the financial capitals of Europe, demanding a Europe wide conference of governments to address the Greek Debt problem, declaring it a problem not just for Greece but for all of Europe, which of course it is. He called for a Euro wide public infrastructure investment program – referring to the 1953 London Conference that wrote off Germany's war debts (ironically). He declared Syriza was not interested in just another "roll over" of existing debt. Nor was Greece interested in an extension of the current debt and austerity arrangements past the February 28 coming deadline. He declared he would refuse, if necessary, to negotiate with Troika representatives, indicating meetings should be with European heads of state. And he repeated Syriza's pre-election policy of debt write-offs. A definite hard line position across the board, signaling to the Troika that two could play the threat game.

So what's changed at the beginning of week two in negotiations? Why has Varoufakis and Syriza backed off the hard line? Or have they?

Publicly, the Troika continues to float various unofficial proposals by means of leaks to the press: i.e. to lower Greek debt repayments by extending the maturity of the debt from current 30 years to up to 50 years, if necessary; to lower interest rate payments; to pay Greece the 4 billion Euros that the ECB had already earned by holding Greek bonds; to extend the current bailout arrangements for six more months after February 28. Others less official are suggesting the Troika might even consider suspending principal and interest payments for a period, or set up an entire new debt arrangement with the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), another debt bailout fund. All the preceding likely represent the Troika's opening bargaining position.

Meanwhile, on Monday, February 2, France offered to step in to mediate the upcoming negotiations between Greece and the Troika – no doubt thus offering to play “soft cop” to Germany's “hard cop” in the negotiations to come.

It was also on February 2 that Greek Finance Minister, Varoufakis, reportedly backed off Syriza's demand for debt forgiveness. But he then offered a new proposal that was significant: to swap old debt for new Greek bonds that would be linked to economic growth. What the latter proposal represents is no debt repayment if there's no Greek growth – and that means an end to austerity programs that the Troika has insisted on for years as a condition of past loans and debt to Greece. The substitute proposal reveals clearly that Syriza's primary objective is to roll back austerity first. Then restructure debt.

So Varoufakis and Syriza have cleverly turned the Troika's formula of more austerity in exchange for more Troika loans on its head. Now its end austerity if you want any repayments of debt!

Henceforth, in Syriza's view negotiations are not about how much more debt will be given Greece in order to roll over past debt and continue making payments, as previously has been the case since 2010. Now the negotiations will focus first on ending austerity, on restoring growth and incomes of the Greek people, and the extent of that restoration will determine how much debt is repaid and when.

So the positions of the parties at the negotiating table are: continue Greece's austerity and economic depression in order to make debt payments ad infinitum (Troika position) vs. end austerity first and grow out of the debt trap imposed by the Troika (Syriza position).

But the negotiations have only just begun. It will be interesting to see if the Troika buys into the new formula proposed by Syriza and agrees to lift austerity now in order to receive some kind of debt repayment in the future. If so, the tough negotiations will be over how much of prior austerity is ended, how fast, how much debt repayment is tied to economic growth and how is that growth estimated.

The next milestone in negotiations arrives on February 4, when the ECB decides whether to provide more interim liquidity assistance to Greece. If the ECB, a Troika member, balks, that will be a sign the Troika has not yet bought into the new formula proposed by Varoufakis and Syriza.

Another important milestone will occur on February 12, at the next meeting of European Union leaders in Brussels.

If the Troika and Europe's leaders recognize that the old Troika formula of more austerity in exchange for more debt is an economic dead end, and that Greece may well exit the Euro if it insists on continuing that old formula, then that recognition will mark the beginning of the end for austerity in Europe.

But if they don't, and they continue to adhere to that dead-end policy, it will set Europe on a path of not only a Greece exit from the Eurozone, but an eventual collapse of the Euro itself. And that will mean even more massive losses for investors, and an almost assured descent by Europe into

a deep and sustained recession.

It will be interesting, to say the least, to watch the coming weeks of negotiations between Greece and the Troika. Greece may be small in size and economically, but right now it is the lynchpin for the economic future of Europe. Syriza and Greece are in a good bargaining position. It remains to be seen how well they play their cards.

[zcomm.org](http://zcomm.org)

Jack Rasmus is the author of the forthcoming book, "Systemic Fragility in the Global Economy," Clarity Press, 2015; and Epic Recession: Prelude to Global Depression and Obama's Economy, both by Pluto Press, 2010 and 2012. His blog is [jackrasmus.com](http://jackrasmus.com) and website [www.kykloproductions.com](http://www.kykloproductions.com).

## AP Under Naidu: Smart City Delusions

Vinay Chandra 3 February 2015



CWI-India Leave a comment TweetIn 2004, The Telugu Desam Party (TDP), which was in power for nine years was utterly routed by the people. It managed to win just 47 out of 294 seats. The rout reflected the utter disenchantment of the electorate with Naidu's policies and his neoliberal model of development. During Naidu's misrule, rural Andhra Pradesh sunk into deeper depths and saw some of the highest rates of farm suicides in the country. Cutbacks in the public sector triggered massive loss of jobs in the state while Naidu played fiddle with his "IT revolution" in Hyderabad. After 10 years, riding on the back of discontentment of Andhra people with the partition of the state, an utterly discredited Congress, and the promise of a massive farm loan waiver (that won't be kept), Naidu is back as the Chief Minister in the new divided Andhra Pradesh.

The signals that Naidu is giving don't seem to be any different from his policies of early 2000s and he seems to be making exactly the same sounds that he was making back then. In Jun 2004, an article in Frontline, had this to say "Chandrababu Naidu's models of development were Singapore and Malaysia and later China. But, these models were heavily tilted towards urban development, with the farmer not factored high into the scheme of things." Now, Singapore has been given the project to build a massive new smart city in the Vijayawada-Guntur region.

The smart city, purported to be ten times as large as Singapore city itself, will require an area of 30,000 acres that would need to be acquired by the state government in the region. The location chosen by the state government has some of the best agricultural lands in the state and the government's motives behind developing a smart city by bulldozing these farmlands is being questioned.

The Government has come up with a "land pooling" scheme as part of an unconstitutional Andhra Pradesh Capital Region Development Authority Act, where those holding dry land will be awarded 800 yards of residential plots and 100 yards of commercial plots per acre while those holding wet lands will be awarded 1000 yards of residential plots and 200 yards of commercial plots per acre. The government will pay an yearly rent of Rs. 30,000 for dry lands and Rs. 50,000 for wet lands for 10 years. The compensation being offered for those giving up their land works out to just Rs. 80 per day, which is completely unjustifiable in the face of complete loss of livelihood.

Understandably, the land pooling scheme is being met with resistance in the region (particularly by those dependent on agriculture) in the face of coercive methods being employed by the state government to complete the acquisition. As of January 7th, reports indicate that the government has managed to pool more than 1500 acres out of the 30,000 target. In addition to the issue of land-holding farmers, even more important questions need to be asked on what will happen when the farming ecosystem in the region will be disrupted due this unnecessarily massive project. What will happen to the thousands of people dependent on farming for their livelihood but do not own any land. Will they migrate to

these smart cities and live without shelters in the slums? The state government doesn't seem to have any answers to these questions. To the current capitalist system, all those people are invisible.

Activists from multiple organizations, including Medha Patkar's National Alliance of People's Movements, are organizing protests against a determined TDP government that is hell bent on making a handful of people rich at the cost of the working people. It did not take long for Naidu's anti-farmer and pro-big business intentions to be exposed to the people (again). The region is already seeing massive land speculation and the scale of the project is extremely prone to corruption and misuse of state apparatus for currying favors. The idea of efficient smart cities looks like an excellent idea on paper, but hard questions need to be asked on the environmental and human costs associated with such projects. If Naidu's 'Hi-Tech' ambitions continue, just as it was in the undivided Andhra Pradesh state, the urban-rural and rich-poor divide will further sharpen in the new Andhra Pradesh state. These are trying times and an organized socialist movement against these neoliberal onslaughts is needed more than ever.

[www.socialism.in](http://www.socialism.in)

## Panic About Panic: Russia and the World-System Today

Immanuel Wallerstein 3 February 2015



Visiting Russia, which I recently did, is a strange experience for someone coming from the Global North. As we know, most Russians have an entirely different reading of recent world history from most persons in the Global North. In addition, however, they are concerned about things other than what visitors expect them to be concerned about.

The one common assumption that transcends these differences is the fact that the occurrence of a sharp drop in world oil and gas prices combined with the embargo imposed by some countries on Russia has created an economic squeeze on Russian state expenditures and individual consumption.

In Russia today almost everyone across the political spectrum believes that the West, and the United States in particular, has conspired with some others - principally Saudi Arabia and Israel - to punish Russia for its actions and alleged misdeeds in pursuing what Russians regard as the legitimate defense of their national interests. The debate centers primarily on Ukraine, but includes as well to a lesser degree Syria and Iran. The conspiracy theory is probably a bit exaggerated, since the United States started developing its shale oil (a major factor in today's world oversupply) already in 1973 as a response to the OPEC price rise.

Yet, one doesn't hear much discussion of these foreign policy issues in Russia. This is probably because there is not too much dissent inside Russia concerning Russia's official foreign policy positions, not even from persons or groups very critical of President Putin on other matters. What one hears discussed instead is how best to handle the acute budgetary shortfall that the Russian state is facing.

There are three basic positions. One is to reduce significantly state expenditures. We might call this the neoliberal option. It is espoused by the Minister of Finance. The second is to use the reserves still available to the Russian state, thus minimizing the need to reduce expenditures immediately. We might call this the social-democratic option. It is espoused by the Minister of the Economy. The third is to use up one of the two sets of reserves but not the other. We might call this the midway option. This would ensure stability for probably eighteen months and is based on the hope that somehow the world price of oil and gas will begin to rise again by then and/or that the sanctions will be annulled or largely circumvented.

The remarkable thing is that all three positions are espoused within the relatively small group of decision-makers surrounding President Putin. So far, it seems that Putin himself is in the camp favoring the midway option.

What is also remarkable is that this debate is quasi-public. At least, it is no secret to any Russian who follows the public statements of the protagonists as well as the leaks to a press that is more diverse than commentators in the West normally suggest.

There is however a lurking danger caused by this quasi-public debate. It is that Russian entrepreneurs, banks, and the general public (particularly the wealthier persons) panic, believing that an option they fear will prevail and that in consequence extensive withdrawals of resources would lead to a rush to the banks and major inflation. If there is a panic of this kind, then none of the options can succeed in enabling the state to survive the financial squeeze.

Hence there was great notice of a speech made by Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev at the Gaidar Forum on January 14. Medvedev announced that the state was going to pursue the midway option. He asked everyone to rally around this option, precisely in order to squelch panic. Indeed he ended his speech by citing the famous saying of President Franklin Roosevelt in 1933: The only thing we have to fear is fear itself. Medvedev said that the Russian government is not afraid.

But will such a statement suffice to ensure that there is no panic? Medvedev's speech however did not totally contain the panic. The debate about Medvedev's pronouncement revealed that many persons and groups are not persuaded that there will not be a panic. There is what I would call a panic about panic.

Putin's mode of containing the panic about panic is to pursue what he thinks is a carefully-measured strong and clear foreign policy. The decision to replace the so-called South Stream (a gas and oil Black Sea pipeline from Russia to Bulgaria that Bulgaria no longer will permit because of the sanctions) with a Turkish Stream (a different Black Sea pipeline going from Russia to Turkey) is a first such step. Both streams would hurt Ukraine by not sending Russia gas and oil via Ukraine and therefore eliminating Ukraine's transit fees. However, the Turkish Stream is also intended to counteract the effect of sanctions (that led to Bulgaria's change of position) and reward Turkey, now increasingly an ally of Russia.

A second step has been the decision to enter into accords with China and other countries to engage in currency transactions in their own currencies, thereby avoiding the fluctuations of the dollar. One of the resulting projects would be a pipeline across Siberia to Northeast Asia, financed heavily by China. This is a way of circumventing the sanctions.

A third step has been the just announced transmission of the S-300 air defense missile system to Iran. Long promised, Russia had cancelled the arrangement in 2010 as result of pressure from the West. Russia is now going to fulfil its initial promise. This serves to reinforce Russian support for Iran's inclusion in the decision-making processes of West Asia. It both puts pressure on the United States and helps to check Saudi Arabia's attempt to maintain itself as the key Sunni Arab state. Already, with the accession of King Salman, the press is full of discussion about the fragility of the Saudi position.

Finally, in Ukraine, the Russians pursue a careful policy. Not totally in control of the Donetsk-Luhansk autonomists, Russia is nonetheless making sure that the autonomists cannot be eliminated militarily. The Russian price for real peace is a commitment by NATO that Ukraine is not a potential member, about which there are different views within NATO. Everyone is playing a high risk game in Ukraine. My guess, and it is in large measure a guess, is that sanity will prevail and a political deal realized. I would say, watch Angela Merkel after the German elections. She (and Germany) want a deal but are not yet free to pursue it.

[iwallerstein.com/panic-about-panic-russia-and-the-world-system-today](http://iwallerstein.com/panic-about-panic-russia-and-the-world-system-today)

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## **The great game continues across Central Asia Whose Silk Road?**

Régis Genté Translated by George Miller

(Le Monde diplomatique - English edition) January 2015

After a brief term of involvement, the US is exiting Central Asia, leaving Russia to defend its (former colonial) interests against China's economic investments in the region.

The US is pulling out of Afghanistan, at least partly, and has closed its only Central Asian base, which it paid dearly to acquire. Now it has little interest in the region. Central Asia's tectonic plates are shifting.

The huge Dordoy bazaar on the road into central Bishkek has been the main wholesale market for Chinese goods in the former USSR for the past 20 years. Trade here is declining, too, as you can see from the smaller number of stacked freight containers. The customs union created in 2010 by Russian president Vladimir Putin, which Kyrgyzstan is about to join, made Chinese products less competitive for Russians and Kazakhs stocking up in Dordoy. But the Chinese are still a presence, and many Chinese shops and restaurants thrive in Bishkek.

A news bulletin on my taxi's radio announced that China would begin construction of a Kyrgyz gas pipeline in 2016, to complete the network built in Turkmenistan to exploit its vast deposits, which already provide 51% of China's natural gas imports (see map).

Central Asia was the focus of the 19th-century Great Game between the British and Russian empires, and then of a new Great Game when the US became involved after the five former Soviet republics (Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan) gained independence in 1991.

The current era could mean uncertainty and danger: Less because of the Afghan frontier - since the Taliban probably have better things to do than conquer Central Asia - than due to the region's own instability, given the difficult transfers of power in prospect in dictatorial, authoritarian regimes, says Alexander Cooley of Barnard College (University of Columbia, New York). The big powers risk not being able to shoulder the security responsibilities.

There have already been clashes between Tajik and Kyrgyz border guards. Minor pretexts, such as the diversion of a watercourse for irrigation, can provoke deadly confrontations because of the lack of clear border demarcation between the countries, and the high number of security flashpoints in the Fergana valley. The Syr Darya river makes this valley, home to 20% of the whole region's population of 60 million, one of the most fertile in Central Asia. The valley straddles three countries, once administrative zones of the USSR, now divided by complicated borders.

### **US-Russian relations soured**

The US sought to play a role in Central Asia after the western intervention in Afghanistan in 2001. Initially, the US was backed by Putin, who was the first head of state to send his condolences to the US on 9/11. But relations soured, especially after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, and Russia's renewed determination to maintain a sphere of influence in its own backyard.

Rightly or wrongly, Russia thought that the US wanted to take advantage of its presence in Afghanistan to become a real player in Central Asia, Cooley says. But it didn't happen: US ambitions for a role in the heart of Eurasia have waxed and waned.

After the first US aircraft arrived at Manas air base in 2001, Washington learned to adapt to local conditions and awarded the base's lucrative fuel contracts to the sons of Kyrgyz presidents Askar Akayev (1990-2005) and Kurmanbek Bakiyev (2005-10) - until they were overthrown (1). But from 2010, Russia put pressure on Kyrgyzstan to send the Americans home, and succeeded in getting the base downgraded to a logistics centre on a renewable annual lease.

In the hope of mending relations with Russia, President Obama refused to engage in confrontation. And having decided to leave Afghanistan, the US seemed to have its attention on the Far East and the Pacific, where its strategic and commercial interests are concentrated. The US strategic rebalancing represents continuity in change: it remains keen to play a key

role in Eurasia, but is looking further east.

US strategy in Central Asia is not imaginative; it is largely based on a vision of a New Silk Road, which since 1999 has aimed to create an economically vibrant and interconnected region in Afghanistan and Central and South Asia, to guarantee stability (2). The idea was to encourage trade through infrastructure development. But the plan was neither coherent nor realistic.

The CASA-1000 electricity transmission line linking Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan has suffered because of the condition of the network in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and from the lack of a strategy to secure the infrastructure (3). Relations between the former Soviet republics have been strained since independence and trade is still very limited. Pakistan is growing away from the US, and the US does not have economic relations with Iran. Both Iran and Pakistan are vital to the creation of a genuine regional partnership.

After a long period of uncertainty, Afghanistan and the US signed an agreement in September on the maintenance of US troops, but many questions about the future of Afghanistan remain (see Afghanistan alone again, December 2014 issue). Other factors also need to be considered: the relaunch of the war on terror, the situation in Pakistan, and relations with Russia, seriously damaged by the Ukraine crisis.

#### **Promised investment**

Three months before the ceremony marking US troops' departure from Kyrgyzstan on 9 June 2014, Russian petroleum giant Rosneft signed a symbolic agreement with Bishkek giving it a 51% share in Manas international airport. (Symbolic because why else would an oil company take control of an airport in a country with no hydrocarbon reserves?) Rosneft, which is run by Igor Sechin, one of Putin's closest collaborators, has promised a \$1bn investment to make Kyrgyzstan a logistics hub.

The agreement comes after other contracts signed by Russian hydroelectricity and gas distribution giants such as Gazprom, Inter RAO and RusHydro. Their motives are more geopolitical than economic: Who would want to buy Kyrgyzgaz, even for one symbolic dollar, when you know that the company is a bottomless pit since our compatriots don't pay their gas bills? said a senior Kyrgyz civil servant, who requested anonymity.

Kyrgyzstan's recent history has taught its leaders that it is best not to stand in the way of Russia's interests - President Bakiyev fell in April 2010 because he ignored this, paying a high price for suggesting the Americans open a military training centre in Batken and for failing to listen to the Kremlin's requests for a second Russian base.

The Ukrainian crisis has changed the situation (4).

The region's powers have remembered how much of a threat Russia can pose ... the Kremlin has changed its tune and suddenly requested, or demanded, more or less officially, that Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan join its Eurasian Economic Union (5), as a way of avoiding complete ridicule for losing Ukraine, said political scientist Parviz Mullojanov in the Tajik capital Dushanbe.

This project for economic, and possibly political, integration has not inspired much enthusiasm. We are not against the idea of integration, quite the reverse. But it's happening solely according to Moscow's diktat, said an advisor to a senior Kazakh politician. After Ukraine's defection and the fear caused by Russia's reaction, the future of the Eurasian Economic Union is far from clear.

Kazakhstan, under the leadership of its authoritarian president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, seemed the greatest enthusiast for regional integration. Nazarbayev has been a keen promoter of the Eurasian idea since 1994; his country has a sizeable Russian or Russian-speaking minority (around 25%). But four years into the customs union, Kazakhs complain that many obstacles prevent them entering the Russian market, though it is supposed to be wholly integrated with their own.

The economies are also of very different in size: Russia's is 10 times the size of Kazakhstan's, but its companies are less competitive, because they have been thriving for nearly 20 years as oligopolies, says financial expert Jean-Christophe Lermusiaux.

### **Contempt for neighbours**

Russia also has trouble hiding its contempt for its neighbours. In August Putin angered his main ally by saying that the Kazakh president had created a state on a territory that has never been a state. Nazarbayev took that as a veiled threat, and said his country would not take part in organisations that constitute a threat to our independence. Kazakhstan abstained from the UN General Assembly vote on the validity of the referendum in Crimea.

Moscow has been even less successful in keeping Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan in its sphere of influence, as they have no shared border with Russia and possess wealth (mainly from hydrocarbons) that makes them attractive to others. Even experience and knowledge on the ground have not enabled Russia to give the security guarantees that the region badly needs. During the three days of violence between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in June 2010 that killed nearly 500 in Osh in southern Kyrgyzstan, neither Russia nor the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) (6), which Russia largely controls, intervened - although the security of the entire Fergana valley was at stake (7).

Russia is losing ground in spite of its advantages: means and representatives in the region, political capital, the confidence of the people and ruling classes, cultural affinities and a shared language. The five Central Asian states are adept at playing Russia off against the US, Europe, South Korea, Japan and, especially, China.

China is a relative newcomer here. In the early 1990s, Iran and Turkey were tipped to be the new big players in the region. But both of them failed and it is China, though nowhere to be seen until the 1980s, which at the beginning of the 21st century is becoming the most important major power in Central Asia, says area expert Thierry Kellner.

China has already outstripped Russia as the biggest trading partner of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan, and is in second place in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

China's commitment is impressive. In September 2013 President Xi Jinping made a 10-day tour of the region, signing contracts and loans worth around \$50bn. He committed to buying 65bn cubic metres of gas a year from Turkmenistan, which is believed to hold the world's fourth biggest reserves; acquired 8.33% of the giant Kashagan oil field in the Kazakh zone of the Caspian; and announced the construction of a refinery and new branches of the oil pipeline that will go through Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, making them less dependent on Uzbek gas, which Tashkent frequently turns off.

Xi also used his visit to test the idea of a Silk Road Economic Belt, a concept that is hazy for now, but could evolve and have a great future.

China is also investing in infrastructure, particularly transport. Its strategy is intended to develop a peaceful backyard, a necessary condition for China's modernisation and its growing power. From the start, security has therefore been at the heart of its policy on Central Asia. All the more so since China is afraid of Uyghur separatism in its Turkic-speaking Muslim province of Xinjiang, which borders the zone. And then there are its concerns about energy security, says Kellner.

China is careful to keep out of domestic politics and avoid charges of neo-colonialism; with its considerable financial capacity, it has made itself a key player. Russia has already lost the power to say no in the region, says Konstantin Syroezhkin of the Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies.

However, there is an increasing number of causes of dissent in Central Asia. China's purchases of Central Asian gas have given it the means to negotiate with Moscow from a position of strength and thereby get reductions on the price of contracts.

## Who needs who

Russia needs China too much in its confrontation with the West to mistreat it in Central Asia. The signing of a huge contract, worth \$400bn, on 21 May 2014, for the supply of 38bn cubic metres of gas a year for 30 years is of vital importance to Russia, as it offers a way of showing the West that Russia can do without it by redirecting its output to China and Asia.

The Chinese president has been promoting his own New Silk Road since 2013. A rail freight link exists between Chongqing and Duisburg (Germany) via Kazakhstan and Russia, a journey that takes 22 days (8). Although the volumes transported are still small compared to sea freight, this route is already being used by big western firms, such as Hewlett-Packard and BMW.

There are no illusions in Moscow about the future of a Sino-Russian alliance. Russia's share of global GDP has fallen to 3.5% and it needs China to enable it to pursue its strategic ambitions, which explains its concessions and apparent goodwill over Chinese interests in Central Asia. Russia sets great store by the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (9) - a potentially powerful bastion with the air of an anti-western club. It brings together some of the world's biggest energy producers and represents the most populous zone on the planet.

With the US's diminishing interest in the region and Russia's declining means, China seems triumphant, but it balks at becoming involved other than economically. Central Asia's geopolitical environment is not conducive to the stabilisation of states run by authoritarian or dictatorial regimes based on fragile clan structures. There are several underlying conflicts, and imminent transfers of power will be problematic, particularly in Uzbekistan. Continuing corruption and poverty provide an increasingly fertile breeding ground for Islamic radicalism.

No major power seems to have enough authority - or the will to use it - to be heeded in a serious security crisis. It would be difficult to reach consensus if there were a crisis caused by ethnic clashes or a contested presidential succession.

Everyone needs to stay flexible towards their regional partners, says Cooley (10), and avoid positions that would rule out collaboration with one of the influential great powers. The deterioration of US-Russian relations is not an encouraging sign, and the Sino-Russian agreement may not be set fair forever.

The current geopolitical shifts come down to the confrontations between the great powers.

The game between the US and Russia ... means that Russia is being pushed back to the depths of Central Asia. It was Russia's defeat in the Crimea in the 19th century that led it to conquer Central Asia in the first place. Today, with the probable loss of Ukraine, Russia could again seek to consolidate its position deep within the Eurasian continent in Central Asia. I wouldn't rule out the possibility that, deep down, Washington would be in favour of that, says Chokan Laumulin of the Cambridge Central Asia Forum.

The role of the Central Asian republics could prove decisive for regional stability. More than ever, political decision-makers and their advisors are trying to play off the ambitions of one great power against another. In Dushanbe, Sayfullo Safarov of the Center for Strategic Research says that, with Tajikistan preparing unenthusiastically to join the Eurasian Economic Union at Russia's behest, whatever happens it

must not abandon its policy of balancing the games of great powers around it. Studying what it means for us to join the Eurasian Economic Union entails thinking about how this is compatible with our fundamental strategic interests.

These countries have been learning to manage that balancing act.  
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## From #Takethesquare to São Paulo's #FreeYourPark

Bernardo Gutiérrez 1 February 2015



There was a time when the occupied square was the city. The initial camp of Spanish 15M Indignados in Puerta del Sol in Madrid became a city per se. In this square-city a kindergarten, libraries, clinics, and cultural spaces emerged.

There was a time when the occupied square was a country. In Tahrir Square talks of dissatisfaction of the mosques of Egypt and Facebook groups like We Are Khaled Said converged, lighting the flame of the revolt. During the occupation of Gezi Park in Istanbul a map of the Republic of Gezi was even designed. The space occupied by different ethnic, religious or ideological groups appeared in different colors: anarchists, communists, socialists, nationalists, LGBT, environmentalists, Muslims, and football fans. Groups losing their walls of prejudice, talking to each other for the first time.

There was a time when the occupied square was the world. In fact, all occupations were or wanted to be the world. The mind map of Acampada Sol of Madrid drew a planetary dialogue in which groups such as the Zapatistas and Anonymous and events such as Argentina 2001 default and Tiananmen Square fitted together. The Zuccotti Park in New York, taken for weeks by Occupy Wall Street, became a global connection interface. We are the 99% of the square-world, they said.

But many squares forgot to be squares. The occupation created a second

skin of commons-oriented practices and self-management. But the petitions of the occupations had more to do with macro-political, social or economic issues. The exception could be the Turkish #DirenGezi explosion, born as resistance against the construction of a mall in Gezi Park. After the outbreak of the riots, the cause of Gezi Park was diluted in an ocean of ailments and requests. The slogan “It is not for a park” opened a multi-faceted revolt. But beyond the conservation of Gezi Park there was no specific demand for self-management. Defending the park as a public good seemed to be the horizon.

### Neither public nor private

The occupation of Augusta Park in the Brazilian city of São Paulo, without being as explosive as the Turkish Gezi Park, opens a new breakthrough in the global cycle of occupations: the proposal of a commons-oriented park. The Augusta Park – being city, country and world – wants to be a park. But it wants to be a common, communitarian or collective park, not just a public park.

Many of the contradictions of the global occupations float over the 25,000 square meters of Augusta Park. As Zuccotti Park in New York, the Augusta Park is a private property. Two companies are the owners of the park: Syrela and Setin. Syrela is also responsible for the construction of the golf course in the Olympic area of Rio de Janeiro, where the #OcupaGolfe (#OccupyGolf) movement has emerged. And here comes the dystopian metaphor: a public sector serving the private sector interests. The market sets the pace.

The municipality of São Paulo, after a lot of public pressure, sanctioned the creation of Augusta Park in late 2013. The forest, the last redoubt of Atlantic Forest in São Paulo, has been declared a historical, environmental and cultural heritage. But the city hall council argues that it has no resources to expropriate the park. The owners of the park wanted €21.8 million in September 2013. Now, based on rising housing prices, they want €85.5 million for the park.

The Park Augusta Movement, after months of actions, festivals and small raids into the park, decided to ‘liberate the park.’ They broke the locks. They entered. They camped. The movement argues that they are not occupying: “We are releasing a space that should be open by law,” says Daniel Biral, member of the Advogados Ativistas collective. The freedom of movement of citizens in the Augusta Park is legally guaranteed. But since December 2013, the park is closed. That is why the park was occupied/opened on Saturday 17 January.

The assemblies within the park take place at a dizzying pace. There are yoga classes, shows, an open school, workshops, meetings, and so on. The creative frenzy includes the presence of many of the groups and social actors of the massive June 2013 protests. The occupation of Augusta Park aims to break the logic of the market. One paragraph of the objectives of the Park Augusta Movement stresses that point: “A public park is a common good, belongs to the social network of the city and cannot remain under private and speculative interests. Its social function must be guaranteed.”

The park wants to be a park. The park wants to be a common park.

### The process-park

“We do not have a definite plan for the park.” The sentence floated on a screen in one of the initial assemblies after the occupation. Breno Castro, one of the participants, was explaining, one by one, the principles of the movement. First: horizontality. Next: pluralism, public space, permaculture, direct democracy, respect and generosity. Finally, Breno explained the process-park concept, a point which also summarizes the insights of global occupations. It is also linked to the so-called ‘perpetual beta’ state, common in the hacker world: an unfinished shape that collective intelligence can constantly improve. The Process-Park, according to its own site: “Why defining a design that will last for years? The Augusta Park will be multiple and be renewed periodically. We will leave mobile and empty areas, which will enable rebuilding processes.”

The Augusta Park park is city, country and world. It is a park-city: inside

there are reading places, recycling areas, tents for political debates. It is also a park-city because it is connected to a network of twelve threatened parks in São Paulo, all of them in a process of resistance. It is a park-country: it has close contact with other urban environmental struggles, such as Fica Ficus (Belo Horizonte), Ocupe Estelita (Recife), the Gong Park (Curitiba), Coco Park (Fortaleza) and #OcupaGolfe (Rio de Janeiro). It is also a park-world: in 2014 they were visited by activists who participated in the occupation of Turkish Gezi Park. Both movements released together the manifesto #Reclaiming our parks. And it is an icon that gains support in several countries, as reflected in a recent BBC article.

But maybe the Augusta Park is something else. Something else than park, city, country and/or world. Paulinho Fluxus, one of the participants in the occupation, sitting on the grass of Augusta Park, remembered his visit to the Santuario dos Pajés, an indigenous land threatened by the housing boom of Brasilia. The sanctuary, for urbanite Paulinho, is the city's cosmic connection with nature. With the planet. The Augusta Park represents that connection too. It is an urban struggle, but connected to the environmental imaginary of the world.

It is connected to the ancient world-views of the so-called Global South. It is a resistance connected to some commons-ruled natural forests in Europe (as in Galicia, Spain). The Augusta Park is technopolitics, networks and territories. But it is also cosmopolitics. This kind of cosmopolitics, linked to the practices of indigenous people around the commons, is a counterweight to the storytelling of the Western world. The individual Cartesianism succumbs in the collective Amerindian vision. "The other exists, therefore he thinks", according to Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, an influential Brazilian anthropologist.

With a serious hydraulic crisis in Brazil, Paulinho Fluxus' speech makes even more sense. There is a lack of water in the main Brazilian cities. Many people think that a water revolt is inevitable. Within weeks. Naomi Klein, in her latest book *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate* puts climate change at the center of politics. There will be riots, she states. Many. Different ones. Against the lack of water. Against the scarcity of green in the cities.

On September 20, People's Climate Mobilization held protests in 156 countries. "Whether or not climate change is the main reason, (such local movements) deserve to be recognized as the anonymous 'carbon keepers', which means that protecting their beloved forests, mountains, rivers and coasts are helping to protect all of us", writes Klein. It is the water, stupid. It is water. It is the climate. It is the park that resists against capital. OccupyDesign and 99% cross creativity and plan actions to impact the UN Climate Conference COP21, to be held in Paris in late 2015. It will be a classic scene of battles. An old struggle. But now there is the landscape of environmental urgency, indignations are rising, and the global network system is more connected than ever.

Near the entrance of Augusta Park in São Paulo, a painting on a poster ignores the fact that military police already has the legal order for eviction. The Augusta Park can be evicted any day. The painting talks with passersby with a shout that opens doors. A shout that connects the city with other visions. A shout that is an evolution of that of Take the Square of 2011. Black letters, white background. An arrow encouraging new horizons: Free your park.

<https://zcomm.org/zcommentary/from-takethe-square-to-sao-paulos-freeyourpark/>

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Over the last couple of days Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, has been rocked by a series of protests against the weak, reactionary and corrupt government of Joseph Kabila. Through mass mobilisations, the predominantly student movement has dispelled any notion of the democratic credentials of the Kabila regime and has exposed its true dictatorial nature.

The immediate cause of the demonstrations was an attempt by Kabila to extend his stay in office past the 2016 deadline. According to the 2006 constitution, the president is barred from occupying office for more than two 5-year terms. Kabila's second term is due to end in 2016. Initially the ruling coalition were in favour of amending the Constitution to allow Kabila to run for office again. Subsequently the regime changed its mind and wanted to amend the Electoral Act instead, under the pretext of conducting a census in order to compile an electoral roll.

Clearly an election without an electoral roll is not democratic. The last time a census was carried out was in 1984. But this was no concern for Kabila in his previous election campaigns. Thus his proposal to conduct a census this time around was correctly seen as a manoeuvre. Kabila has had 14 years to conduct a census, but has waited until the very end of his term in office. Furthermore the regime, together with the United Nations mission in the DRC, known by the acronym MONUSCO, is planning a major military offensive against the Rwandan FDLR rebels in the East of the country. The DRC is a massive, backward country almost two-thirds the size of Western Europe. To conduct a census here with its very poor infrastructure is an enormous undertaking in the best of situations, let alone when it is mired in conflict.

Some reports suggest that a census under these conditions could take as long as four years to complete. To do so in a war zone would be almost impossible. If the regime had been successful in pushing through an amendment for a census, it would have effectively meant that Kabila had extended his stay in office for years. The problem for Kabila though was that everybody in the streets of Kinshasa saw through this farce.

### **Mass protests**

On Monday 19 January 2015, police fired tear gas grenades and clashed with thousands of students and youth activists at the University of Kinshasa (UNIKIN) who were protesting against amendments to the Electoral Act. During the previous weekend the lower house of parliament voted in favour of the amendment-act and passed it to the Senate for "debate". This infuriated thousands of UNIKIN students who took to the streets. And the third largest party in parliament, the Union for the Congolese Nation (UNC), called for the "mass occupation of parliament."

A massive brawl erupted in the city centre between demonstrators and security forces. The Grand Market, the central market in the city, was the scene of a fierce battle between police and protesters who defended themselves with stones, bottles and other projectiles. In the district of Lemba, police opened fire with live ammunition on protesters. Soon, protests spread throughout the city. Plumes of black smoke from burning tyres were billowing into the air where army helicopters were patrolling. On the campus of UNIKIN buses were set alight. Four kilometers from there protesters blocked the roads with burning tires and makeshift barricades. Near parliament, all gatherings of people were attacked with tear gas grenades and live fire by police and presidential guard soldiers. The area around the Palais du Peuple (National Assembly) was completely cordoned off by hundreds of police and soldiers.

A student from the Higher Institute of Applied Techniques (ISTA) described the fatal shooting of one of his classmates: "When we were marching toward the Palais de Peuple, the police blocked the road so we couldn't pass. They started dispersing us by firing live bullets into the crowd. That was when one of our friends was hit and died. The Republican Guard then came and took his body away. We were all angry and started throwing rocks. Then the police and the Republican Guard started firing at us so we all started to flee."

Schools were deserted throughout the city. The police also barricaded the

offices of the UNC and its leader, Vital Kamerhe who was once an ally of Kabila, was not allowed to leave the offices.

Thousands of kilometers away, in the eastern city of Goma, there were also reports of clashes between security forces and protesters. Tear gas was fired and Reuters reported that at least two people were hit with live ammunition. There were also demonstrations and protests in Bukavu, in South Kivu province.

On Tuesday 20 January protests continued for a second day. The regime cut off mobile internet services in Kinshasa and blocked text messaging. South Africa's mobile telecommunication giant Vodacom confirmed that it acted under instruction from the government. The streets of the capital were patrolled by heavily armed soldiers and police. At the University of Kinshasa and in the southern part of the city students were mobilising massively. Clashes erupted in Ngaba in the south of the city. Massive crowds also occupied the road to the airport, causing mass disruption of flights. Air France latter cancelled all flights to Kinshasa. "We won't stop until they have withdrawn this law," one student said. "We are tired of Kabila. He has to go!", another added. Protests also erupted in Bukavu on Tuesday. On the same day youths destroyed a government building in Ngaba and made off with police weapons.

By Wednesday 21 January the death toll after three consecutive days of protest had reached 42 people according to a report by Reuters - almost three times the number given by the government. Gunfire rang out at Kinshasa University where protesting students were shouting "Kabila get out!". Here we can clearly see how, in the space of three days and under the hammer blows of events, the demands which started as the rejection of a piece of legislation, have been transformed into a rejection of the regime.

In another neighbourhood youths destroyed a police vehicle after they were attacked by police. Security forces again clashed with protesters in Matete and Limite neighbourhoods. In the district of Ndjili a police mobile unit was destroyed by students who were chanting slogans against the notorious Kinshasa police chief, General Celestin Kanyama. There were also witness reports that the presidential guard opened fire in a ward of Mama Yemo hospital in Kinshasa and injured three people.

Demonstrations were held in cities and towns across the country, including Bukavu, Bunia, Uvira, Lubumbashi and Mbandaka as the momentum of the protests shifted dramatically to the East of the country. In Goma a mass demonstration erupted to demand the release of 12 protesters who were arrested on Tuesday. According to several witnesses on the site protesters barricaded roads and suffered a severe crackdown by the security forces who carried out arbitrary arrests of university and high school students. In the neighbouring city of Bukavu students erected barricades on the national highway that leads from Independence Square to the Higher Institute of Medical Services in the city centre. The police attacked the protesters with tear gas and the protesters responded by attacking and ransacking the police station.

For the entire week banks, schools and many businesses were closed in Kinshasa. The only area of the city which had not been hit by the protests is the Gombe district where Kabila has his residence and where most government offices and embassies are located. In this posh neighbourhood, which is an entirely different world to the squalid conditions in the rest of the city, things seemed fairly calm and restive.

### **Kabila clinging to power**

Kabila was installed as president by army generals and corrupt politicians after his father, Laurent Kabila was assassinated in 2001. In two successive elections in 2006 and 2011 he was returned to office in elections which were characterized by open vote rigging and heavy fraud.

The current situation can be traced back to September 2014 when rumours began to circulate in Kinshasa that Kabila was looking for ways to extend his stay in office. These rumours soon became fact when Kabila loyalists began campaigning for another term in office. On 14 September 2014 there were clashes in Kinshasa, although on a smaller scale than now.

Then, in December 2014 Kabila announced the formation of a new government which was clearly an attempt to broaden his political base ahead of the current constitutional crisis. Through bribery he brought members from two opposition parties into his government including Evariste Boshab of the People's Party for the Reconstruction and Democracy who has subsequently been agitating openly for a constitutional amendment to allow Kabila to stand for a third term.

### **Capitalist nightmare**

In one of those instances of irony of which history is so full, these protests coincided with the 54th anniversary of the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, the country's anti-colonial hero and first prime minister. At the same time that the weak capitalist leaders were paying lip service to Lumumba while being in the pocket of Chinese and American capitalists, the student movement has completely unmasked the true nature of these people. The central government is particularly weak and is being kept in place through a network of deals, arrangements, patronage, bribery and corruption involving local tribal leaders, regional powers and ultimately the big (and not so big) imperial powers of China, America, Australia and South Africa.

It is these powers, not Kabila, which ultimately decide the fate of the millions of Congolese people. Sometimes these powers cooperate when the benefit is mutual. But for the most part there are all kind of struggles and power politics involved, including using rival armed groups as proxies for the continued looting of this mineral rich country. In fact it is completely incorrect to speak of the "sovereign integrity" of this tragic land. After 55 years of nominal "independence", the country is much more under the jackboot of imperialism than ever before.

The demand for democratic rights in itself is of course reason enough for popular uprisings. Over the last year the manipulation of the law to keep unpopular leaders in office have been the trigger for mass movements and even revolutions in many African countries, particularly in the West of the continent. The DRC is no exception. Similar conditions create similar results. But these protests are in the last analysis a direct result of the dire living conditions of the masses. In the scattered reports which have come out of the protests there are numerous reports of economic demands like employment and an end to poverty in such a potentially rich country.

Despite its natural resources the country remains one of the poorest in the world. According to the World Bank, the country has more than 80 million hectares of arable land and over 1100 minerals and precious metals. But decades of brutal dictatorship under Mobutu and the systematic looting of its resources by rival imperialist groups have plunged the country into an abyss of abject poverty and backwardness. The country ranks second to last on the UN's Development Index. The per capita income of US\$220 per year is among the lowest in the world. More than two million people are internally displaced after years of wars and destruction. Sexual violence rates are the highest in the world. To add insult to injury, after the 2008 world economic meltdown, the regime and the World Bank imposed a "restrictive monetary policy" and "fiscal discipline", i.e., vicious austerity measures on people who are already living in the dire poverty. In this way, the poorest people in the world had to pay for the crisis of capitalism.

### **Role of the students**

The students have been the main force behind the present protests. The epicentre of the protests is the University of Kinshasa, followed by other universities in Goma and Bukavu. In a country where the trade union movement is very weak due to the enormous backwardness of the country and decades of brutal repression by the Mobutu regime, the universities are very important places to organize against the regime.

But the movement of the students lacks a clear revolutionary programme based on the interests of the students, workers, poor peasants and other oppressed layers in society. The result is that some reactionary, tribal, pre-capitalist and capitalist figures of the opposition can attach themselves to the movement for their own selfish interests. For example, three days into the protests, all of a sudden some reactionary figures and organisations like Étienne Tshisekedi (who is in Brussels!), the European

Union, the US State Department and other opposition figures began to speak out against the regime and were hypocritically calling for an end to “violence” and respect for the “rule of law”. In fact, it is no longer in the interests of Western Imperialism for Kabila to extend his stay in office since he has been openly leaning towards China over the last period. Therefore the danger is that in the absence of a revolutionary programme, progressive movements such as this can easily be hijacked by reactionary elements..

### **The regime buckles under pressure**

Despite all the hardships, killings, mass arrests and attacks by the police and the army which took place, the regime still could not put an end to the protests. This points firstly to the weakness of the government and secondly, to the fact that the masses had lost their fear for the Kabila regime. This was confirmed on Wednesday when the government showed signs of strain. The interior minister suddenly announced that the controversial bill was only a “draft” and was subject to change. There were briefly rumours that top generals were about to ditch Kabila, but this was quickly denied.

In the heat of the events massive cracks began to emerge in the regime. There have been significant splits, including opposition coming from Kabila’s home province of the mineral rich Katanga province. There, the governor, Moise Katumbi, has distanced himself from Kabila. Kabila also faced dissent from within his own ruling coalition where powerful figures like Kengo wa Dondo and Christophe Lutundula also distanced themselves from the changes to the Electoral Act.

On Thursday, the streets of Kinshasa were calmer and internet access was available, although there were still clashes in Goma. The Senate, which was meeting to discuss the controversial Bill, decided to postpone voting on it until Friday 23 January.

Then, in a dramatic turn of events on Friday, under the threat of a countrywide popular uprising, the Senate buckled under pressure and amended the Electoral Bill by dropping the controversial Clause 8 which would have required a census to be held before the elections in 2016. “We have discarded the census and identification so that we can move towards good elections in peace and so we can respect the constitutional timetable and our laws. We have listened to the streets. That is why the vote today is an historic vote”, said Senate president Leon Kengo in a live televised address. He also conceded that the previous clause would have “exceeded the timeframe prescribed by the constitution”. Furthermore, the Senate enshrined the constitutional election period of 2016 into law. The Senate rules now require the compilation of an electoral roll based on a collection of geographic data. A census will be held after the elections.

This turn of events is a major blow for Kabila and shows the weakness of the regime. It is also an outright victory for the protesters. The Congolese people, led by the heroic students are making their voices heard loud and clear. The biggest conquest is that the masses have experienced their strength. This movement in the heart of central Africa has joined the inspiring revolutionary movements in West Africa which have shaken the region to its core. This is a lightning flash illuminating the way forward for the Congolese revolution. On its own, and within the artificial boundaries of the DRC there no solution for the plight of the people of DR Congo. Genuine emancipation from imperialism, hunger, homelessness and poverty can only come through socialist revolution on a regional and ultimately on a continent-wide basis. The major problems of the people of Africa can only begin to be solved on the basis of an All African Union of Socialist Republics and the struggle for the global overthrow of capitalism.  
[www.marxist.com](http://www.marxist.com)

## **China: Significant upsurge in workers’ strikes and protests in 2014**

Congyue Dai 28 January 2015



Despite all the Keynesian experiments and the monetary stimulus, China has failed to escape the global economic crisis. In 2014 its economic

growth dropped to 7.4%, the weakest in 24 years. For the first time in 16 years growth missed the government's annual target (7.5%).

The Chinese government has tried to paper over the slowdown in the economy by referring to it as a new normality of economic growth in which China's structural adjustment is progressing steadily.

However, given the reduced rate of growth, referring to it with a different name does not change the essence of the situation for the Chinese workers, who are experiencing the slowdown in the closures of factories, wage arrears, slower growth of minimum wages, and unpaid social security. Thus, in the year of weakest growth, China has seen the largest number of workers' strikes and protests.

According to the data collected by China Labour Bulletin, there were at least 1378 workers' strikes and protests in 2014, more than double the 2013 figure (656) and three times that of 2012 (382). There was a dramatic upturn in the last quarter of 2014, with 569 strikes recorded, an acceleration on previous quarters and almost four times the number in the same period of 2013.

Yue Yuen workers on strike Although these figures partly reflect a rise in the reporting of actions by the workers themselves, - who increasingly use cheap smartphones and social media in order to draw a wider audience - there is clearly an increase in working class struggles and a sharpening of class contradictions. This is reflected not only in the continual growth of strikes, but also in the outbreak of the largest strike in recent Chinese history in Yue Yuen shoe factories with more than 40,000 workers participating last April.

Although the Guangdong province in the south continues to be the centre of the workers' movement in China, it only accounts for 22% of the total, largely decreased from the 37% it represented in 2013. This is not due to the emergence of several sub-centres - although Heilongjiang, Shandong, Jiangsu and Henan do see a leap in the number of strikes - rather, it is because of the upsurge of strikes all over China. 22 out of 31 provinces have increased their share of strikes in 2014. Factories moving to more inland areas seeking cheaper labour, the far-reaching impact of the economic slowdown and the increasing class-consciousness of Chinese workers, are the reasons why industrial actions are becoming more and more evenly spread across the country.

Manufacturing still remains at the top of all the industries, accounting for 559 strikes, 41% of the 2014 total. But the biggest increase was in the construction sector, up from 20 strikes - just 3% - in 2013 to 254 strikes - 18% - in 2014.

Since 2009, the housing market has continued to prosper, and large scale construction driven by the Keynesian policies has become one of the driving forces of China's economy. But this came to an end at the beginning of last year. The housing market is now facing a deepening slump. Saddled with reduced sales and weaker credit availability, many developers are in a precarious financial situation, which in turn explains the growing wage disputes.

More than 90% of the strikes in the construction sector in 2014 were related to wage arrears. And they were more concentrated in less developed provinces in the northeast and inland areas, where the housing bubble burst more quickly .

Also, there were 251 strikes in the transport sector, rising from 185 in the previous year. Among these, there were the truck drivers' strikes in Yantian Port, in Shenzhen, just across the strait to Hong Kong, and in Beilun Port in Ningbo, Zhejiang, as well as the taxi drivers' strikes which culminated in a cross-city strike in early January 2015. Whilst the oil price is falling the high charges by taxi companies and competition from unlicensed drivers have become the focus of taxi and truck drivers.

Another important development was the rapid growth of strikes and protests by teachers, up from 43 in 2013 to 82 last year. More than half of these took place in the last quarter. The most famous were the protests in

Heilongjiang province in northeast China, where around 20,000 teachers from middle and primary schools came out on strike in cities and districts around the capital Harbin, protesting low pay and pension irregularities. Protests of teachers in state-run schools, mainly broke out in less advanced areas including Xiaogan and Enshi in the Hubei province, Yulin in the Shaanxi province, Baoto in Inner Mongolia and were mainly over low wages, lack of formal employment status, pension and housing funding contributions and over performance-based wage systems. Because of the relatively weak finances, the local governments failed to increase the wages or pay the pension and housing funding contributions for the teachers.

In addition, there were also strikes over low wages, wage arrears and abusive management in privately-run schools and nurseries. Whereas the teachers in the past were relatively reluctant to take strike action, they have become radicalised by the pressures on living standards as well as due to inspiration from the actions of other teachers.

There was also an increase in miners' strikes and protests, after a nearly two-year-long slump in China's coal industry. According to Wang Xianzheng, chairman of the China Coal Industry Association, more than half of China's coal-mining enterprises are now struggling to pay the wages of their workers, and more than 70% of China's coal mining companies are making losses. The main focus of the miners is on wage arrears and pit closures.

Across all industries, the main demands are for the payment of unpaid wages, wage increases and compensation, which account for 73% of the strikes recorded. Together with the slowdown in economic growth, there is also a decline in minimum wage growth. Only 20 regions (the fewest since 2011) increased their minimum wage by an average of only 13.1% (the lowest since 2011) in 2014. Apart from wage issues, more and more workers are also demanding that the employers pay for social security and housing fund contributions, as was seen in the case of the Yue Yuen strike.

The rapid increase in industrial unrest is clearly a threat to the Chinese ruling class. Whereas in previous booming years the government had tried to play the role of negotiator, it is also increasingly responding with repressive measures. There has been a clear increase in police interventions and arrests during the strikes and protests. For instance, in the Yue Yuen strike, the police not only beat some of the striking workers severely, but also went into the factory with police dogs to force the workers back to work.

At the same time the government is trying to control the movement by putting pressure on labour activists and NGOs who are arrested more frequently, detained for longer and in general harassed more. The main aim of this is to guide the workers towards the official trade union federation, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), which is the only legal union in China.

As a counter-weight to the independent movement of the workers the state is trying to create a safety valve for the pressure that is building up below the surface. For instance, in 2012 in Shenzhen, in the Guangdong Province, the workers managed to win the right to direct elections of the union negotiators in 163 enterprises. The state countered this with the new Regulation on Enterprise Collective Consultation and Collective Contracts implemented on 1 January 2015, according to which the official trade unions will be the only officially sanctioned negotiators on behalf of the workers.

The further slowdown of the Chinese economy will result in a further worsening of wages and working conditions, which are already the main factors causing the present rise in strike levels. More importantly, it will lead to growing unemployment and bring more uncertainty in the lives of the workers. As Premier Li Keqiang recently stated, according to official estimations, the Chinese economy needs to grow by 7.2% a year to ensure jobs for the 10 million new workers that enter the labour market each year. This year the growth rate is likely to fall below this threshold, and there are already signs that point to rising unemployment.

All of these elements will lead to more strikes and protests and bitter struggles, in which the workers will start to organise and unite on a higher level. China is now entering an era of the new normality, not only of economic growth, but also of internal contradictions and class struggle. The working class in China is awakening!  
[www.marxist.com/massive-upsurge-in-workers-strike.htm](http://www.marxist.com/massive-upsurge-in-workers-strike.htm)  
China Labour Bulletin

## US-India Nuke Deal A Big Win for Corporations



**Author and scholar Vijay Prashad says the US-India nuclear deal will protect US corporations from liability in case of an industrial disaster like India faced in the 1984 Bhopal gas leak**

Vijay Prashad interviewed by Jaisal Noor on the Real News Network  
January 2015

**JAISAL NOOR, TRNN PRODUCER:** Welcome to The Real News Network. I'm Jaisal Noor in Baltimore.

The nuclear agreement reached between the U.S. and India during President Obama's visit this weekend is being hailed as a historic breakthrough. It follows up on the 2006 nuclear deal between the two countries that was stalled on the issue of liability for U.S. corporations. That hurdle was cleared by eliminating the financial responsibility for U.S. companies in case of a disaster like what happened to Japan at Fukushima. Obama's visit also witnessed the bolstering of defense ties with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Now joining us from Northampton, Massachusetts, to discuss all this is Vijay Prashad. He is the George and Martha Kellner Chair in South Asian History and professor of international studies at Trinity College. His latest book is *No Free Left: The Future of Indian Communism*. He's also the chief editor at Left World Books.

Thank you so much for joining us again, Vijay.

**VIJAY PRASHAD, PROF. OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, TRINITY COLLEGE:** Pleasure, Jaisal. Thank you.

**NOOR:** So the 20th anniversary of the Bhopal industrial disaster, the greatest industrial disaster in world history, just passed a few months ago. And now the prime minister of India has agreed to this deal, which some have said leaves potential victims of future nuclear disasters in India in the same boat as the victims of the Bhopal gas leak. What's your response?

**PRASHAD:** The Bhopal incident is a very good test case, where despite the fact that there's Indian law that actually constrains firms from walking away from disasters, nothing has happened for the victims 30 years later.

The people who had been brought before the courts were able to pay bail and flee Indian jurisdiction. There was no hope of bringing them back to India, despite the fact that India and the United States have an extradition treaty. So in the historical period, the fact that there was no real robust approach towards prosecuting industrial crimes shows that there has been no stomach, really, in this [core (?)].

In this case, in 2005 and 2006, India and the United States went into a discussion around a nuclear agreement, where essentially India, despite being outside the International Atomic Energy Agency, despite not being a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, was provided by the United States as sort of a approach out of the nuclear cold. The United States was going to make sure that India was able to get nuclear material from the nuclear suppliers group. The United States was going to make sure that its firms were going to enter India and bring in nuclear technology.

There was a huge debate in India in the Parliament, which at that time leaned somewhat more left than right, in 2010 passed a law which was the Nuclear Liability law, which basically prevented the government from offering the United States what it wanted, which is a limited liability or no liability for American firms which would operate inside India.

But it turns out now Mr. Modi, despite the fact that there is parliamentary restriction, has decided to loosen liability for American firms operating in India. And the likelihood is that because the Parliament leans further right than left, they're going to overturn that law.

**NOOR:** And it's my understanding that the BJP actually opposed this nuclear deal originally when they were in the opposition. Talk about this deal now and the fact that the BJP has now helped pass it now.

**PRASHAD:** Well, Jaisal, the BJP and its predecessor, the Jana Sangh, have been arguing since the 1950s for a very close relationship between India and the United States. They have wanted to break with U.S. and with Indian relations with the Non-Aligned Movement, later with Indian closeness to the Soviet Union, and go full-fledged into a close relationship to the United States. So this has been a long-term agenda for the Hindu right, which is now in power in India.

It is, of course, the case that when the Congress government, that is, the opposing government, attempted to do this nuclear deal, the BJP in Parliament protested against it on a variety of grounds, including a kind of straightforward nastiness ground: why should we make this deal with the Americans? But meanwhile, thanks to WikiLeaks, it was clear that senior BJP leaders, such as Jaswant Singh, went to visit the American embassy and said, look, we have to make these kind of noises for election purposes, but really we are for a nuclear deal. The problem that you, the Americans, have made is you've tried to make this deal with a Congress government, which at that time relied on communist support for the government to stay in power. He said, instead of going with them, you should have gone with us, you should go with us. So it's very clear that from that private statements and from the deal that is now being cut, the BJP was never really opposed to a nuclear deal with the American government.

**NOOR:** And so, during this visit, President Obama also shored up military ties Narendra Modi. Talk a little bit about that. And at the end of the day, whether it's talking about the civilian nuclear program or the military, corporations are benefiting on both ends.

**PRASHAD:** Well, exactly correct. I mean, look, the beneficiary of this nuclear deal is not the American public; it's Westinghouse, it's the big nuclear manufacturers. And besides that, the nuclear deal in 2006 was conducted essentially as a way to make India a vote against Iran in the International Atomic Energy Agency board meeting.

You know, it's a strange situation. India had a leadership position in the International Atomic Energy Agency despite the fact that it's not a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty. So at one level, this is about cooperation or corporate profit, and it's about the kind of geostrategic objectives of the U.S. government.

Well, with the defense agreement, this has also been around now almost 20 years. United States and India have conducted military exercises together. India is one of the largest importers of weapons in the world. It imports half of Israel's exports. And it imports a very large amount of American material. This deal is interesting, because the Obama administration and the administration of Mr. Modi have now talked about joint ventures for drone production and C-130 aircraft production in India. That means U.S. firms will be working to produce military equipment in India. And India, of course, will also buy military equipment from the United States. So, once again, there is a kind of boondoggle for large corporations. But at the same time, this boondoggle for corporations is related to India coming into the American narrative of geopolitics.

**NOOR:** Well, Vijay Prashad, thank you so much for joining us again.

**PRASHAD:** Thank you.

**NOOR:** Thank you for joining us at The Real News Network.  
[therealnews.com](http://therealnews.com)

*Vijay Prashad is the George and Martha Kellner Chair in South Asian History and Professor of International Studies at Trinity College. He is the author of sixteen books, including *The Poorer Nations: A Possible History of the Global South* (Verso, 2013), *Arab Spring, Libyan Winter* (AK, 2012) and (co-edited with Paul Amar) *Dispatches from the Arab Spring* (2013). He writes regularly for *The Hindu*, *Frontline*, *Jadaliyya*, *Counterpunch*, *Himal and Bol*.*

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### **Obama: he came, he saw, he gave advice**

Badri Raina 29 January 2015

Obama spent three whole days in India. He was welcomed like one of our own, complete with huggy hugs and the intimacy of first naming, even if one-sided, the erudite Indian Chief Executive going even to the extent of telling him the meaning of his first name, Barack, which now we know means “the one who is blessed.” The 1894 triumph was mentioned—that telling moment when our Vivekananda took the Parliament of Religions at Chicago by storm and taught the world a thing or two about the pre-eminence of our Vedas. Coming as he does from the very same Chicago, Obama had had the wit to present to the visiting Indian Prime Minister a year or so ago a compilation of the speeches made at that watershed event in Chicago a century and a quarter back where Vivekananda “proved” to the semitic world how the Vedas were the mother of all faiths, and how being Hindu meant being universal.

Just when the Obama visit was going so swimmingly, bathed in the glow of the Vedas and sundry saffron accoutrement, imagine what this Obama fellow, during an address to India’s aspirating youth, proud of the Vedic yore, even if by hearsay, but yearning for a Yankee future, chose to do: as if poking a finger in the Hindutva eye, this Obama made bold to say how “Michelle and I have been strengthened by our Christian faith.” No ghar vapsi (i.e. return to the all-encompassing original faith) there, you might well say, Vivekananda or no Vivekananda. Was he also insinuating that it might be wrong to vandalise churches etc.? In other words, teaching us tolerance on our own tolerant soil. Fingers crossed. We need his technology.

In fact, this cheeky Obama—he went all the way, as if you couldn’t stop him. Reminding his bright audience of how Gandhi had said all religions are branches of the same tree, how, in fact, Article 25 of the Indian Constitution guaranteed to all the right to profess, practice, and preach their own religions without fear of persecution, or discrimination. As if to say, “I have done my homework not just on Vivekananda but also on your Constitution, so don’t tell me.” And, even more gallingly, how it is incumbent on governments to “protect religious freedoms” as well as on all citizens. Ergo, not enough for any government to say they have nothing to do with what their well-wishers may be doing here, there, and elsewhere to those “others” who practice faiths different from that of the

majority, however peaceful and law abiding they may be, or however empowered to do so by the Constitution. Having learnt a trick or two from his bosom friend, Modi, Obama went on to make that irrefutable and pulverizing appeal to his own experience of having been often “treated differently” in that land of the free and the brave. Once said, how could you prevent any Dalit or Adivasi, or Muslim, or Christian in Bharat from thinking the American President might have been speaking for him as well? Not to speak of women who are not blessed with vintage fair skin, however accomplished, handsome, and noble they be.

Come to think of it, Obama said a mouthful, as if he was enunciating a Methodist equivalent of the Vedic-Vivekananda peroration to an Indian audience—a sort of empire striking back you might say – a century or more in the making, secure in the knowledge that, being the most powerful man in authority worldwide, with plenty to give, there was nary a mischance of anyone saying with Bartleby “I would prefer not to” listen.

With the religious question dealt with, like it or not, Obama had the further gumption to aver that “our countries are not perfect.” This at a juncture in the modern history of India when everywhere perfection drips from the mouth of babes as much as it does from those they wish to emulate and celebrate. Indeed, look where you will, hear where you will, was India that is Bharat ever more perfect? Even to the exclusion of the least demur which stands to be promptly subjected to the correctional clout that perfection now wields to orchestrated applause? Now, we might have agreed had the visiting persona limited his confession to his own land. After all, think what moral decrepitude obtains there where women may wear what they like, and where children leave their parents and go their own way, etc.; indeed, imperfections too numerous for our politeness to number, although their sinful habits of eating beef and drinking liquor must receive mention. But to have included Bharat in his contemplation of imperfection—is this to be endured?

And what was his argument? That both in the US of A and in India great big “skyscrapers” exist cheek by jowl with great “poverty.” This monumental hypocrisy at just the moment when we are poised to erase “socialist” from the Preamble of our Constitution so as we may plunge full scale into the American way of life—privatising wealth and assets, maximising profits, dismantling welfare, deepening inequality, eliminating subsidies to the poor and enhancing subsidies, nee incentives, to the rich—all in enlightened national and global interest! So what a thing to say that economic rapacity and reformist expropriation equal imperfection. And from a bright man who went to Harvard. Asking us to “open up” from one side of his mouth, and preaching socialism from the other side. Alas, were we not so enslaved to the ancient edict of Atithi Devo Bhava (a guest is god), what might our Surjit Bhallas and Gurcharan Dases and others of that evolved tribe of thinkers not have had to say to Obama about what does and does not constitute imperfection. But our mouths remained sealed; we need the reactors and the defence technologies. Best to swallow the crude homily and get on with Vikas (development).

But what if the reactors do not, after all, materialize? We may have agreed between the two great leaders to pass on the buck of liability to commercial types, but what commercial mind would risk insuring a nuclear disaster, you might well speculate. And what Westinghouse and suchlike might want to venture investing when the costs of producing nuclear energy escalate to a point where no one may buy? Points to ponder, points to ponder. And what canny American war-making firm may consent to co-produce to a “make-in-India” tune, when such co-production may involve sharing not just finished technologies but letting on how they are arrived at? And permanent membership of the Security Council, ha, wait to hear from the Chinese, the Germans, and the Japanese, as well as the Brazilians before you saddle your horses, mate. Have you read your American history well? We are afraid not—reason why you tend to mistake one-sided hugs and chummy camaraderie for strategic conquests. And from a President who is not only lame duck but has both Houses of Congress opposed to him. Not to speak of a Pentagon, always willing to make war with alacrity but never fool enough to give away ascendancy of wherewithal.

As to depending on our fifth column, namely our bustling NRIs, more effervescence, less substance or clout there. And surely not after our

Hindutva exertions have been so roundly rebuked by a Christian Head of State on our own home turf. Annoyance and mayhem, down and out there.

But it was a great success, the Obama visit—a great success. Reason why for four days round the clock we saw little else on the electronic channels but guffaw and good will, and heard philosophy and reminiscence, suffusing our real lives and our real needs with syllables of promise and the shimmer of zest.

That over, shoulder to the wheel, for the prices keep going up and the only commodity cheaply available is religion—that which cannot fill the belly, or plaster the bone, or keep the hovel from the rain, or protect children and women from slavery and rape.

Soon we may be only a “sovereign democratic republic”, neither “socialist” nor “secular”, even in name.

That indeed will be perfection.  
zcomm.org

## China's GDP slowest since 1990

**The Chinese economy has decelerated by 30 percent in the past five years**



China Worker 23 January 2015

The release this week of official 2014 GDP data confirmed expectations that China's economy recorded its slowest pace in 24 years. Most economic forecasters point to even slower growth in the coming years as China grapples with deflation, overcapacity, a surge in debt levels, and the increasing “zombification” of overinvested economic sectors including the housing market which has been the economy's main engine of growth for the past decade.

The Chinese regime is expected to take further measures in coming months to loosen monetary policy in order to stimulate the economy and counter deflationary pressures (in common with the central banks in Europe and Japan) by easing the flow of credit to struggling local governments and companies. But this will require an extraordinarily difficult balancing act if the government is not to trigger a new upsurge in already unsustainable debt levels.

Last year's full-year GDP growth was 7.4 percent, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) announced on Tuesday, undershooting the government's 7.5 percent target. This was the first time since 1998, in the midst of the Asian financial crisis, that Beijing missed its growth target.

The figures mean that the former ‘miracle economy’ has slowed by 30 percent in the past five years, from an expansion rate of 10.4 percent in 2010, the last time it achieved double-digit growth, to 9.3 percent in 2011, and 7.7 percent in 2012 and 2013. The latest figures signal “the end of a high-growth heyday,” concluded The Wall Street Journal. China's state news agency Xinhua concurred with this view. “The country's period of miraculous breakneck growth is over - but let's get over it,” it said.

### **Bad news is good?**

China's headline GDP growth figure still ranks as one of the fastest in the world. But nobody who grasps the real condition of the Chinese economy will find reassurance in this fact. The Chinese government has long been accused of manipulating GDP statistics and even Premier Li Keqiang some years ago famously described the country's GDP data as “man made”. Other indices suggest the economy may have suffered a more abrupt slowdown than suggested by the official figures. China's total power generation - widely seen as a more accurate gauge of economic growth - increased by just 3.2 percent in 2014 according to the NBS. This was the slowest expansion in 16 years. While final statistics are not yet published, it seems highly probable that China's steel consumption fell last year for the first time since 1995. Steel is another important indicator of wider

economic performance.

The government's message is that the economic slowdown is good news and a deliberate policy. In the media the formulation "new normal" is repeated over and over. In fact, at its news conference to announce the GDP figures the NBS used this term eight times! But as Jamil Anderlini pointed out in the Financial Times, "In China's authoritarian political system, the 'leadership of the Communist party' is always 'entirely correct' and so bad news, such as the slowest growth in nearly a quarter of a century, is either the fault of 'external forces' or actually good news."

Capitalist economists are now taking an increasingly dark view of the Chinese economy, with the latest GDP figures seen as heralding an extended slowdown with serious implications for the crisis-stricken global economy.

"We should expect growth numbers starting with a 6 to come through in 2015 - we expect 6.8 percent growth in 2015, slowing to 6.5 percent in 2016," Fitch Ratings said in a research note. The International Monetary Fund, normally considered "bullish" on China, has also lowered its forecast for Chinese growth to 6.8 percent this year, and 6.3 percent in 2016. "The housing slowdown is more serious than we thought earlier," confessed IMF chief economist Olivier Blanchard. The Fund predicts India will experience faster GDP growth than China in 2016.

### **Shadow of deflation**

Like many other parts of the world economy, China is now grappling with deflation (falling prices). In China's case this is mainly the result of unprecedented levels of overcapacity. "The ratio of output to capacity in many sectors - for example, steel, plate glass, construction materials, chemicals and fertilisers, aluminium, shipbuilding, and solar panel and wind turbine manufacturing - has fallen sharply. Last year it was about 70-72 per cent, and it is likely to have dropped further since," noted the Financial Times (24 December 2014).

The frenetic pace of construction especially following the monster stimulus injection of 2008 has resulted in a multitude of 'ghost towns' and a huge debt overhang. China's consumer inflation rate has fallen to 1.5 percent, from 6 percent five years ago. But producer prices have been in negative territory for 34 consecutive months, falling by 10 per cent since 2011. Deflation, which makes debt repayments more expensive in real terms, is now seen as the biggest danger facing the global capitalist economy. This is shown by the ECB's formal announcement on January 22 of a substantial 'quantitative easing' programme. Copying the US central bank's previous policy, the European Central Bank will electronically print around 60 billion euros a month over the coming two years. The aim of this policy is to shake the economy out of deflation, which currently afflicts nine of nineteen Eurozone members.

Beijing's interest rate cut last November followed a similar logic. But it proved to be counterproductive, having little effect on loosening credit conditions for struggling companies, but instead triggering a stock market bubble with share prices surging by 36 percent in the eight weeks following the rate reduction. The housing market was heavily driven by speculation in the past, with one percent of the population said to own more than one-third of China's urban housing. Now, with the real estate sector in the doldrums, some of this speculative capital has poured into the stock market.

### **Deflation threatens the world economy.**

The government is attempting to "defuse debt risks" as Premier Li promised last year's session of the National People's Congress. Initially, it has attempted to rein in the riskiest forms of shadow banking, concentrating on the rapidly growing trust sector. But despite new government curbs in 2014, assets in the shadow banking sector as a whole grew a further 14 percent to US\$9 trillion [source: Nomura Securities]. The growth of shadow banking, a phenomenon previously associated mostly with ultra-deregulated Anglo-Saxon capitalism, is heavily linked with the most speculative branches of the Chinese economy such as real estate, which are now suffering from overcapacity and heightened default risks.

According to J.P. Morgan, local government debt almost quadrupled to 21 trillion yuan (US\$3.4 trillion) in 2014, from 5.6 trillion yuan in 2008. Local governments have engaged in colossal debt-driven construction programmes in cohorts with developers and private investors with the aim of outstripping neighbouring regions and achieving impressive GDP figures. This construction binge has also fuelled the corruption epidemic that 'paramount leader' Xi Jinping has publicly admitted could bring about the collapse of the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) dictatorship. Last year's slowdown in the housing market, with a ten percent decline in new housing starts, has increased the pressures on local governments who report a 10 percent decline in land sales over the full year 2014. Land sales are the most important source of local government revenues.

Beijing's dilemma is that further stimulus measures risk inflating a new credit bubble, increasing the odds of a financial crisis in the future, while cutting the flow of credit could trigger a sharper slowdown and even outright recession, thus reducing the ability of companies and local governments to repay their debts.

According to Anne Stevenson-Yang, a bourgeois economist who has long warned about the potential for a banking crisis in China, "China is sinking into a deflationary recession that's increasing in speed and may take some time to run its course. Investors have lost faith in the property market, which alone comprises about 20 percent of GDP, when taking into account the entire supply chain, from iron ore production to construction to related financial services and appliance sales... There's even an outside possibility that China's economic miracle could end up in a fiery crash landing, if a surge in banking system loan defaults outruns government regulators' attempts to contain such a credit crisis and restore financial confidence."

#### **Defusing the debt bomb**

The government has so far proceeded with extreme caution in attempting to defuse the debt time bomb. Last year saw a number of 'near misses' with corporate defaults narrowly averted out of fear these could trigger a wider crisis throughout the financial system. Beijing is expected to announce a deposit insurance scheme for the banks in coming months, similar to other countries, which it hopes will provide a 'firewall' against wider financial panics in the event of individual bankruptcies and defaults. At the same time it has ordered local governments to 'reclassify' their debt obligations in order to remove the implicit government guarantee that today applies to all government-linked companies, investment vehicles, and applies de facto to the shadow finance instruments linked to them. Once these steps are completed, it is widely believed that Beijing will allow defaults to take place on a selective basis as a means to instil 'discipline' on credit markets and to protect the core banking system from the excesses of its shadow-banking arm. The government clearly anticipates some 'localised' banking crises but hopes to contain these and prevent them from spreading. This, however, entails enormous risks and developments could slip beyond the control of the government and its regulatory agencies.

The Chinese economy is therefore entering uncharted territory in 2015. The Chinese dictatorship's mix of neo-liberal capitalist reforms ("let the market play a decisive role") together with increased state repression and political control are leading society deeper into economic crisis and political turmoil. The working class must forge its own alternative to this bankrupt regime, based on democratic self-organisation and international socialism.

[chinaworker.info](http://chinaworker.info)

## **The Greek Election**

Leo Panitch 26 January 2015



As we enter the eighth year of the long-lingering global economic crisis, it is sobering indeed that it is only in Greece that a political party putting forward a clear, radical democratic alternative to the perverse policies of

neoliberal austerity stands on the doorstep of entering the state.

Emerging out of a coalescence of people from the 1980s Eurocommunist left and alter-globalization social movements at the beginning of the millennium, Syriza had at one point reached as much as 15 per cent support in opinion polls before 2010. But it came to the brink of power only when its new leader, Alexis Tsipras, in the run-up to the spring 2012 election proclaimed that it was Syriza's immediate goal and duty to enter government in coalition with anybody who would join with them to stop the economic torture of the Greek people.

The policies imposed by the European Central Bank (ECB), and above all by the German central bank acting behind it, made the term Great Depression rather than Great Recession especially apt for Greece in this crisis. Unemployment was pushed beyond 25 per cent, minimum wages were cut by a third, people were cut off the electricity grid and denied basic pharmaceuticals. The rule of law was simply thrown out in terms of labour relations.

### **Immediate Steps Post Election**

Having clung to office for two more years, the governing coalition of the old patronage parties is about to be displaced by Syriza in next Sunday's election. What Syriza is first of all promising is that it will renege on the reactionary austerity policies. They are promising to reinstate collective bargaining and workers' basic rights, to raise the minimum wage, to reconnect people to the electricity grid. It is a sad commentary on our times that these have become radical things to do.

A good deal of this can be done without resolving the very large question of whether Greece will continue to treat as legitimate and pay all the interest on the enormous debt that was run up by previous clientalist and, in many senses, corrupt governments, who always worked hand in glove with the very small capitalist oligarchy that runs industry, trade and finance. Syriza has costed its immediate restorative policies at some 11-billion euros, equivalent to less than 20 per cent of revenues lost through tax avoidance. Its most popular proposed revenue measure involves finally requiring the big media barons to pay license fees for the use of that very basic public resource - the airwaves.

Syriza is not saying that they want to leave the euro. They don't, and wouldn't be anywhere near where they are in the polls otherwise. The question is whether they can have the breathing room to undertake basic restorative policies, and to lay the ground for a longer-term economic strategy. This would entail real structural reform of the Greek state, so there could be some real democratic involvement in what's invested and how it's invested, so that Greece might come out of the crisis in a progressive manner.

The loans Greece has had from European Union, the European Central Bank, and the IMF in exchange for introducing such terrible austerity has not removed its heavy debt burden. The loans were mainly designed to allow for paying interest due to the bondholders, so that Greece could continue to borrow, at exorbitant rates. The insistence that a newly-elected Syriza government - which would be Greece's first really honest, non-clientalist government - should first of all embrace the obligation to pay such interest rates to either wealthy Greek capitalists or to foreign bankers is nothing less than scandalous.

### **Overcoming the Crisis**

The premise that were Syriza to succeed that somehow this would deepen the European crisis stems from looking at the world in terms of the dangers that a democratically elected government poses for domestic and international capital rather than in terms of the necessary things that a democratic government should be doing for the majority of its people.

Syriza represents the first and the strongest democratic response to the bizarre deepening of neoliberalism after the 2008 crisis. Were such a democratic government to be stymied or brought down by the hostility of its domestic capitalist class working in cahoots with international capitalists and their political representatives, this would be a tragedy for democracy. It would reinforce the notion, growing ever stronger in Europe

today, that the only way to protect people from the neoliberal austerity is through supporting right-wing ethno-nationalist parties.

What Syriza stands for in this context is what Spain's newly elected Republican government stood for in the early 1930s at a time when the Nazis on the march to winning elections in Germany. For the moment - at least until Podemos reclaims the mantle at the end of this year - a democratic Greece under Syriza would represent what democratic Spain represented for the international left in the 1930s. The prospects for a different outcome are much better, provided there is strong international support for giving a Syriza government the breathing room it would need.  
zcomm.org

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## Russia/Ukraine: Facing a turbulent 2015

### As death toll rises, economies plunge into freefall

Rob Jones (CWI, Moscow) 22 January 2014



President Putin entered 2014 on a high: the movement against the falsification of elections in Moscow in 2012-3 was led into a political dead-end by the pro-western liberals, was finished off using minor concessions and more serious repression. Internationally, growing tension between the western imperialist powers and the Russian imperialism saw the latter winning tactical victories, particularly in Syria. The Sochi Olympics, the most expensive games in history, were used as a showcase to temporarily divert attention from the huge corruption eating away at the Russian economy.

The only major problem, it seemed, for Putin was neighbouring Ukraine, which the EU, US and NATO have been trying, for some time, to use as a bulwark against Russia. The mass opposition to the authoritarian Yanukovich-Azarov government was fuelled by poverty and corruption. But in the absence of a left alternative the protests fell under the leadership of pro-European business people and the far right. The overthrow of the Yanukovich-Azarov regime, with western backing, was a blow to the Russian ruling elite. The Kremlin used the genuine fear of the Russian-speaking population - that their language, political and economic rights were threatened by the Kiev government - to step up support for pro-Russian separatists. Crimea has now returned to Russia and war continues to simmer in Donetsk and Lugansk. Thousands have now died and up to a million refugees have fled the region.

2015 started with no apparent improvement in the situation. The death toll in east Ukraine is already creeping up again, with shootings and artillery strikes in the disputed regions and bomb attacks in cities such as Dnepropetrovsk and Odessa continue. The head of the 'Lugansk republic', Igor Plotninsky, at the Kremlin's behest, has launched a brutal struggle for control of the armed forces there, alongside the far-right led "Batman" battalion and with the "Almighty Don Host" - a Cossack band which says it is restoring the Russian empire. While the warlords fight amongst themselves, the population is increasingly desperate. Residents of the Kalininskii region of Donetsk have sent a petition to the republican head demanding the use of artillery in their region is stopped, as it just provokes return fire from the Kiev side.

As long as the situation remains unresolved, none of the other serious problems facing the two countries can even begin to be solved. But the peace negotiations that started last summer in Minsk are making no progress. A session due to take place on 25th December broke down. Last week's planned talks in Kazakhstan were cancelled, as Merkel said she saw no point in attending because of Russia's intransigence. She made no comment on the Ukrainian Rada's (parliament) decision to drop the country's "neutrality", stating it wanted to join NATO and launching a new

conscription of 200,000 soldiers.

The only part of the earlier agreement to be partially implemented has been an exchange of prisoners. Russia, in words, claims to want a settlement but continues to support the rebels, although as the recent killings in Lugansk demonstrate, the Kremlin is having difficulty controlling them. The leaders of the two rebel republics have their own agendas, at the top of which is a refusal to simply go back into Ukraine.

Both Russia and Ukraine are facing economic meltdown. Ukraine's GDP fell by 7.5% last year and the currency, the hryvnia, by 42%. The aid promised by the EU has not been delivered, and the country's needs have become even greater. In a session that lasted until 3 o'clock in the morning on 30 December, the Rada finally passed the budget for 2015. This predicts a further 4-5% GDP drop, a slashing of social expenditures by 10% while, at the same time, military and defence expenditures which have mushroomed by five times, will now consume 20-25% of the country's income. With the collapse of the coal industry in the east, Kiev now has to buy coal from South Africa. Thirty two mines are to be closed, 24 are to face temporary closure and another 37 are to be privatised. Even the usually tame Trade Union of Education and Scientific workers has warned that over 100,000 teachers will lose their jobs, and threatens to organise a national strike.

### **Ruble tumbles**

The Russian ruble lost 40% of its value in 2014 and a further 13% in the first two weeks of 2015. Even the Economics Ministry is predicting a further 5% drop in GDP in 2015, although a government meeting last week even considered a scenario in which there is a 10% fall. This comes after a period of stagnation, when real wages have not been able to keep up with prices. "Ideal storm", "badly wounded", "banking crisis", "default" and "vicious spiral" are the sort of words used to describe the situation on the business pages.

President Putin blames the crisis on the west's attempts to put the "Russian bear" on a chain. "As soon as they succeed in doing so they will tear out its fangs and claws" he says. The western powers do desperately want to limit the strength of the new Russian imperialism. But the truth is that the reasons for the economic crisis are rooted in the Russian economy itself. The economy was stagnant even before the Ukrainian crisis and 40% of the huge outflow of capital in 2014, which reached \$125-130 billion, took place before sanctions were imposed.

Now the collapse of the world oil price from \$115 a barrel in June 2014 to \$46 demonstrates, once again, the volatility or chaotic nature of the world's capitalist economies. Goldman-Sachs predicts the price will stay at \$42 for 6 months. The oil company, BP, predict it will hover at \$50 for the next three years. On top of this, the sanctions are having an effect by limiting even further investment. Putin sees this as an opportunity to boost domestic production. This happened after the 1998 ruble collapse, but then there were two other factors involved - Russian oil output increased over 10 years by 60% and the world oil price grew to record levels. This, plus the excess industrial capacity still remaining from Soviet times, allowed for an increase in domestic production. These factors are absent today.

The government argues that with about \$150 billion in its stability fund, it has enough to get through the crisis. But in 2014 it spent \$83 billion propping up the ruble alone. Now experts predict that apart from further support to the ruble, \$50 billion a year is needed to compensate for the budget deficit. Significant amounts will be needed to bail out banks and maybe bankrupt companies and to compensate the oligarchs for sanctions. The country has currency reserves, but once it starts eating into those, panic may set in and the suggestions made by some economists that Russia faces default, at some stage, seem credible.

### **Crimea**

Nor are things going well in the Crimea. The peninsula has faced widespread electricity blackouts as the Ukrainian network has failed to supply sufficient power. Quoting "security fears" the Ukrainian authorities have blocked all bus, train and freight transport to the Crimea. With

Russian air-companies suspending flights because of the lack of profitability this is causing real problems. Some reports also indicate that budget sector workers (teachers, health workers etc.,) were told that the long New Year holiday will be at “their own expense” - that is with a 30% pay cut for January. These economic hardships are on top of the new restrictions on democratic rights - apart from the extension of Russia’s harsh “anti-extremist” and “anti-LGBT” legislation, only 83 of the Crimea’s 3,000 mass media outlets have been recognised under Russia’s restrictive media laws.

Last year’s referendum in Crimea, followed by its incorporation into Russia, gave a huge boost to Putin’s popularity in Russia. He consistently blames Russia’s woes on foreign influence and sanctions. In response to attempts by the western powers to step up the isolation of Russia and to move NATO activities closer to its borders, Putin has tried to extend Russian influence in other parts of the world. But with the ‘BRIC’ countries and others like oil-producing Venezuela facing their own economic difficulties, Putin’s foreign policy offers no real hope of improving the economic situation in Russia. His support for the pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine has raised the alarm bells amongst the ruling elites of traditional allies, like Belarus and Kazakhstan. The leaders of the two countries, Lukashenko and Nazarbayev, demonstrated open opposition to the Russian intervention.

### **Russian opposition**

At home, Putin used this period to renege on the small concessions he was forced to make after the 2012-3 protests. The liberal pro-capitalist opposition has been significantly weakened by the events of the past year. Part of it supported Putin’s policy in Ukraine, as have all the official parties. The large protest planned for 15th January, the day that the sentence against Alexei Navalny (the best known of the liberal leaders) was due to be announced, was derailed when the judge brought forward the announcement by three weeks and suspended the three and a half year sentence. A few hundred tried to protest but were quickly rounded up by the police. The liberal strategy is not based on a conscious attempt to mobilise people against the government but in the hope that a crisis in the government will spark off a Russian version of Euromaidan. Such a protest movement can only, at most, change the ruling elites but will not aim to tackle poverty and corruption. Putin uses these very negative features consequences of events in Ukraine to warn against supporting the opposition. Only a mass movement led by a genuine working-class party can force out the region’s authoritarian regimes and create a worker’s government that introduces socialist policies to transform the lives of the majority.

But other issues are coming to the fore that will make it increasingly difficult to avoid protests. At the forefront is the question of budget cuts, with the announcement last autumn that up to half of Moscow’s hospitals are to close or be merged. On 14 January, a 10% cross-the-board cut in state budget expenditure, except of course in defence and security, was announced. A number of angry demonstrations took place at the end of last year. High profile industries are also in difficulty. With the market for new cars expected to drop by 25% a year, the CEO of Renault Nissan predicts a “bloodbath for everybody”.

The question is now whether a coordinated fight-back against the attacks on workers’ living standards can be organised but there is the danger that independent trade unions will not give the firm lead to maintain the momentum needed to resist the closures. It is necessary for a wide campaign to be built involving those who work in the public sector and those who use it - whether students or patients, as well as those living in the affected areas, to resist all closures and redundancies and to fight for those who have already lost their jobs to be given new jobs without loss of pay or status.

[www.socialistworld.net](http://www.socialistworld.net)



Alok Laddha (CWI-India) 21 January 2015

The Indian Science Congress Association was formed in 1914, and holds its meet in the first week of January every year. However this year for the first time in its history it held a session on Scientific practices in ancient India, which roughly covers the period from 2000BC to 500AD. The session had talks on Engineering applications of ancient Indian Botany that rather remarkably started with an attack on contemporary medical research by claiming how ancient Indian doctors claimed cancer cells were present in every human body and how today we do not even understand diabetes properly!

There was a talk on Ancient Indian aviation technology which cited a book Vymanika Shastra as one of his main sources for the ancient Indian knowledge, perhaps not knowing that this book was thoroughly discredited in 1972 by three Indian Scientists from Indian Institute of Science who showed that none of the techniques described in the book and attributed to ancient Indian texts will allow objects to fly. There was also a talk on advances in surgery in ancient India. This was also the only session where majority of the talks were not delivered by Science faculties but by faculties of Sanskrit department, a retired pilot and a retired civil Engineer. These talks paint a picture of how in the ancient times, remarkable advancement in Science was made and the knowledge was either lost or made impure by advent of other religions like Jainism, Buddhism and of course Islam.

Although the organizers of the ISC-2015 claimed to be under no pressure from the government to organize such a session, the entire idea is consistent with the Hindutva inspired clamour that started from the Prime Minister downwards attributing plastic surgery, stem cell research, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, algebra and Pythagoras theorem as having been developed by India and "given away" to the rest of the world. (or stolen by outsiders as Dr. Subramanian 'Susu' Swamy & co would like to constantly remind us)

The idea to "revive" ancient Indian Science is not an isolated incident but is an element of a larger movement where Hindutva supremacy through supremacy of Brahminical intellect in ancient times is claimed. As is well known by now, a supplementary reading book prescribed by Gujarat State Board known as "Tejomay Bharat" is an encyclopedia of unverifiable and unsubstantiated information which covers a wide range of topics from ancient history to Vedic Maths to advancements made by Hindu Civilization in Scientific discipline.

According to this text, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet, Burma and Sri Lanka were all part of Akhand Bharat (united India) and this idea of Akhand Bharat is not merely ahistorical fact but a reality waiting to happen. On page 51 it says Akhand Bharat will first be enmeshed on the landscape of our dreams and emotions and then realise her form and shape in geography. The book is circulated in school free of cost and has chapters on Nuclear energy which states that a Sage called

Kanada, who was founder of one of the six schools of Vedic Philosophy around 2500 years ago, was the one who discovered Atomic and Nuclear energy. The book goes on to claim that Germany stole this technology from us as they had six universities of Sanskrit studies in early twentieth century! And these universities fell in the hand of U.S. and its allies on one hand and Russia on the other when Germany was defeated.

This is the reason why U.S. and Russia became nuclear superpowers. (The author of this comic chapter perhaps didn't know about the Manhattan project and that U.S was a Nuclear power already by end of world-war Two.) This book written by Dinanath Batra who heads the educational wing of RSS takes the idea of ancient Hindu supremacy to another level altogether. So much so that the actual scholars of ancient India, like Aryabhata are not spared either. According to this book invention of zero precedes Aryabhata by some thousands of years and its credit goes to two figures not known for their mathematical Prowess but their role in Mahabharata, namely Dushyant and Shakuntala!

From Scientific point of view, all these activities seem laughable. None of these books or talks follow an actual scientific method of investigation but takes statements attributed to ancient sources at face value, a lot of which have already been scientifically debunked. However this coercion of Indian Science by ancient Brahminical (and hence Hindutva) scholarship is a rather serious development when viewed in the larger scheme of things.

The Ancient Indian History is constantly being re-written by the RSS. In the three books titled Hindu Charmakar Jati, Hindu Khatik Jati and Hindu Valmiki Jati which were released last year, it is claimed that the Dalit caste and its 600 odd sub-castes were created by the Muslim Invaders and did not exist in the Hindu religion prior to Muslim Invasion. The idea of Temple desecration and forced conversion during Muslim rule has been inserted into the Indian Psyche so deeply that even by many liberals it is accepted as a historical truth. Whereas in reality the work of eminent historians like Richard Eaton which have debunked these myths is consistently ignored.

Reviving Hindutva supremacy of the past is perhaps one of the most important aspects of RSS's agenda. With BJP in power, they have clearly got the license to infiltrate the Indian academia and we are going to witness with increased intensity, the publishing of books like Tejomay Bharat. And with this coercion will come more such vedic nonsense as well as increased funding for institutions and conferences which promote this kind of Pseudo-Scientific research.

[www.socialism.in](http://www.socialism.in)

## Can Podemos Win in Spain?

Bécquer Seguí and Sebastiaan Faber 20 January 2015



If the current poll numbers hold, Spain's next prime minister will be Pablo Iglesias, a pony-tailed 36-year-old political scientist who cut his teeth in the Communist Youth and the anti-globalization movement—but whose party, Podemos, wants “to change the rules of the political game,” Iglesias told the journalist Jacobo Rivero. Left and right, he added, are metaphors that are no longer “useful in political terms”: “the fundamental divide now [is] between oligarchy and democracy, between a social majority and a privileged minority.” Or, as Podemos likes to put it, between *la gente* and *la casta*, the people and the caste.

Podemos was founded only a year ago and, in May, it stunned Spain's political establishment by winning five seats in the European Parliament (1.25 million votes, nearly 8 percent). In many respects, the party—whose name translates as “We can”—is the Spanish sibling of Greece's Syriza. Central to its still-evolving platform is a broad set of economic-stimulus measures that buck the European obsession with austerity as the only way out of the continent's economic crisis. Among other things, Podemos proposes a restructuring of the national debt, a “deprivatization” of essential services such as healthcare and energy, and a form of universal basic income that would provide a road back into Spain's anemic economy

for the millions of unemployed—officially nearly 24 percent of the workforce, and as high as 54 percent among those 18 to 25. The party also wants to reform the country's Constitution, which cemented Spain's democratic transition in the late 1970s as a compromise between the Franco regime and the opposition. For Podemos, the Constitution has become a "padlock": the cornerstone of the failed "regime of '78" that, starting in the 1980s, was built on a bipartisan consensus between the center-left Socialist Party (PSOE) and the right-wing Popular Party (PP), breeding corruption while stifling democracy.

As it happens, Iglesias was born in October 1978—the same month the Constitution was approved in Parliament. And this is not the only irony of fate. Podemos may soon drive the final nail in the coffin of the Socialist Party, after whose nineteenth-century founder Iglesias was named. According to a postelection analysis on [ELDiario.es](http://ELDiario.es), "What appears to be true is that wherever support for the PSOE deteriorates fastest is where people have voted most for Podemos."

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The ascension of Podemos has changed the face of European politics, raising the prospect of a powerful southern coalition riding an electoral wave to challenge the austerity policies imposed by Germany and the European Central Bank. (Podemos, Syriza and other parties have joined the European United Left coalition in the Parliament in Brussels.) In Spain, as in Greece, Italy and Portugal, these policies have been nothing short of disastrous. In addition to the massive unemployment, Spain's national debt has soared close to 100 percent of gross domestic product and, according to the grassroots organization Platform for People Affected by Mortgages (PAH), nearly 570,000 families have lost their homes since the housing crisis hit in 2007. Under Spain's antiquated mortgage law, homeowners retain their debt even after foreclosure; thus, over 1 million people have been sucked into a black hole of financial despair. The country has seen a wave of economically induced suicides. According to UNICEF, Spain's child-poverty rate is at 36.3 percent. And the country suffers Europe's largest rate of income inequality, with the top fifth enjoying seven and a half times the wealth of the bottom fifth.

Against a political class that's widely—and quite rightly—perceived as embarrassingly incompetent, pathologically corrupt and deeply antidemocratic, Podemos promises competency, honesty and democracy. While established politicians from the left and right are beholden to corporate interests, Podemos proudly states that it "doesn't owe anybody anything." The party's meteoric ascent is partly due to the clarity of its message and the intelligence of its leaders. But most people agree that the bread and butter of Podemos is the Spanish media, particularly television. "One of the greatest errors of the European left has been to consider mass media as a space that could be surrendered to its adversaries without a struggle," says political scientist Carolina Bescansa, the party's newly elected secretary for political and social analysis. "But television is where the bulk of public opinion in any country is built. If you decide that you don't want to access that space on principle, what you're saying is that you give up the democratic path to win elections."

While leftist parties in Spain and elsewhere tend to view the mass media with contempt and the people appearing on TV as tainted, Podemos has opted for the opposite approach. Iglesias and other party representatives like Bescansa, Íñigo Errejón and Juan Carlos Monedero have taken to Spanish television, incessantly participating on the tertulias—political-debate shows—and appearing in interviews on the country's commercial channels. They've more than held their own against politicians like Esperanza Aguirre, the head of the Partido Popular in Madrid, and journalists like Eduardo Inda (the Spanish equivalents of Mitch McConnell and David Brooks, respectively). On TV, Podemos members have set themselves apart with a clear, commonsensical message, a distinct lack of fear and even a different style of dress: Iglesias sometimes wears a tie but never a jacket, while Monedero prefers political T-shirts and a red neck scarf. And unlike their opponents, they are always well prepared.

"People think that politics happens in parties or collectives, but that's not true," Luis Giménez says in the first pages of *Claro que Podemos*, his

recently published book on the party, co-written by Ana Domínguez. “Politics happens in the media.” That strategy has borne fruit. At first, Spain’s commercial media provided ample space to Podemos because it boosted ratings. Later, they unleashed their fearmongering campaigns—promulgating baseless accusations about Iglesias’s and Monedero’s financial connections to the Venezuelan government and Errejón’s research grant at the University of Málaga. John Müller, an economic reporter for the conservative paper *El Mundo*, even edited a frenzied book critical of Podemos that was published only a month after the May elections. But the larger the media’s magnifying glass on Podemos, the more the Spanish public appears to support it in the polls.

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The emergence of Podemos has caught the attention not only of the media but of other political parties in Spain, forcing them to adjust their discourse, their tactics and even their leadership. The established party that is closest to Podemos on the political spectrum, the United Left (IU)—a coalition that includes the Spanish Communist Party—has recently experienced a changing of the guard: Alberto Garzón, a young economist whose relationship with Iglesias has so far been friendly, has taken over from the graying Cayo Lara. Even the ruling Partido Popular has had to change its tune: Podemos’s focus on ethics, combined with an unending litany of PP corruption scandals—illegal party financing, kickbacks on construction projects, huge Swiss bank accounts and extra cash for party leaders delivered monthly in manila envelopes—has forced the Partido Popular to introduce some (fairly superficial) anti-corruption measures in the Spanish Parliament. The Socialist Party has also changed, replacing its balding, 62-year-old secretary general, Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba, with Pedro Sánchez, who is twenty years younger and has the Ken-doll looks of the ideal son-in-law. “Sánchez now even dresses like Pablo Iglesias—shirtsleeves rolled up, a backpack over one shoulder, a small tie,” says Tania González Peñas, one of the five Podemos members in the European Parliament. Joking aside, “the rest of the political parties have had to adapt themselves to us.” The political historian Pablo Sánchez León agrees: “At the level of discourse, Podemos has already won the battle. Their message has reframed the terms of debate. Now Pedro Sánchez is forced to explain why he is not part of ‘the caste.’”

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“We don’t want to be a party. we don’t want to be a coalition of parties. We don’t want to be a new commodity in the electoral marketplace,” Iglesias proclaimed to a crowd of more than 100 at the doorstep of the Teatro del Barrio in Madrid on the brisk winter morning of January 17, 2014. “What we propose to you all is a method.” Iglesias was speaking to the people who couldn’t fit into the Teatro’s 130-person-capacity playhouse, where he’d given a press conference introducing a political initiative called “Podemos” moments earlier. The event had come on the heels of the publication of *Making a Move: Turning Indignation Into Political Change*, a manifesto signed by twenty-eight intellectuals and activists, calling for a political campaign to “regain popular sovereignty.” Iglesias went on to ask the members of his audience to sign a petition if they wanted the initiative to continue and to develop into a party in time for the European Parliament elections several months later. He set the bar at 50,000 signatures. Podemos supporters met that mark in a little over a day.

But the history of Podemos really begins several years earlier. The indignados movement, known in Spain as “15-M” and in the United States as “the Spanish Occupy,” cut across ossified positions that had long divided the Spanish left. On May 15, 2011, a week before the local elections, feminist collectives, anti-eviction organizations and youth unemployment groups coalesced with already established political organizations like the Anticapitalist Left to occupy Madrid’s central square, Puerta del Sol. Highlighting the precariousness of existence for the working class and average citizens by pitching tents across the plaza, the protesters underscored the inability of the Spanish political class to heed calls for more direct representation and to relinquish its intimate relationship with banking and business interests. “15-M was a thoroughly spontaneous movement that combined many issues and impugned a large

part of the system,” says Miguel Bermejo, an activist with Juventud Sin Futuro (Youth Without a Future), one of the original groups behind the indignados protests. Bermejo was recently elected to Podemos’s Citizens Council. Contrary to the movement’s critics, he adds, 15-M wasn’t thought of as a way to translate popular indignation into a political program: “The virtue of 15-M was that it repoliticized many questions that had been depoliticized and had come to appear natural.”

That sentiment is widely shared outside of Podemos. Journalist Jacobo Rivero, the author of a book-length interview with Iglesias, notes that the 15-M movement profoundly changed Spanish society. “Regular citizens have discovered that they can do political work, that anyone can participate in politics,” he says. The historian Sánchez León echoes Rivero’s sentiment: “Something very interesting has happened in Spain: the people have finally discovered that they are smarter than their own politicians.” This change in consciousness has been the direct result of practices that grew out of 15-M, in particular the proliferation of assemblies that organized everything from local libraries and school-lunch programs to political seminars and the collective editing of manifestos that were read aloud or even delivered to the Spanish Parliament.

Such grassroots assemblies, organized around particular issues, interests or communities, are now the lifeblood of Podemos. Called “circles,” these citizen groups debate and come up with proposals behind which the party and its leaders must throw their weight. Citizens can participate in more than one circle at a time; as Bermejo explains, multiple memberships are encouraged. A medical doctor residing in Lavapiés, the bohemian Madrid neighborhood where Podemos was born, would be privy to local issues affecting the community, and thus could serve as an informed participant in the Lavapiés Circle. But she may also provide a much-needed perspective on public health and thus could play an important role as a member of the Public Health Circle.

Social media and innovative web platforms like Reddit, Appgree and Loomio make this kind of fluid citizen participation possible on a broad scale and in real time. Podemos has even sought out and developed its own platform, based on open-access code and software, that will soon be copied by a number of parties from other countries. Several months ago, an article appeared in *The New Yorker* describing Podemos as the “world’s first Reddit party.” While it’s true that members have developed an innovative use of the platform—proposing, debating and amending political positions on the subreddit Plaza Podemos—Miguel Ardanuy and others in charge of the party’s web presence reject the label. Podemos is “neither a television-, social-media-, community- nor a street-only party,” he says. Its power instead resides in “the ability to bring together these experiences and make them reinforce each other.” Others have pointed out that Reddit offers a window only into the back-and-forth, not the consensus-building that is the cornerstone of the “circle” model.

At a meeting of representatives from circles across Spain, Jorge Lago and Eduardo Maura led a session to train new Podemos members in how to interact with the Spanish media. “What happens when a reporter comes to you saying that someone said something on such-and-such a local Podemos Facebook page as if it’s the party’s official position?” The answer: you explain that each circle is independent, and that what the reporter is reading are internal debates that don’t yet represent any “official” position. But then you add that the fact they’ve been able to see it at all shows the party’s health and commitment to transparency. “The circles are going to be a counterforce within the party,” Bermejo said moments later, reinforcing the idea. “This internal pressure from local circles is what we want.”

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In September, Podemos launched a two-month Constituent Congress that included thousands of circle meetings, broad online debates, electronic elections and a mass meeting in the Palacio Vistalegre in Madrid. In an unprecedented exercise of direct democracy, more than 100,000 people participated in the process, which yielded an organizational structure and a set of basic ethical principles for the party. At the closing event on November 15, at the Teatro Apolo Nuevo in Madrid, Podemos presented its

secretary general, Pablo Iglesias, along with a Committee of Guarantees to guard procedures and protocol and a sixty-two-person Citizens Council. The event evoked a spirit of enthusiasm, a sense of purpose, and even a sign of Southern European solidarity against Brussels and Berlin.

Among the hundreds of journalists and sympathizers who filled the old theater to the brim were all the main representatives of Europe's new social movements. The crowd was addressed by Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras, Jean-Luc Mélenchon from France's Left Front and Marisa Matias, a Portuguese member of the European United Left. "The marionettes in Brussels and in our own countries' governments...decided to punish our peoples. In their view, we are lazy and live above our means and have no right to healthcare, education or even a home," Matias said. "We have a message for the marionettes and the faceless powers: if you threaten our lives, we will take the power." Tsipras argued that the European tables have already been turned: "Today, it's [Angela] Merkel who is asked what she will do when Spain and Greece have governments that are of the people and just," he said.

"It's not just fear that's changing sides," Iglesias said when he finally took the stage. "Smiles are starting to change sides, too. When they insult you, when they yell, when they lie, when they slander, smile—because we are going to win." (Soon after, Podemos launched the hashtag #SuOidioNuestraSonrisa: Their Hate, Our Smile.)

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Yet for some Podemos supporters, the final act was a disappointment. They felt the two-month Constituent Congress had not been true to the party's core democratic principles. In September, members were asked to collaborate in writing three documents—ethical, political and organizational—that would form the basis for the party and be debated at the congress. The open call was originally answered by more than 250 documents in September. By October, the merging of documents pared that number down to around fifty. At Vistalegre in mid-October, each group was given a time slot to make the case for its document to become one of the foundational pillars of Podemos.

The meeting inevitably accentuated important differences within the party, but two tendencies stood out. Leading a professor-heavy team that included Bescansa, Errejón, Monedero and Luis Alegre (all of whom are affiliated with the Complutense University of Madrid), Iglesias put forth his own proposal. Pablo Echenique, a physicist and Podemos member in the European Parliament, presented the strongest alternative, an organizational document that many thought was more inclusive than Iglesias's. Echenique's proposal would have given more power to the party's circles over questions of repeal and control, instead of dividing the responsibility among three bodies: the party members, the Citizens Council and the organizational leadership. Echenique's proposal also called for three secretaries general, not one, and introduced the idea that 20 percent of the Citizens Council be elected by a drawing, rather than 100 percent by a direct membership vote. These measures were intended to avoid the traps—and power trips—of traditional politics.

Miguel Urbán, an activist from the Anticapitalist Left who has known Iglesias for years and was an original signer of the January manifesto, insists that Iglesias's seeming pragmatism is in fact an abandonment of principle. "Iglesias says that if you want to win in politics, you have to leave your principles at the door," Urbán asserts. "I say that without principles, winning doesn't make any sense. I want change, not a replacement. We have to maintain the goal of self-government." Other supporters of Echenique point to the not-so-democratic idea of requiring members to vote on the three documents as a bloc instead of separately. Echenique, in fact, only presented an organizational document. Had Podemos members been given a chance, some think, they might have chosen his organizational document along with Iglesias's ethical and political ones. This kind of plural basis for the party's foundational documents might have more accurately represented its more than 314,000 members. Meanwhile, the online elections for Citizens Councils at the municipal level, which were held in December, further strengthened the position of the Iglesias faction.

For the actor Alberto San Juan, who also signed the January manifesto, the experience has been suffocating: “We have told [Iglesias’s group] several times: ‘We’ve got some doubts, we want to talk.’ But they have made no time for us. People ask, ‘Do you know what’s going on in Podemos?’ We don’t know any more than they do.”

“Everyone has suddenly become very serious,” the political scientist Noelia Adánez adds. “Not too long ago, it was still possible to make jokes about Podemos and poke a little fun. That’s gone now.”

The writer Rafael Narbona succinctly summarizes the arc of the past year from a distance: Podemos has “taken advantage of the legacy of the 15-M, made use of the assembly model, but in the end constituted itself as a traditional party.” As a result, the entire leadership structure is filled with people close to Iglesias. “That was a mistake,” says historian Sánchez León, “although an understandable one. There is a difficult road ahead, and Pablo wants to have a team he can work with. Carolina Bescansa is the best political analyst in Spain today. Errejón is only 32, but he is absolutely brilliant.” The team also has plenty of international experience: Errejón has worked closely with Bolivian President Evo Morales, while Monedero—at 52, the oldest of the core group—was an adviser to Venezuela’s Hugo Chávez.

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Debates still rage over Podemos’s future. The approach of municipal elections on May 24 has led many party members and political observers to speculate as to the role its swelling influence may play. In October, after a heated debate, members voted not to join those elections under the Podemos banner. Iglesias’s group argued that participating in the local elections—more than 8,000 races—was simply too big a risk. As a young organization, they felt, Podemos would be vulnerable to infiltration by candidates who didn’t meet its strict ethical standards. Instead, local groups are encouraged to support coalitions of “popular unity” that share Podemos’s basic principles.

While not everyone in Podemos agrees with the decision not to run under the party name in May, a healthy slice of its membership welcomes the idea of a more wide-ranging left coalition. The activist Ada Colau, who helped form the anti-eviction organization PAH, founded Guanyem Barcelona (Let’s Win Barcelona) shortly after the elections for the European Parliament last May. Her aim was to create a broad left-wing coalition to compete in Barcelona’s municipal elections in 2015. The decision to put their support behind local initiatives has opened the door for many Podemos members to temporarily “join” Colau’s coalition, which has now grown well beyond Catalonia under the name Ganemos. Ultimately, Bescansa predicts, “the local circles will say: ‘Here, yes, there, no; with these people, yes, but with those people, no.’ ”

Beyond the left, many think that the future of the Socialist Party rests in the hands of Podemos. The journalist Emilio Silva speculates that the death knell may soon sound for a party that was founded over a century ago by another Pablo Iglesias. “I can see a scenario unfolding in which Podemos wins the 2016 general elections, but not with an absolute majority, after which the PP and PSOE form a coalition to block Podemos from governing,” he says, adding: “That will be the end of the PSOE.” It would be poetic justice in the eyes of those leftist critics who, ever since Spain’s transition to democracy in the late 1970s, have watched the party abandon its Marxist and working-class origins and move steadily to the right.

The main headquarters of Podemos today is in an office building at the gateway to the Gran Vía, Madrid’s equivalent of Times Square. The entrance to the building looks rather chic, but once you make your way to the party’s seventh-floor office, you can’t help but notice the missing wall panels, discount furniture and naked wiring. Empty desks and porch chairs are often the only items in a room. (“We’ve only been here for about a month,” a member of the Podemos media team says.) From there, it’s approximately a thirty-minute walk to the other Podemos headquarters, in Lavapiés, one of Madrid’s most ethnically diverse neighborhoods. Ninety

feet up the street from Teatro del Barrio, the office is housed in a small storefront with one of those typical graffiti-covered metal gates. When you lift the gate, you see Podemos pictures, announcements and decals plastered across the windows. Inside, there's a cozy storage and meeting space that archives a year's worth of documents, banners and memories.

Today, Podemos is caught between two rival aspirations: on the one hand, to stay true to the egalitarian principles from which it arose; on the other, to win elections, which means making its message appeal to all Spaniards— young and old, progressive and conservative. After revealing how the party came to have an office at a fashionable address overlooking the Gran Vía, the media-team member quickly adds: "We're looking for another, larger space to combine both offices." One might hope that with this future consolidation, Podemos leaves neither a view of Lavapiés nor the Gran Vía behind.

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## Nigeria: 2015 general elections and the working masses

### Boko Haram and the war in the north-east

 Aj. Dagga Tolar and Kola Ibrahim, DSM (CWI in Nigeria) 17 January 2014

 Elections have become a periodic ritual, mandated and made compulsory by law, at least to keep the pretence of the so called civil rule in motion. In 2015, there is a sharper division among the ruling elites who, despite current economic and social hardships, are turning to the poor working peoples for votes. Indeed, the 2015 general elections are taking place against the background of the past 16 years of civil rule which has meant nothing but worsening living conditions for the working masses.

The question therefore arises: Will any of the different sections of the ruling elites that triumph at the poll offer anything characteristically different from the norm these past 16 years? Is there any possibility of breaking with the neo-liberal capitalist and anti-poor policies of deregulation and privatization? The answer is No. The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the major bourgeois opposition, the All Progressives Congress (APC), are both locked in the same mode as they are hell bent on the same ruinous direction that left the ruling elites and their cronies awash with fabulous wealth and luxury while the teeming population are grounded in excruciating poverty.

With all of the primaries in the major political parties concluded and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) out with the list of candidates for the 2015 general election, all seems set for a civil war among the various sections of the ruling elites for the spoils of office. This is one roforofo fight that will leave the working masses worse off, no matter where the pendulum swings.

The various internal struggles within the two main political parties during the primaries, wherein huge monetary resources were deployed by various aspirants to woo party members, shows that the elections are already monetised. While President Jonathan only needed to gather party members in Abuja, under 'right' monetary atmosphere, to endorse him; various aspirants at state and legislative levels, had to battle, money for money, to secure the 'fortune' tickets to contest for political offices. In the APC, the headline of one of the major national dailies, the Punch, titled Dollar Reign at APC Convention, captures the level of monetization of the party primary, as all the contenders, including supporters of the so-called 'incorruptible' Muhammadu Buhari, struggled to outspend each other in the mad rush for the party ticket. At state and legislative primaries, similar scenarios played out as party bigwigs turned the primaries into a merchant business.

The fact is that there is no fundamental difference between the opposition APC and PDP, the ruling party. This is why it is very easy for PDP aspirants who lost out in the primaries to pick up the APC tickets a few days - in some cases a few hours - after decamping to the APC. Besides, many power wielders of APC like Rotimi Amaechi, Rabiun Kwankwanso, Bukola Saraki, Atiku Abubakar, etc., are former power-wielders in the PDP, who

helped that party to rule with impunity in the not too distant past. Moreover, the social and economic policies of APC are the same as those of PDP, and do not pose any singular threat to capitalism and the capitalist class as a whole. The popular support for the emergence of Buhari as APC presidential candidate, rather than reflecting any radical situation, reflects the confusion in mass consciousness as result of the absence of a credible mass working class political alternative and the sterile nature of the APC's 'change' mantra.

Flowing from the above, it can be safely concluded that, in the absence of a mass working class political platform to represent the independent programmes of the working and oppressed people, the election, ab initio, has been rigged against the working people. More than this, the election will not engender any serious shift in state policy that will unleash the enormous resources of the country for the development of people and the society. It is also important to note that the consciousness of the masses to the emergence of either of the two sides of the ruling class may not be the same. In fact, the view of many working class and youth elements towards this election will be divergent, on the basis of general confusion occasioned particularly by absence of any working class political alternative that can show the way out of the mounting social and economic problems. This is the reason we, as socialists, with benefits of foresight, need to look at the character that the election can assume and what can unfold afterwards.

We also must not fail to pose the question of what will be the fortunes of each of these parties in the coming election. Will the PDP hold of power at the centre in the past 16years be brought to an end? What is the nature and character of Buhari's support base? Is the mood for change strong enough to engender an electoral mass movement that will oust the PDP government at the centre? Is Buhari capable of turning the apple cart and secure victory for the APC, given the general historical antecedence of the incumbency factor that has remained a dominant feature of elections in Nigeria?

#### **The scoresheet of civil rule under the PDP**

President Jonathan's/PDP's six-year rule, if anything, has not drastically departed from the previous 8 years rule under Obasanjo (1999-2007) and Yar'adua (2007-2009). An additional four years for Jonathan and the PDP will therefore not engender any fundamental change whatsoever that could result into radical improvement in the welfare or living conditions of the working masses. The working and poor people, on the contrary, should prepare for further attacks as it has always been the case after every election.

With the crash in oil prices to a figure much below \$60 a barrel, from a peak price of \$115 in mid-2014, and against the projected \$65 per barrel benchmark for the 2015 budget, the economic future of Nigeria can only be bleaker. This can only mean a tremendous shortfall in income, which has seen government already announced some austerity measures, and the devaluation of the country's currency. Already, various governments, both at the federal and state levels, are owing workers salary arrears, which is an indication of worsening situations for the working masses, their dependents and allies. Already, according to Punch newspaper, there is on-going thinking about retrenchment by policy makers in both the public and private sectors. It will not be surprising that state governments, including opposition-controlled states, will be the first to fire the first salvo of retrenchment, giving that most of them are unviable economically without robust federal allocation.

The economy remains largely oil dependent with over 95% of foreign exchange earnings and 70% of government earning coming from crude oil export. This will definitely have its toll on the working masses. The government is not shying away from this, it is only being currently held back by the elections. With the drastic depletion of the Excess Crude Account from a figure of \$22 billion dollars to the current figure of \$4 billion, and the Foreign Reserve, from \$62 billion to the current \$28 billion, the strategists of the ruling class are themselves at their wits' end on how to save the economy from total collapse. Poverty is put officially at 70% of the population leaving on less than \$1.25 a day, and unemployment at an underestimation of 28%.

It is imperative to point out that just 8 months ago, the government went to the roof tops with a screaming claim that Nigeria was now the biggest economy in Africa despite growing poverty level. This bogey has now been completely exposed. While we are told that the oil sector now contributes only 13 percent to the now rebased GDP, the reality is that, on the basis of the neo-colonial character of the economy and the rent-seeking nature of the capitalist class, this 13 percent has major impact on the economy. Most capitalist big businesses rely on the patronage and subsidy from the state to make huge profits. On the other hand, the state relies solely on rents and royalty from the oil wealth exploited by multinational corporations, to sustain crude capitalism. To diversify the economy will mean capitalist class across every spectrum will have to forgo immediate wealth accumulation for a medium and long term investment. This is actually what Nigeria's capitalists are not prepared for.

This is clearly demonstrated in the auto industry, where the so-called development of local manufacturing of cars has become a mere bogey, in spite of the enormous subsidies the government is doling out to the sector. The failure to expand and improve the electricity sector, despite its centrality to any major development and diversification of the economy, is another major reflection of the backwardness of the capitalist class. Today, government has committed or guaranteed up to N300 billion - including the latest N213 billion bailout - to the private buyers of the legacy companies of PHCN, even when the companies were sold at rock-bottom prices to these capitalist sharks. The bailouts are not meant to seriously improve generation, transmission or distribution, but to allow the private buyers make adequate profits and pay outstanding debts and interests to banks. This January will mark the third time electricity tariff will be hiked in the interests of private buyers, even when actual supply to the consumers is dwindling.

In the oil sector, despite promises by government officials since 2012, there has not been any improvement in the country's oil refining capacity. Aside from the private sector running away from any long term investment that will tie their capital down, and prevent them from making quick money from the state; the state oil company, NNPC, has been run aground such to such an extent that it cannot even refine up to 25 percent of its installed capacity. Yet, it was in the same NNPC that \$20 billion was reported to have been missing by former governor of the CBN, Sanusi Lamido. In the cement industry, despite the fact that Nigeria now has self-sufficiency in cement production, this has not brought down the price to an affordable level that will allow working people to own houses. This is in spite of huge government dole out, including virtual creation of monopoly for few local producers. The so-called price slash by major cement producer, Dangote, from N1, 500 to N1, 000 has more to do with stiff competition aimed at protecting the company's investment, than attempt to make lives bearable for the people. It is therefore not surprising that the prices were quickly and unceremoniously hiked again by the company, citing higher foreign exchange rate, according to newspaper reports.

The 2015 budget proposes to spend 21% of the total budget amounting to N943 billion to service Nigeria's debt. With external debt currently put at \$9.5 billion, the government is out to enhance its ability to obtain more loans by sufficiently demonstrating its commitment to servicing the debt, and then use this as a credential to access more loans. We must not soon forget that Obasanjo and the same Okonjo Iweala struck a so-called debt cancellation bogey by fretting out \$12.4 billion to the Paris club and IMF in 2005, to ostensibly buy out \$18 billion and bring an end to burden of servicing debts to free funds for other vital needs. Just as we in the DSM stated during the debt-cancellation bogey, that the debt cancellation, aside meaning looting of public resources to satisfy the interests of global financial sharks, the action will actually not take Nigeria away from debt. Now, less than ten years, the country is back in a debt trap, with governments owing \$9.5 billion foreign debt and over \$47.6 billion local debt, totalling \$57.15 billion. Nothing exemplifies the failure of government more than the fact that major increase in these debts happened at a period the country was earning so much from crude oil export. Now, the country is fully back to the era of committing public resources that should be used for public need to servicing debts that have contributed little or nothing to the improvement of people's living

conditions and infrastructure development.

The huge oil wealth during the boom, aside not translating to industrialization and diversification of the economy, has also left social services in terrible state. The six-month strike of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) for improved funding of education that ended in December 2013 clearly underscored the horrible state of public education. Now the promised N200 billion intervention yearly intervention fund may be scuttled with the current belt-tightening measures of the capitalist government. Across campuses, fees are being hiked with authorities premising this on underfunding. The health sector is in disarray. Aside the horrible conditions of hospitals and their underfunding, the incessant strikes by health workers, seeking one improvement or the other, has shown the Jonathan government is simply a prodigal government. Many public roads, including the major ones like Lokoja-Abuja road, Lagos-Ibadan road, Apapa-Oshodi expressway, etc. are still in terrible conditions, despite billions of naira being committed to rehabilitate them.

While the working people are attacked from all fronts, the ruling elites, through direct and indirect means, have looted the wealth of the country, including gifting out trillions of naira to big businesses and politicians, for which the Jonathan government will be recorded in history as a government which took corruption to a new height. Under the government, monumental corruption became the norm in the government, with no single high-profile corruption case prosecution carried through to a logical conclusion. The government and in fact, the president, has no qualms associating openly with and granting a state pardon to corrupt persons like Alameiseigha. Various ministers indicted of corruption were either left untouched or given soft landing. Existing cases of corruption, including that of Muhammed Abacha, the son of late former dictator, Sanni Abacha, were tactically settled out of court. This is not unexpected as the government is founded and funded by corrupt individuals. This is coupled with the fact that the Jonathan government, having lost mass support within a very short time (since 2012), has to rely on the most rotten section of the ruling class.

Flowing from above, the working and oppressed people cannot hope to get anything better in another four year rule of Jonathan/PDP. In fact, left to majority of working and oppressed people, Jonathan/PDP government should not last one day more.

#### **Boko Haram and the war in the north-east**

Is it a possibility that the insurgency of the Boko Haram can have any direct implication on the general elections? With territories taken over and flags hoisted on them, will elections hold in these conquered territories? Not with 1.6 million already displaced from their homes in the North East, and some 600, 000 camped outside of their homes. It is clear that this lot may most likely not be able to vote their preference in the elections.

The massive death tolls of over 10,340 within a year period from Nov 2013 to Nov. 2014, a figure nearly equally the 10,733 for the same period in Iraq, only further demonstrate how immense the insurgency is. By the February 14 Presidential election, it will be over 300 days that over 276 girls have been kidnapped from Chibok, not counting the additional ones that have since been kidnapped, without the government having any clue on the whereabouts or demonstrating any serious effort at rescuing them. This in itself is enough to vote Jonathan and the PDP out of power.

That Jonathan has proved incapable of taking on the Boko Haram insurgency, if anything it has sought to negotiate with them and has been rebuffed as demonstrated by the failed peace deal in October 2014. In fact, as the German state radio recently commented, Goodluck Jonathan is apparently unmoved by the most gruesome attacks and in their aftermath is quite happy to have his picture taken at birthday parties or wedding celebrations.

The military effort has not been any better off. The Nigerian military is completely ill-equipped to take on Boko Haram, and the reaction of the rank and file of the military has been to challenge and voice their disapproval of the orders of the Generals and Army Commandants to virtually go and commit suicide given their poor weaponry. For stating this

fact the Generals have chosen to make a scape-goat of the rank and file and junior officers, by accusing them of mutiny and subjecting them to court martial. So far 70 soldiers have been sentenced to death by firing squad and 203 have been dismissed from the military.

The Nigeria working masses must come to the full defense of these soldiers and demand their sentence be quashed and those dismissed restored to their posts without loss of pay! These soldiers cannot be expected to provide the tools with which to perform their duties, this explains why DSM and members of the SPN always call for the right to a trade union for both the rank and file soldiers and the police so that they can ventilate their views by demanding improved working conditions and the right to go on strike

Rather than call the military Generals to order, the Jonathan regime has turned a blind eye to their excessive actions and alleged corrupt practices, which will only further demoralize the rank and file soldiers and whittle down their enthusiasm to fight the Boko Haram insurgents. The question of the budgeted funds for the defence ministry these past 16 years and what it has been expended also points to how deep the Generals and the Jonathan regime are enmeshed in corruption.

But we must make the point that the fight to end the Boko Haram insurgency is not simply military, although the need for the organization of democratically run defence of communities from attack is vital. A purely military approach is incapable of addressing all of the economic issues of deprivation, poverty, corruption and oppression that over the years have provided fertile ground for recruitment into religious extremism in all facets. Only under a government committed to building schools, providing publicly funded and free education for all, provide jobs, and ensure a living wage, and all of the necessary health facilities, housing, roads etc. can religious fundamentalism be checked.

Who will therefore likely benefit from attacks by Boko Haram as we approach the elections? It is definitely not the working masses, whose blood will be shed and displaced from their homes. If, for instance, there are major attacks, bombings, on the eve or during the election itself this will instil fear in the North and discourage people from coming out to vote their choice

Both Jonathan and Buhari will try as much as possible to play on the political advantage that the Boko Haram activities offer to their ambition. It means that only the united effort and struggle of the working masses can we ever hope to end the menace of the Boko Haram and the scourge they constitute against the working masses.

#### **Can Buhari and the APC be trusted?**

This will be the fourth time that Buhari (a former Head of State from Dec. 31 1983-Aug. 17, 1985) is contesting the presidential elections since the return to civil rule. In the elections in 2011 he mustered over 12 million votes.

It is clear that unlike the previous three general elections that Buhari has contested against the PDP and lost, that this time around he will not be walked over and the election will not be a push over considering the growing support from sections of the ruling elite and growing illusion of a section of the masses. The possibility of violent protests breaking out in the North if the result is otherwise for Buhari, as was the case in 2011 when the PDP and Jonathan were declared winner, cannot be entirely ruled out, even on a bigger scale and possibly growing beyond the North. While acknowledging the right to protest against an illegitimate government, we in the DSM condemn violence and killing in the name of protest.

Buhari has cut for himself a figure of a no-nonsense individual who in spite of being a former Head of State maintains a frugal existence with no known outlandish properties to his name, outside of his residence in Daura, Katsina State and another one in Kaduna. The arrest, trial and sentencing of politicians of the Second Republic to prison for corruption has earned him, from liberal apologists and some sections of radical elements, the status of one who can take on the monster of corruption in

the country. He wears the moral toga of possessing the credibility to fight corruption and this has endeared him to the masses mostly in the North, and a significant layer of the vanishing middle class layers whose living conditions is not any different from the working masses and large layers of change seekers, both in the north and south. It cannot be ruled out that given a free and fair election, Buhari may win the election. However, the claim by Buhari that he was able to get a loan of N27.5 million from bank in a jiffy to pay for the APC nomination form has cast a dent on his anti-corruption image.

But then, elections in Nigeria, if anything, are far from free and fair. Already at the primaries both in the APC and PDP, the ticket was won by the highest bidder. Delegates returned home with as much as 5,000 dollars and above in their kitty. The elections will therefore be greatly influenced by monetary inducement. Much before now, the poorest of the poor have in the past drawn the conclusion that if they do not take whatever is on offer by the politicians, they could as well kiss them goodbye until the next election. This reality is underscored by the growing popularity of 'Stomach Infrastructure' (a term used to describe ridiculous bribing of people with food items and money for political patronage).

While Jonathan has raised N21 billion from his looting partners, Buhari has reportedly raised N118 million from ranks of his supporters. However, this is just a side of the story. Buhari's supporters are big time contractors, corrupt politicians and business men and women; many of whom are former members and funders of the PDP.

While Buhari may cut the image of an anti-corruption fighter, his candidature is nothing short of contradiction. His image as a clean candidate is being undermined by the structure and people behind him, the likes of Tinubu, Amaechi, Saraki, etc. On the other hand, Buhari, despite garnering up to 12 million votes in 2011 elections without the support of these individuals, believe he cannot win the presidential election without the support of the corrupt bigwigs around him. This clearly shows the limitation of Buhari.

The APC is a machinery completely controlled by Tinubu, whose rule of 16 years in Lagos (under various names - AD, AC, ACN and now APC) is also so very much loathed that given a genuine working class or even reformist mass popular party it could also be defeated. The party was defeated in the governorship elections in Ondo, while incumbent APC governor in Ekiti State, Kayode Fayemi, was rounded defeated by a similarly rotten PDP under Fayose. In Osun State, in spite of the much hatred the PDP and its candidate, Iyiola Omisore has courted from the masses, the APC candidate Rauf Aregbesola could only win with 55 percent of the votes.

All this is because of the anti-poor policies of the APC governments at state levels. Across the APC-controlled states, fees in tertiary institutions have been hiked astronomically, while public education is in messy state. In Lagos State for instance, it took a mass struggle and the fear of the possible backlash in the coming election to force it to revert an atrocious fees increase at the Lagos State University (LASU). Everywhere they are in power, APC has not proved anyway different from the PDP. Most of the policies of the APC governors are elitist and pro-rich - contractors, financial sharks, etc. Many of these states have incurred huge debts that have little impact on the people. Osun State has not paid workers' salaries for three months now, while Fashola's Lagos has refused to implement the Teachers' Salary Scale. The only difference being that it has not had access to larger pool of fund available in the centre.

Therefore, the good intention of Buhari - if there is any - will not be enough to change the reality on ground. For instance, how will Buhari, a known advocate of austerity, address the dwindling revenue of the country? Where will the money come from, if not from serious taxation of the people and massive borrowing, that will only enrich contractors and big businesses but economically disenfranchise working and poor people? How will Nigeria, which economy is backward, be able to decouple from dollar?

#### **Is Buhari's Candidature a Mass Electoral Movement?**

There has been attempt to present Buhari's candidature as a form of mass

revolt against PDP. This is given: (1). The utter failure and cluelessness of the Jonathan/PDP government to resolve or address basic issues facing the country, and the continued worsening of living conditions of the people; (2). The anti-corruption image of Buhari; (3). The implosion of the PDP and the ability of the various strands of politicians to form APC and (4). The failure of the labour movement leadership to build a formidable mass working peoples' political party.

However, this is just one side of the story. There are no programmatic slogans rooted in welfare of people e.g. job creation, free education, etc., that can incite mass support. In the second republic, Awolowo's Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) popularized the idea of free education at all levels as a campaign slogan. Today, the dominant slogan is the mantra of 'change', which itself doesn't say much and is dangerous for APC at state level. The APC has been therefore playing up the anti-corruption image of Buhari to mobilize and attract support.

This is why Buhari's main support has revolved around middle class, educated youth and a growing number of working class people, grossly disgusted with the Jonathan government. Aside this layer is the sizeable population of the North, especially the core north, who are supporting the Buhari.

However the election, aside mobilization for campaigns by both parties, has not witnessed any conscious mass movement of the working masses. Besides, there is still a significant layer of working people and youths, earnestly searching for a genuine alternative to the main pro-establishment parties. While, because of the generalized hatred for the Jonathan government, Buhari/APC may gain huge votes that may make it closer to winning the election, but, because the opposition politics has not incited needed mass movement, even close to that which installed Macky Sall in Senegal against Abdoulaye Wade in 2012, it may not overcome incumbency power. However, politics is a life issue. Between now and the election, new developments can reinforce or modify this prognosis. Certainly in the less likely event of Buhari defeating Jonathan, either through a truly mass mobilisation or a significant split in the ruling elite, the consequences could be enormous, both in terms of the immediate post-election situation and in sections of the masses feeling that the time is right to press forward their own demands.

#### **What stage are we passing through in mass consciousness?**

Behind the general confused mood in this election is the issue of the dampened mood of the mass of people. Clearly, the capitalist crises has aggravated to the extent that the seed of revolution is not only ripe but it is getting rotten. The latest oil revenue crisis only adds fuel to the already raging fire of capitalist degeneration. Moreover, the ruling capitalist class and their big business partners have shown beyond any doubt that they cannot move the society forward. Internationally too, capitalism is facing its worst crisis in decades, with Europe and elsewhere in seeming permanent economic recession.

Expectedly, there has been rise in mass anger against the expected attacks on the living conditions of the working and poor people as the economy get worse. However, despite the huge anger, the labour leadership, since 2012 has tried to roll back the wheel of progress. Aside stabbing the 2012 general strike and mass revolt in the back, the labour leadership has played the role of prison warder for capitalism, helping to hold working people at bay, both on the industrial and political fronts. The deliberate destruction of Labour Party by labour leaders and failure to build a new working class political alternative has created a confused political consciousness among the generality of the working people. More than this, the labour leadership has almost deleted mass struggle from its lexicon. All this, in addition to the belief that the labour movement cannot lead, but only betray mass resistance and struggle against attacks by the ruling class, has generated political confusion that has partly made working people to queue behind different sections of the capitalist political class. While conditions for revolution are very present, coupled with the latent anger against the system, the treacherous role of the labour leadership has disoriented vast layer of the working class people, and has thrown back what could have been a generally radicalized mood suitable for mass mobilization for genuine change. It is therefore no accident that religion,

ethnicity, parochialism and seeming individualism (as shown in the 'stomach infrastructure' mantra) have become visible factors in the current political scene.

Therefore, as against attempt to portray the support Buhari has gained, as a form of revolutionary mood, as being advocated by some lefts, the current mood is that of political confusion caused by the lack of a formidable working people political alternative. It is the task of socialists and working class activists to mobilize the most advanced among the disillusioned layer in this period through patient explanation of the bankruptcy of the two bourgeois parties, and by participating in various pockets of struggles breaking out.

### **Beyond 2015 elections**

As said earlier, neither of the two main political parties or contestants stands for any policy that can lift the masses out of poverty and want. Inescapably, any of the two parties that emerge victorious will be forced, on the basis of objective reality, to force down the throat of the masses, anti-poor, neo-liberal policies, while safeguarding the interests of big business. However, some more specific prognoses need to be drawn out.

The victory of Jonathan/PDP will mean a mandate to continue and consolidate the anti-poor policies and orientation of the government. As said earlier, austerity policies are being planned. Electricity tariff has been hiked, and will be fully implemented in July; retrenchment is in the offing while fuel price hike/full deregulation is on the agenda, even when falling price of crude oil necessitates reduction of fuel prices. Surely, these attacks will meet mass resistance, as the labour leadership may be compelled to lead mass struggle. The masses, having exhausted all 'peaceful' means may move to the arena of struggle. Of course, it is possible that a PDP electoral victory may first engender some dampened mood, but the shock and awe will be replaced sooner than later, by mass radicalization. A similar situation played out in 2011, where Jonathan triumphalism was met, some eight months later, by mass resistance to fuel price hike.

If, on the other hand, the opposition wins, there may be a period of honeymoon with mass of working people giving the new government chance to express itself. Socialists would demand that the government implements its promises and call upon the working masses to independently mobilise to struggle for their demands. On the other side, the Buhari/APC will use the excuse of high level of rot in the system, to demand sacrifice and belt-tightening, although this could be combined with some anti-corruption actions. This sooner than later will cast away the illusion as people, impatient for the grandstanding of the opposition, will demand result for their support. This is coming on the heel of worsening of economic indices of the country.

But, aside these two prognoses, is also the possibility of rise in violence, as various forces wanting the Jonathan/PDP government out, and seeing no solution in the electoral front, may take to violent means. Even, some leading figures of the opposition, such as Rotimi Amaechi, are already talking tough, including raising the prospect of a parallel government. Besides, the question of post-election violence, whether it is in individual states or more widespread, particularly if there is a popular feeling that the results have been rigged, cannot be ruled out.

The defeat of Jonathan may lead to rise in militancy in the Niger Delta, as both parties are already playing the politics of regionalism and sectarianism. Just recently, Jonathan's government awarded the contract for procurement of warships to a former militant, Tompolo in addition to juicy contracts for securing oil pipelines to the Niger Delta militants. Also, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) has openly endorsed the APC. All this portends serious danger to Nigeria's existence, as politicians on both sides are becoming so desperate, and fearful of defeat. This is because the national cake is getting smaller, and the question of who controls it is becoming a life-and-death struggle.

This also raises the question of a military intervention in politics if things should degenerate out of control. This is a real possibility as Nigerian politicians are very narrow-minded in defence of their interests. Indeed, if

things degenerate, a section of the capitalist political class, in conjunction with imperialism, may canvass military intervention. Moreover, the military high command is very unpopular, not only among the general populace, but even among rank-and-file soldiers who have become resistant in recent time. The military hierarchy is seen to be corrupt and ineffective, especially in the face of inability to contain the Boko Haram insurgency. A military intervention against a background of charged ethnic and religious division will most likely worsen the situation with catastrophic implication for the working and poor masses. Nevertheless, a military coup or a form of Interim Government is a possibility.

Whichever direction the pendulum swing, one thing is very clear. Unless a working class platform emerges to mobilize mass of workers, youth and the oppressed against the system, Nigeria capitalist class can only lead the country to the blind alley of barbarism.

Besides, whatever happens or whoever wins, Jonathan or Buhari, the working masses cannot escape the lash of the whip of capitalist attacks. Therefore there is the need to prepare ahead for the struggle to resist the deepening of the austerity measures. It also means that ultimately the working class people have to rely on their strength and organization to struggle and provide the necessary leadership for the poor to commence mass struggle for the complete overthrow of ruling elites and capitalism.

### **Labour leaders and the Labour Party**

The working masses can in no way be deceived by the recent attempt by the labour leadership to purportedly reclaim the Labour Party by setting up a caretaker committee with elements who do not have any authority and position within the party. From all indications it is extremely unlikely that this party will be reclaimed from the anti-poor elements and electoral merchants to whom the labour leadership surrendered the leadership of the Labour Party.

When some of the elements on the NLC sponsored caretaker committee held positions in the immediate past leadership of the Labour Party which could have been used to initiate internal struggle to reclaim the party they were, in practice, complicit in the atrocities of the Dan Nwanyawu led executive. This included turning the party tickets into cash and carry commodities for anti-poor, moneybag politicians who lost out in any of the major bourgeois parties, in most cases the PDP, and open endorsement of President Jonathan and his anti-poor neo-liberal policies both in 2011 and now. All this explains why the Labour Party was not attractive to working people and youths apart from the fact that the party leadership did not make any effort or showed interest to orientate the party towards the working class people. Even when members of the DSM together with some socialists and trade unionists launched the Campaign for a Mass Based Labour Party (CMBLP) to agitate for repositioning of the party and opening of the party for workers and youths in order to build it as a genuine mass working people party, we were witch-hunted out of the party

We must recall that left to their antics that the Labour leaders would never have registered the Labour Party as it took the struggle of Gani Fawehinmi and supporters around him, which included the members of the DSM, to legally and politically challenge and defeat the military imposition of only 3 parties after the 1999 general elections. Even after this, it was the pressure of the working masses following a series of general strikes from 2000-2003 that left the Labour leaders with no choice than to be seen to have taken the step so as to prevent others from seizing the initiative.

So this latest effort amount to nothing. If anything it is to pretend that it is doing something and working at reorganizing the LP, when in actual fact this translate to mean that the working masses will not have a formidable platform ahead and beyond the 2015 general elections to ventilate their anger and challenge the ruling elite for power.

As made quite clear by the leadership of LP, the NLC and TUC trade union centres' leaderships, in spite of being the founders of the party, have no such powers and having even failed to take up their 3 seats in the NEC of the LP. There will be no stopping the INEC backed LP leadership from retaining the party as a trash can of anti-poor politicians as it has

happened already in the states across the country, as well as endorsing and mobilizing support for Jonathan like it did in the 2011 general elections, something the labour leaders may not have a problem with.

Like Trotsky pointed out, the crisis plaguing the working masses can be reduced to the absence of revolutionary working class leadership, with the added challenge in Nigeria of organising the broad masses. But limited organisation did not limit support for the January 2012 general strike, which stopped the entire country. But in spite of the overwhelming mood in the January 2012 mass protest against Jonathan that even went as far as demanding an end to the regime. The labour leaders have taken no practical step till date. Indeed they have not even consistently struggled to win the full implementation of the N18,000 minimum wage which was passed into law almost four years ago!

This explains why the DSM and its supporters combined the campaign for the formation of a mass working people party with the initiative to register the Socialist Party of Nigeria (SPN) to provide a platform with which to begin to organize the working masses to challenge the ruling elites and their rabid anti-poor capitalist policies. The party will be used to intervene in the daily struggles of the working people and youths for improvement and against anti-poor policies, as well as to contest elections where possible in order to reach out to the working people and youths with socialist program. If members of the party are elected, they will be representatives of the interests of the working people and youths and receive the average salaries of skilled workers together with incidental expenses while the rest is donated to the party and labour movement to promote the struggle for a mass working class political alternative.

However the INEC has refused to register SPN despite it fulfilling all the legal requirements for registration. This is apparently not unconnected to the conscious attempt by the ruling elite to deny the working masses the opportunity for an alternative choice to the thieving ruling class parties. We have already challenged the undemocratic decision of the INEC in the court. The matter is coming for hearing at the Federal High Court Abuja on January 28. It is clear that if we get favourable judgment it is already impossible to participate in 2015 elections. But the party will intervene in the turbulent period that will most likely follow the general elections irrespective of the party that wins given the deepening economic and social crisis.

What is certain is that we in the DSM and SPN shall continue to struggle along the working class people and youths against all capitalist attacks and organize to put forward a working class alternative. We will continue the struggle for the overthrow of capitalism and revolutionary transformation of Nigeria along a democratic socialist direction that will make possible the nationalization of the commanding sectors of the economy under a workers and poor farmers' peoples' government, democratically managed by the working people to free up the resources that will bring about the necessary infrastructural development of society and meet the needs of the working people.

[www.socialistworld.net](http://www.socialistworld.net)



**Nii Akuetteh, analyst of African and international affairs, says it is difficult to decipher what Boko Haram is expecting to achieve by mass killing of civilians (Part 1)**

Nii Akuetteh interviewed on the Real News Network 15 January 2014

**SHARMINI PERIES, EXEC. PRODUCER, TRNN:** Welcome to The Real News Network. I'm Sharmini Peries, coming to you from Baltimore.

Nigerians are mourning the death of 150 people who were killed in Baga in a Boko Haram suspected attack.

In another attack last week, in Maiduguri, hospital officials told The New York Times that the suicide bomber was perhaps a ten-year-old little girl. She was screened by a metal detector at the entrance of the market, but the bomb went off before she could be isolated, killing 20 people and wounding many more. Some people at the market speculated that she could have not even know what was strapped to her body.

This incident is a stark reminder of the 200 girls that went missing last April who are yet to be found.

Here to discuss the developments in Nigeria from Washington, D.C., is Nii Akuetteh. Nii is an independent analyst of African and international affairs. He's also the former executive director of Africa Action and a adjunct professor of African studies at Georgetown University.

Thank you so much for joining us, Nii.

**NII AKUETTEH, FMR. DIRECTOR AT AFRICA ACTION:** It's a pleasure to be back.

**PERIES:** Nii, could you explain these most recent attacks on Nigerian civilians? Why is Boko Haram targeting civilians?

**AKUETTEH:** I think you said more recent, and that is true, but Boko Haram has been around for about five years, and their modus operandum has not actually changed. They kill a lot more civilians than soldiers, and basically, as far as I'm concerned, they are not giving irrational convincing reason for doing what they are doing, except that they want to make Nigeria ungovernable, because they don't like the current government and they are trying to wreck the government through violent means. Beyond that, it's hard to say what they are really going after.

**PERIES:** So this is not religious faction, this is the context, or some background to this attack would be really helpful for ordinary people, Nii.

**AKUETTEH:** Yes. You know, the question of religion is always--in these instances is a little complex and interesting. Even there's been other terrorist attacks elsewhere, and one of the things is that we think there should be a focus on Nigeria. So I don't want to turn the spotlight on the other incidents. But they have this in common. There is the debate as to whether these very violent extremists are really moved by religious beliefs, and whether those are mainstream religious beliefs or are they just violent thoughts that brought themselves up in a particular religion.

So, on the surface of it, of course Boko Haram says that they are Muslims and they are doing this and they want to set up a caliphate and rule it according to sharia, the holy law in the Quran. On the other hand, they killed so many innocent people that respect their--religious leaders say that these people, at best, they are just using words. They are paying lip service because their behavior is very far from people who are really living by the rules of Islam. So that always raises the question, are they religious or not?

**PERIES:** Now, you said they had been around for five years, so they must have been making some political demands of the current government, or at least trying to curry favor with the civilians. What is the real agenda here?

**AKUETTEH:** That is a wonderful question, because from my point of view they haven't paid attention to them for all this time. They are all over the map. They change their demands.

The one constant is that they come out and violently kill Nigerians, and, especially given we're talking about whether or not they are real Muslims, the majority of their victims have been Muslim-Nigerian. So, on the one hand, they can claim that they are agreed, because Muslim-Nigerians are not being treated well. But they themselves kill more Muslims. So that's number one. Number two, there are times when they say they want to bring sharia to Nigeria.

But if you want to change the government--and Nigeria has been a democracy for a while now. And for me one of the interesting things is that Boko Haram did not arise when--for the better part of Nigeria's independence since 1960 they have been ruled by military dictators, usually of northern Muslim origin, and Boko Haram did not arise. They arose when Nigeria turned to democracy.

Now, in a democracy, if you want to change the government, that's fine. Persuade the people. You don't kill them. So I'm saying their claim that they are [different in (?)] the interests of Muslims doesn't convince me; their claim that they want to change the country's system to sharia law doesn't convince me. The only constant is their violent attacks.

There was a point when the government even said, okay, we are willing to talk, because there was a lot of international pressure. And I hope that we will get to the point of the international community in general and the United States in particular. Their attitude and policy towards Nigeria vis-à-vis Boko Haram. I am quite unhappy with that.

But the point is: pressure was put on the Nigerian government to say you cannot solve this issue by military approach, so you need to talk to them. Well, the Nigerian government tried to talk to them. Boko Haram showed no interest in talking. So whether it is talking, whether it is using the political process to change it, whether it is [different in (?)] Muslims, for me, all those are false claims.

**PERIES:** Right. Nii, let's take up the question of the international community and U.S. foreign policy towards the region, and the Boko Haram in particular, in the next segment. And I hope you can join us.

**AKUETTEH:** Sure.

**PERIES:** And thank you for joining us on The Real News Network.

[therealnews.com](http://therealnews.com)

**The Nigerian government's requests for assistance in fighting Boko Haram is ignored by the international community, says Nii Akuetteh (Part 2)**



[therealnews.com/t2/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=31&Itemid=74&jumival=12992](http://therealnews.com/t2/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=31&Itemid=74&jumival=12992)

*Nii Akuetteh is an independent analyst of African & international affairs, seen regularly on Al Jazeera and many other global TV outlets and published frequently, especially by Pambazuka News. He is the former Executive Director of Africa Action, and he was a professor of African Studies at Georgetown University.*

Luis Britto Garcia (aporrea.org) 12 January 2015



In previous articles I observed how recent radical changes had occurred in the economic structure which in turn affected political and cultural spheres in the world. I pointed to the Popular Republic of China, who became the primary economy on the globe in October of 2014 with a GDP of 17.6 billion dollars, exceeding the 17.4 billion of the United States. I added that it had been predicted this would happen by the year of 2020, but the powerful socialist economy got six years ahead, causing the IMF to calculate that by 2019, the Chinese GDP will be USD\$26.9 billion while that of the US will be \$22.1 billion. Keeping in mind that for Anglo Saxons [and most anglophones], a billion is one thousand millions. Additionally, China systematically buys gold, in a possible attempt to free itself from the hegemonic dollar which has no other backing other than its value printed in green ink.

It is not only China that advances towards the lead role in the global economy. I also indicated that between September 8th and 10th of 2014 the 21 countries of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation laid out the Zone of Free Asian-Pacific Trade, whose economies represent over half of world trade. Those countries constitute the Asian Bank for Investment and Infrastructure, a possible counterweight to the International Monetary Fund, while China invested 40 billion dollars in the 'Silk Route-' a network of ports, trains, energy ducts and fiber-optic conductors that connect Russia, Iran, Turkey, the Indian Ocean, and cities such as Berlin, Rotterdam and Venice.

This combination of phenomena cannot help but exercise its influence over Latin America; the Eastern limit of the Pacific Ocean will have another independent route toward the Atlantic and the Caribbean with the canal being opened across Nicaragua. Latin America and the Caribbean is the region with the most natural resources in the world in fresh water, biodiversity, hydrocarbons and other elements, with the added agricultural potential capable of feeding the entire planet and, that which distinguishes it from conflicted Africa, a prevailing common culture and path toward integration through organizations such as Mercosur, the ALBA, Unasur, the CELAC, and others. Chinese demand has made it so the impact of the current global economic crisis has not slammed Latin Americans so hard. China is the second commercial partner in the region, with an amount of 260 billion annual dollars [in trade], exceeded only by the United States. Latin America is an enormous market.

Commercial exchange with China has doubled in ten years, and Peking estimates that in the next decade trade will reach 500 billion dollars. The United States project of imposing the FTAA [Free Trade Area of the Americas] ended in resounding failure in 2005. As I write these lines, the same is not coming to pass between China and the ministers of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) who met in Beijing on the 8th and 9th of January. The United States and Canada are on the outside of the colossal alliance of 33 countries who in these moments are defining their commercial relations with the new primary economic potential of the world. China has placed a fund of 35 billion dollars at the disposition of CELAC member countries, whose modalities of investment will be outlined in the forum.

Venezuela, for her part, has gotten since 2008 about US\$50 billion in Chinese credits, which it pays for with 524,000 barrels of hydrocarbons daily, a quantity which will have doubled by next year. Numerous companies and businessmen of the Asian country have met with [president Nicolas] Maduro during his visit to Beijing. The Asian presence is a fact as irreversible for Venezuela and Latin America as it is for the rest of the world.

New investments should not make us confine ourselves to the dependent mono productive exporter model. They should not impose Free Trade Agreements that will prohibit us from defending our ecology or protecting our agriculture and industry. We should not bestow the investors with fiscal nor legal immunity in local courts, nor should we permit free ports

## Silver Lining in Kashmir Elections

Lal Khan 13 January 2015



Some of the most deceitful forms of elections and 'democracy' are to be found these days in countries that are suffering direct or indirect military aggression and occupation by world and regional imperialist powers. The elections and governments in Iraq, Afghanistan and other countries under imperialist occupation are, in the last analysis, a tragic farce. Indian-controlled Kashmir is no different because it is directly under the boot of the imperialist Indian military - an occupation enforced by the so-called 'largest democracy' in the world using one of the largest military deployments on earth and draconian laws like The Prevention of Terrorism Act, 2002 (POTA) to infringe the basic rights of the Kashmiri oppressed masses.

The current sorry state of Kashmiri nationalists and separatists is entirely due to their erroneous policies, strategies, and more importantly reliance on the US imperialism and its concubine the United Nations. These leaders capitulated to capitalism and laid bare the fact that independence for Kashmir on a bourgeois basis is sheer utopia. The ebbing of the Kashmiri Intifada or uprising in the early 90s and the machinations of the Pakistani state ended up pushing the nationalist movement aside. And the onslaught of Islamic fundamentalists further damaged the quest for Kashmir's independence. The right-wing semi-religious tendencies that called for Kashmir to become a part of Pakistan also drove a wedge between those participating in the struggle for national liberation. This proved a very convenient excuse for the Indian state to intensify state terrorism against the Kashmiri freedom fighters using the cover of a 'war against terror'. During this oppressive occupation the notoriously hypocritical and deceptive Indian bourgeoisie has been playing democratic games in connivance with the Kashmiri political elite to perpetuate its despotic rule.

However, with the decline of the nationalist struggle, a new generation of Kashmiri youth on both sides of the Line Of Control are following the path of struggle for their social and economic demands. The Marxist tendency in these movements is working tirelessly to link the struggle for national emancipation with the class struggle, in line with Lenin's classical position on the national question. With other avenues of struggle limited, the masses have tried to express their aspirations through the elections in Kashmir, trying to beat the Indian oppressor-bourgeois at its own game. With the advent of the reactionary Modi regime in Delhi, the Indian elite tried to aggressively force its writ on the people of Kashmir. However, when it came to practice, they had to act with far more caution than these bigots had ever imagined they would be required. The masses in Kashmir rejected Modi's rhetoric of 'development' and there was widespread resistance to his aggressive policies.

Following the pattern of previous rulers, the Modi regime tried to get the Kashmiri elite to go along with its sinister designs. But such was the pressure from below that the wealthy and corrupt political leaders of this part of Kashmir did not dare to openly side with the reactionary BJP. The oppressed masses would consider those who did as traitors. This created polarisation on two levels in Kashmir. One was to split the Kashmiris on the basis of religion more than ever before, and the second was that the resolve of the Kashmiri masses against any subservience to Delhi was sharpened and radicalised. This ploy of 'development' and 'bringing more investment to the state' by the demagogic Hindu right wing failed. The toiling masses in Kashmir saw the development façade for what it really was - the pro-corporate Modi regime threatening to dilute the Land Acquisition Act. The real aim was to expropriate Kashmiri land for corporate vultures and to deprive ordinary Kashmiris of the very rights for which their ancestors had fought the Maharajah in the 1920s.

However, in Jammu Modi exploited the old complaints of 'discrimination' and in this he succeeded. All of the 25 seats the BJP won are in Jammu, where 37 seats were contested. In Kashmir, the BJP lost its deposit in 35 of the 36 seats it contested. The People's Democratic Party (PDP) won 28 seats, of which three came from the Muslim-majority areas of Jammu. The Sangh Parivar has fostered this religious polarisation since 1947. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh demanded a division of the area on religious lines, not realising this would give it only two and a half of Jammu's former six districts. BJP got in all some 3 percent of the Valley's total vote. This is the net result of its efforts to divide the region.

Most people voted for better living conditions and an end to the suffering. While doing so they made no secret of their alienation from New Delhi. Whatever rotten compromise takes place or coalition regime is formed; it is bound to be unstable and in crisis right from the start thanks to the seething resistance it will inspire in the resilient Kashmiri masses. This festering wound on the body politic of the subcontinent cannot heal within the confines of the system. Yet there is a silver lining in the dark clouds that have blanketed Kashmir for three quarters of a century.

Mohammad Yousaf Tarigami, state secretary of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), won the election in Kulgam constituency for the fourth consecutive term. Kulgam is located on the northern foothills of Peer Panchal and has been a strong bastion of the fundamentalist politico-religious organization, Jamaat-e-Islami. Tarigami contested the seat for the first time in 1996 when Kashmir was in the grip of fundamentalism, polarization and religious militancy. He retained the seat in 2002 and 2008, and fought the elections again in 2014 on the ticket of the CPI (M). In Kashmir valley the People's Democratic Party emerged as the largest single party winning 28 seats by rhetorically promising to fight BJP's Hindutva, as well as playing the communal card in the predominantly Muslim area. In Kulgam, it campaigned against the Communist candidate in the name of Islam and its workers tried to present the election as a battle between Islam and Kufr. The big contractors, drug smugglers and Jamaat-e-Islami activists supported the anti-communist candidate in a big way with money and manpower.

The slogan that religion should not be used for achieving political power and exploiting the masses figured prominently in Tarigami's election campaign. The main focus of the CPI (M) campaign in this constituency was on protecting the rights of the working class and all the oppressed, including low-paid employees and temporary workers. Universal health, education, benefits for the old, sick and the destitute, and demands for the peasants were highlighted in the election manifesto. The revolutionary struggle in Kashmir was emphasized as a part of universal fight against the anti-people capitalist system. While campaigning, it was also clarified that the parliamentary path is not the only way to fight and defeat the exploitative system; it is rather only an opportunity to boost the struggle to overthrow imperialism, capitalism and ruthless exploitation.

The revolutionary poems of Faiz and the songs of famous Kashmiri revolutionary poet Abdul Ahad Azad were sung in Tarigami's campaign meetings. The symbol of the party - sickle, hammer and star was distributed to all voters and pasted on walls in every town and village. The communist campaign did not shy away from publicizing the aims and objectives of communist ideology and its revolutionary struggle for the transformation of society. In a telephone message to the Pakistani Marxists, Tarigami said, "It's not just my victory; it's the victory of the revolutionaries of the subcontinent and the whole world".  
[www.marxist.com](http://www.marxist.com)

## Freedom of expression!

**No to racism! no unity behind the Valls-Merkel-Cameron-Sarko, etc...**



Gauche Revolutionnaire (Translation Bing ) 12 January 2015



The attack and the murder of 12 people by heavily armed men in the premises of the newspaper Charlie Hebdo Wednesday 7 January is a dramatic event which we condemn firmly as a cowardly and barbaric

attack.

Our thoughts and our support are of course to the relatives of the victims: Frédéric Boisseau, maintenance officer; Bernard Maris, Economist; Michel Renaud, Elsa Cayat, psychoanalyst; Mustapha Raturaj., correction; Franck Brinsolaro, brigadier; Ahmed Merabet, police; Wolinski, Chakrapani ', Tignous, Cabu, Honoré (designers), the other victims and the wounded.

By attacking Charlie Hebdo and people like Wolinski and Cabu, is not anyone who was targeted. These are, for many, journalists known for their longstanding commitment date. They have, in many ways, fought intolerance, racism, censorship... They die under the balls of madmen racist and intolerant we revolt. In if also taking simple workers, those who have committed this atrocious murder demonstrate that they have nothing to do with the fight against racism, they do not defend the Muslims and don't want especially a tolerant and respectful of each society.

In no case the Muslims in France will feel relieved by this Act, well on the contrary. It is also often them who will pay the consequences in the street, as in whenever a reactionary and blind Act is committed. These terrorists who claim to defend a 'religion' are no better than the reactionaries islamophobes who, suddenly, are rubbing their hands and increasing acts of violence against Muslims. In fact, these two categories walk hand in hand to develop intolerance and obscurantism. This heinous and cowardly act of terrorism reinforces all the reactionary currents that want to divide workers and young people on a religious or community basis.

#### **No obstacle to freedom of expression and the right to caricature!**

Charlie was the product of a long tradition of struggle against censorship, against racism and the extreme right. not so far sparing the left. They used provocation and sarcasm in the extreme as a denunciation of political correctness and the political and media manipulation. It defends Charlie Hebdo because we think that there should not be any obstacles to the freedom of expression. We know that this right is soon attacked by the ruling classes. We had defended the same position for Dini while we disagree with what he said, which can also be considered as of racism in some aspects, including its many anti-Semitic overtones. When Charlie Hebdo published the Muhammad cartoons was first to respond to the death threats against the Danish journalist, to say: Yes it has the right not to believe in God and to criticise religions... The problem it is also provocatively things, and sometimes insulting, in a context of one-upmanship in anti-Muslim racism, especially after September 11, 2001, is not an answer and can even be playing into the hands of racists. And this was the case of the times including during the too long years where Charlie has been led by the opportunistic Philippe Val (which will be from the far left in his youth to advocate now positions close to Sarkozy). While defending the most comprehensive right to freedom of expression, it is on these issues that we largely keep our distance with some words and drawings that could publish Charlie.

Cartoons can still be disturbing, but they kill person contrary to the realities that designers as Cabu or Wolinski denounced in their work as an artist. Could find them a bit 'beasts and villains' times, but they themselves sought to denounce the stupidity and oppression. From their beginning, they clashed with forces which harassed the society: the Church, the army, the supporters of colonialism, the extreme right... What were referred to these terrorists in their cowardice, is not the real Islamophobic extreme rightist, but defenders of freedom of expression and the fight against oppression and totalitarianism. Often, it was not the faith which was prescribed in drawings, but the use which is made for the purposes of power or racism.

#### **No unit with those who feed racism!**

It is still amazing to hear all the politicians that Charlie was criticizing and caricaturait defend today this newspaper. Designers have a good laugh indeed if they were told that the Notre Dame de Paris Cathedral would spell the end in their tribute for 15 minutes... nice feat for federalists anticlericals! This will be their last

But there is what laughing yellow before the hypocrisy of the ruling classes

and their media lackeys boundless, and it should not forget what are the responsibilities of each and other. We stand for uncompromising way freedom of expression, but when we know that the press is 90% in the hands of large capitalist groups which are censored without hesitation often according to the laws of profitability, it is certainly not them that can give us lessons on "freedom of expression".

Sarko, Pen etc. have no place in the tributes!

While a new law "anti terrorist" restricting our freedoms was passed in November, under the pretext of struggle against jihadist networks, pretext always easy for telling people, suddenly politicians are concerned about our freedoms. Two months ago, the police was deployed with violence to keep peaceful actions in memory of Rémi Fraisse, environmentalist murdered by the police. While this Government to attack trade unionists, they have worries of freedom of opinion? While all media looking for the 'clash' and the 'buzz' are open to Zemmour & co and multiply the amalgam and insults against Muslims and immigrants, they are rediscovering themselves defenders of freedom of expression and tolerance?

Even the FN wants to enter this "national unity" and claims to defend a newspaper that fought against his builds of commerce: racism and Islamophobia in particular. No, the FN has no place in tributes to the dead of Charlie Hebdo. As Marine Le Pen took the opportunity to speak to reintroduce the death penalty, something against which all Charlie designers have always been.

As for the right, is no tribute to the dead of Charlie that interests him. Sarkozy speaks of 'war of civilization' as he spoke of the "ruffneck" before. Members of right as Mariani claim freedom of expression advocates while they tried to ban numerous shows and even Rap songs... No unit with these politicians who are trying to use the current emotion to advance their racist ideas.

And certainly not with the heads of Government who have been invited by Valls: Spanish Prime Minister and heir to Franco, Rajoy, the British Prime Minister Cameron that was animated in his youth the youth of the conservative party and their campaign "hang Mandela '...

### **Freedom of expression: a weapon against the ruling classes and the reactionaries.**

Then, we declare, in tribute to the victims, in defense of freedom of expression and opinion, and against the policies of social regression that make the bed of fanatics and reactionary of all edges. We have the largest possible in the days and months ahead to prevent them to rebuild a virginity on the death of these people. It we need unity, but not this façade unit which does not guarantee our freedoms.

The best tribute we can pay to the victims, is to strengthen the fight against racism, ignorance and all policies which aim to divide workers and young people. What is sorely missing for years is to have a political force which clearly defends the victims of capitalist society, that is open to all and all, and given itself the objective unity of workers, young people, the unemployed, pensioners, regardless of origins, cultures... A political force which calls for fighting as much against attacks by the Government and the employers against racism and intolerance. The left betrayed us in many ways in recent years, by agreeing to place its action within the framework of capitalism, by abandoning the anti-racist struggle and by supporting some wars (in the near and Middle East, Mali...). This same Government talks about the 'danger jihadist here, while it supports the Turkey that helps Daesh in Syria, who allied himself with the Qatar or Saudi Arabia which ultra-reactionary plans support them also to terrorist groups...

The current Government, led by the PS, also bears a responsibility in the poisonous atmosphere of recent months. It follows stride the steps of case sensitive social and democratic policies instituted by his predecessor, Sarkozy. Events should not make us forget the statements of Macron, for whom the only objective that must have a young is to become a billionaire, which means get rich on the backs of workers and the majority of the population. They must not make us forget nor the thousands of redundancies, policy ultra liberal wealthy and unemployment, which

affect us all wherever it comes. The mobilization in homage to the dead Charlie should not make us put aside the need for a struggle together against this Government's policy at the service of the rich and the bankers.

**For the unity of workers and the population against racism, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism!**

The world of Thursday 8 January edition headlined 'French 11'... faithful to the sensationalism that now characterizes the media. But the fact that they dare this comparison is fraught with meaning about the atmosphere that you will undergo in the coming weeks. One can expect that a larger space exists for the right and extreme right forces. It is to organize us to on bases of struggle against racism and capitalism to counteract this. One can expect that this attack is used by the ruling classes (not only in France) to impose drastic measures against immigrants (or those that look to be...), activists and we all, on the pretext of national unity and fight against terrorism. The Vigipirate plan has already developed to the maximum level in Île de France, which among other things prohibits large gatherings, and will further strengthen the facies including controls among the population of North African origin.

Maintained climate of Islamophobia is becoming increasingly strong. This leads some Muslims in France to feel strong precisely under attack. We condemn all forms of racism, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, sexism... And we are fighting for a supportive, fraternal, and tolerant world. Nothing comparable with these visionaries who are taken to the vigilante (but fear, it seems, people armed with a simple pencil). Terrorists, in the image of the warlords that violate and pillage of defenceless in Africa and the Middle East, have what to do with the struggle of the peoples of these regions, whether in Palestine, Syria, Iraq, during the revolutions in Tunisia, in Egypt, or mass movements in Burkina, Senegal... no more than those of ordinary people Muslim or not, in France. The 'religion' of these terrorists is a juicy and profitable traffic such as weapons, as trafficking is a business for groups like Boko Haram or Daesh, which also massacred in the first place of the Muslims by the thousands in Nigeria, Cameroon, Iraq or Syria. At the same time, if in Europe, young people radicalize point of losing any human concept and become a terrorist, is not unrelated to the policy of the imperialists who bomb countries for years, and sowed chaos and war for hundreds of millions of people around the world.

But faced with this, is not individual terrorism that will change things, instead, it strengthens the dominant class and imprisons people in fear. And the answer is not self-absorption, confinement in communities, which is certainly wanted as much by the extreme right traditional French by certain religious groups. It is instead a tolerant, combative and democratic mass movement it takes!

**All together, regain the initiative!**

Trade unions, organisations of the labour movement, associations must call to gather and to pay tribute to the victims of Charlie Hebdo on their own bases: for unity of workers, young people and the great majority of the population regardless of its origin or beliefs, for freedom of expression against all reactionary and fundamentalist terrorists against policies racist and imperialist Governments in France that increase sectarian divisions intolerance and obscurantism.

Against racism and against policies that put in precarious conditions of millions of people, should be a United and massive mobilization! It is on these bases that we will participate in the support for the journalists and employees of Charlie Hebdo and that we will continue to fight against the policies of social regression of the Government in the weeks and months to come.

We are a tolerant and democratic society where everyone can live as he likes, according to the culture, philosophy, religion he wishes. Such a democratic society is possible, she asked that we fight together to destroy the roots of oppression and division: capitalism, its law of profit and the exploitation of workers and natural resources for the benefit of a small minority of super rich. It is pulling out of the hands of the capitalists the principal means of production and Exchange, and organizing the economy in a democratic manner, under public ownership and the management and control of workers and of the population that can end inequality, war and injustice. It is this perspective of a company and democratic that we stand

in complete opposition to the barbarity without end imposed on us by capitalism

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## **Liberté d'expression ! Non au racisme ! pas d'unité derrière les Valls-Merkel-Cameron-Sarko etc...**

Gauche Revolutionnaire 12 January 2014

L'attaque et le meurtre de 12 personnes par des hommes lourdement armés dans les locaux du journal Charlie Hebdo mercredi 7 janvier est un événement dramatique que nous condamnons fermement comme une attaque lâche et barbare.

Nos pensées et tout notre soutien vont bien sûr vers les proches des victimes : Frédéric Boisseau, agent d'entretien ; Bernard Maris, économiste ; Michel Renaud, Elsa Cayat, psychanalyste ; Mustapha Ourrad., correcteur ; Franck Brinsolaro, brigadier ; Ahmed Merabet, policier ; Wolinski, Charb', Tignous, Cabu, Honoré (dessinateurs), les autres victimes et les blessés.

En attaquant Charlie Hebdo et des personnes comme Wolinski et Cabu, ce n'est pas n'importe qui qui a été visé. Ce sont, pour beaucoup, des journalistes connus pour leur engagement de longue date. Ils ont, de multiples manières, combattu l'intolérance, le racisme, la censure... Qu'ils meurent sous les balles de fous furieux racistes et intolérants nous révolte. En s'en prenant aussi à de simples travailleurs, ceux qui ont commis cet assassinat atroce démontrent qu'ils n'en ont rien à faire de lutter contre le racisme, ils ne défendent pas les musulmans et ne veulent surtout pas d'une société tolérante et respectueuse de chacun.

En aucun cas les musulmans en France ne vont se sentir soulagés par cet acte, bien au contraire. C'est d'ailleurs bien souvent eux qui vont payer les conséquences dans la rue, comme à chaque fois qu'un acte réactionnaire et aveugle est commis. Ces terroristes qui prétendent défendre une « religion » ne valent pas mieux que les réactionnaires islamophobes qui, du coup, vont se frotter les mains et multiplient les actes de violence à l'égard des musulmans. De fait, ces deux catégories marchent main dans la main pour développer l'intolérance et l'obscurantisme. Cet acte terroriste odieux et lâche renforce tous les courants réactionnaires qui veulent diviser les travailleurs et les jeunes sur une base religieuse ou communautaire.

### **Pas d'entrave à la liberté d'expression et au droit à la caricature!**

Charlie était le produit d'une longue tradition de lutte contre la censure, contre le racisme et l'extrême droite ; sans pour autant épargner la gauche. Ils utilisaient la provocation et le sarcasme à l'extrême comme moyen de dénonciation du politiquement correct et de la manipulation politique et médiatique. On défend Charlie Hebdo car on pense qu'il ne doit pas y avoir d'obstacles à la liberté d'expression. Nous savons que ce droit est très vite attaqué par les classes dirigeantes. Nous avons défendu la même position pour Dieudonné alors que nous sommes en désaccord avec ce qu'il dit, qui peut aussi être considéré comme du racisme dans certains aspects, notamment ses nombreux sous-entendus anti-sémites. Quand Charlie Hebdo a publié les caricatures de Mahomet c'était d'abord pour répondre aux menaces de mort contre le journaliste danois, pour dire : oui on a le droit de ne pas croire en dieu et de critiquer les religions... Le problème c'est qu'aborder les choses de façon aussi provocante, et parfois insultante, dans un contexte de surenchère dans le racisme anti-musulman, surtout après le 11 septembre 2001, n'est pas une réponse et peut même paraître faire le jeu des racistes. Et ce fut le cas des fois notamment durant les trop longues années où Charlie a été dirigé par l'opportuniste Philippe Val (qui sera passé de l'extrême gauche dans sa jeunesse à prôner désormais des positions proches de Sarkozy). Tout en défendant le droit le plus complet à la liberté d'expression, c'est sur ces sujets là que nous gardons largement nos distances avec certains propos et dessins que pouvaient publier Charlie.

Les caricatures peuvent toujours déranger, mais elles ne tuent personne au contraire des réalités que des dessinateurs comme Cabu ou Wolinski ont dénoncé dans leur travail d'artiste. On pouvait les trouver un peu «bêtes et méchants» des fois, mais eux mêmes visaient à dénoncer la bêtise et

l'oppression. Dès leurs débuts, ils se sont affrontés aux forces qui brimaient la société : l'Église, l'armée, les partisans du colonialisme, l'extrême droite... Ce qu'ont visé ces terroristes dans leur lâcheté, ce n'est pas les vrais islamophobes d'extrême droite, mais des défenseurs de la liberté d'expression, et de la lutte contre l'oppression et le totalitarisme. Souvent, ça n'était pas la foi qui était visée dans les dessins, mais l'utilisation qui en est faite à des fins de pouvoir ou de racisme.

### **Pas d'unité avec ceux qui nourrissent le racisme!**

Il est quand même incroyable d'entendre tous les politiciens que Charlie critiquait et caricaturait défendre aujourd'hui ce journal. Les dessinateurs auraient bien rigolé d'ailleurs si on leur avait dit que la cathédrale Notre Dame de Paris sonnerait le glas en leur hommage pendant 15 minutes... belle prouesse pour des anticléricaux forcenés ! Ce sera leur dernière blague, dommage qu'ils ne puissent en profiter.

Mais, il y a de quoi rire jaune devant l'hypocrisie sans borne des classes dirigeantes et de leur valets des médias, et on ne doit pas oublier quelles sont les responsabilités des uns et des autres. Nous défendons de manière intransigeante la liberté d'expression, mais quand on sait que la presse est à 90% aux mains de grands groupes capitalistes qui y censurent sans hésiter souvent selon les lois de la rentabilité, ce ne sont certainement pas eux qui peuvent nous donner des leçons sur la « liberté d'expression ».

### **Sarko, Le Pen etc. n'ont pas leur place dans les hommages !**

Alors qu'une nouvelle loi « anti terroriste » restreignant nos libertés a été votée en novembre, sous prétexte de lutte contre les filières djihadistes, prétexte toujours facile pour fliquer les gens, tout d'un coup les politiciens se préoccupent de nos libertés. Il y a deux mois, la police était déployée avec violence pour empêcher les actions pacifiques en mémoire de Rémi Fraisse, militant écologiste assassiné par la police. Alors que ce gouvernement attaque les syndicalistes, ils se préoccuperaient de la liberté d'opinion ? Alors que tous les médias à la recherche du « clash » et du « buzz » sont ouverts à des Zemmour & co et multiplient les amalgames et les insultes contre les musulmans et les immigrés, ils se redécouvrent défenseurs de la liberté d'opinion et de la tolérance ?

Même le FN veut entrer dans cette « unité nationale » et prétend défendre un journal qui luttait contre ce qui fait son fond de commerce : le racisme et l'islamophobie en particulier. Non, le FN n'a pas sa place dans des hommages aux morts de Charlie Hebdo. D'autant plus que Marine Le Pen en profite pour parler de réintroduire la peine de mort, chose contre laquelle tous les dessinateurs de Charlie ont toujours été.

Quant à la droite, ce n'est pas non plus l'hommage aux morts de Charlie qui l'intéresse. Sarkozy parle de « guerre de civilisation » comme il a parlé des « racailles » avant. Des députés de droite comme Mariani se prétendent défenseurs de la liberté d'expression alors qu'ils ont tenté de faire interdire de nombreux spectacles et même des chansons de Rap... Pas d'unité avec ces politiciens qui tentent de se servir de l'émotion actuelle pour avancer leurs idées racistes.

Et certainement pas non plus avec les chefs de gouvernement qui ont été invités par Valls : le premier ministre espagnol et héritier du franquisme, Rajoy, le premier ministre britannique Cameron qui avait animé dans sa jeunesse les jeunes du Parti conservateur et leur campagne « pendez Mandela »...

### **La liberté d'expression : une arme contre les classes dirigeantes et les réactionnaires.**

Alors, nous manifesterons, en hommage aux victimes, en défense de la liberté d'expression et d'opinion, et contre les politiques de régression sociales qui font le lit des fanatiques et réactionnaires de tous bords. Nous devons être le plus nombreux possible dans les jours et mois à venir à les empêcher de se refaire une virginité sur la mort de ces personnes. Il nous faut de l'unité, mais pas cette unité de façade qui ne garantit pas nos libertés.

Le meilleur hommage que l'on puisse rendre aux victimes, c'est de renforcer la lutte contre le racisme, l'obscurantisme et toutes les politiques qui visent à diviser les travailleurs et les jeunes. Ce qui nous

manque cruellement depuis des années c'est d'avoir une force politique qui défende clairement les victimes de la société capitaliste, qui soit ouverte à tous et toutes, et se donne pour objectif l'unité des travailleurs, des jeunes, des chômeurs, des retraités, quelles que soient les origines, les cultures... Une force politique qui appelle à lutter autant contre les attaques du gouvernement et du patronat que contre le racisme et l'intolérance. La gauche nous a trahi de multiples façons ces dernières années, en acceptant de placer son action dans le cadre du capitalisme, en abandonnant la lutte antiraciste et en soutenant pour certains les guerres (au Proche et moyen Orient, au Mali...). Ce même gouvernement nous parle du « danger djihadiste » ici, alors qu'il soutient la Turquie qui aide Daesh en Syrie, qui s'allie avec le Qatar ou l'Arabie Saoudite dont les régimes ultra-réactionnaires soutiennent eux aussi des groupes terroristes...

Le gouvernement actuel, dirigé par le PS, porte aussi une responsabilité dans l'atmosphère délétère de ces derniers mois. Il suit sans sourciller les pas des politiques de casse sociale et démocratique engagées par son prédécesseur, Sarkozy. Les événements ne doivent pas nous faire oublier les déclarations de Macron, pour qui le seul objectif que doit avoir un jeune est de devenir milliardaire, ce qui veut dire s'enrichir sur le dos des travailleurs et de la majorité de la population. Ils ne doivent pas nous faire oublier non plus les milliers de licenciements, la politique ultra libérale en faveur des plus riches et le chômage, qui nous touchent tous d'où qu'on vienne. La mobilisation en hommage aux morts de Charlie ne doit pas nous faire mettre de côté la nécessité d'une lutte d'ensemble contre la politique de ce gouvernement au service des riches et des banquiers.

### **Pour l'unité des travailleurs et de la population contre le racisme, l'islamophobie et l'antisémitisme!**

L'édition du Monde de jeudi 8 janvier titrait « Le 11 septembre français » ... fidèle au sensationnalisme qui caractérise désormais les médias. Mais le fait qu'ils osent cette comparaison est lourde de sens sur l'ambiance que l'on devra subir dans les semaines à venir. On peut s'attendre à ce qu'un espace plus grand existe pour les forces de droite et d'extrême droite. C'est à nous de nous organiser sur des bases de lutte contre le racisme et contre le capitalisme pour contrer cela. On peut s'attendre à ce que cet attentat soit utilisé par les classes dirigeantes (pas seulement en France) pour imposer des mesures drastiques contre les immigrés (ou ceux qui ont l'air de l'être...), les militants et nous tous, sous prétexte d'unité nationale et de lutte contre le terrorisme. Le plan Vigipirate a déjà été mis au niveau maximum en Île de France, ce qui prévoit entre autre l'interdiction des grands rassemblements, et va renforcer encore les contrôles au faciès notamment parmi la population d'origine maghrébine.

Le climat d'islamophobie entretenu est de plus en plus fort. Ceci amène certains musulmans en France à se sentir fort justement sous attaque. Nous dénonçons toute forme de racisme, d'islamophobie, d'antisémitisme, de sexisme... Et nous luttons pour un monde solidaire, fraternel, et tolérant. Rien de comparable avec ces illuminés qui se prennent pour des justiciers (mais craignent, semble-t-il, des gens armés d'un simple crayon). Les terroristes, à l'image des seigneurs de guerre qui violent et pillent des populations sans défense en Afrique et au Moyen Orient, n'ont que faire de la lutte des peuples de ces régions, que ce soit en Palestine, en Syrie, en Irak, lors des révolutions en Tunisie, en Egypte, ou des mouvements de masse au Burkina, au Sénégal...pas plus que de celles des gens ordinaires, musulmans ou pas, en France. La « religion » de ces terroristes est un trafic juteux et rentable comme celui des armes, tout comme le trafic d'êtres humains est un business pour des groupes comme Boko Haram ou Daesh, qui d'ailleurs massacrent en premier lieu des musulmans par milliers au Nigeria, au Cameroun, en Irak ou en Syrie. Dans le même temps, si, en Europe, des jeunes se radicalisent au point de perdre toute notion humaine et de devenir terroriste, ce n'est pas sans rapport avec la politique des impérialistes qui bombardent certains pays depuis des années, et ont semé le chaos et la guerre pour des centaines de millions de personnes de part le monde.

Mais face à cela, ce n'est pas le terrorisme individuel qui changera les choses, au contraire, il renforce la classe dominante et enferme les populations dans la peur. Et la réponse n'est pas le repli sur soi, l'enfermement dans les communautés, qui est certainement voulu autant

par l'extrême droite traditionnelle française que par certains groupes religieux. C'est au contraire un mouvement de masse tolérant, combatif et démocratique qu'il faut !

### **Tous ensemble, reprendre l'initiative !**

Les syndicats, les organisations du mouvement ouvrier, les associations doivent appeler à se rassembler et à rendre hommage aux victimes de Charlie Hebdo sur leurs propres bases : pour l'unité des travailleurs, des jeunes et de la grande majorité de la population quelque soit son origine ou ses croyances, pour la liberté d'expression, contre tous les réactionnaires et les terroristes intégristes, contre les politiques racistes et impérialistes des gouvernements en France qui accroissent les divisions sectaires, l'intolérance et l'obscurantisme.

Contre le racisme, et contre les politiques qui mettent dans la précarité des millions de personnes, il faut une mobilisation unie et massive ! C'est sur ces bases que nous participerons au soutien aux journalistes et employés de Charlie Hebdo et que nous continuerons de lutter contre les politiques de régression sociale du gouvernement dans les semaines et mois à venir.

Nous sommes pour une société tolérante et démocratique, où chacun puisse vivre comme il l'entend, selon la culture, la philosophie, la religion qu'il souhaite. Une telle société démocratique est possible, elle demande qu'on lutte tous ensemble pour détruire les racines de l'oppression et de la division : le capitalisme, sa loi du profit et l'exploitation des travailleurs et des richesses naturelles au bénéfice d'une petite minorité de super riches. C'est en retirant des mains des capitalistes les principaux moyens de productions et d'échange, et en organisant l'économie de manière démocratique, sous propriété publique et sous la gestion et le contrôle des travailleurs et de la population qu'on peut mettre fin aux inégalités, aux guerres et à l'injustice. C'est cette perspective d'une société socialiste et démocratique que nous défendons, en opposition complète à la barbarie sans fin que nous impose le capitalisme. Rejoignez nous [www.gaucherevolutionnaire.fr](http://www.gaucherevolutionnaire.fr)

## **Transnet oil spill pollutes wealthy gated village**



### **A suburban Durban disaster reveals wider planetary abuse and racism**

Patrick Bond 12 January 2015

Over the holiday season, the front pages of the newspapers in Durban screamed out again and again about a major diesel spill. In the suburb of Hillcrest on December 23, a Durban-Johannesburg pipeline operated by Transnet gushed 220 000 liters into wealthy white residents' gardens.

The pipeline, built in 1965 and now at least four years past its official retirement date, annually carries three billion litres of petroleum products for BP, Shell and Malaysian-owned Engen. An anonymous company source confirmed to The Witness newspaper, 'The underground pipe had burst along a weld line which had given way.' A Transnet spokesperson confessed that the Hillcrest clean-up would take 'close to a year.'

Look more closely at the damage and how it might have been prevented. Not only should this become a case for rethinking both our addiction to climate-destroying petroleum and the geographically-illogical Johannesburg region's excessive air pollution - and what narratives activists might deploy against fossil-fuel facilitators like Transnet.

Those were points made back in 2008 by one of the country's finest civil society groups, the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA), when they predicted this sort of incident based on experiences with multinational corporations at Africa's largest oil refinery site. In 2001, one pipeline used by Shell and BP spilled of 1.3 million liters of oil in the South Durban Bluff neighbourhood (disclosure: this is where I live).

In addition, the mainly white Hillcrest residents' 'Not In My Back Yard!' ('NIMBY') tradition stands exposed, as does Transnet's solution to the unreliable old pipeline: pump more oil through a brand new pipeline traversing former KwaZulu bantustan areas and South Durban neighbourhoods inhabited by mainly low-income black people.

That 'New Multi-Products Pipeline' (NMPP) - whose piping was completed three years ago but which still awaits two new pump stations to reach full capacity - suffered huge delays and overruns, raising the cost from the initial estimate of R6.5 billion in 2006 to R23.4 billion at last count.

In September 2007, even Transnet's oft-praised then CEO Maria Ramos had estimated the final cost at just R11.2 billion, less than half of what it would balloon to within a matter of three years after the route change through South Durban. Because different petroleum products (unleaded petrol, diesel and jet fuel) move through it, it was a complex pipe to lay out over 544 kilometers. The NMPP has been called the world's largest pipeline of its kind.

As for timing, the new pipeline and pumping stations were meant to be completed by 2010 so the line running through Hillcrest should have been decommissioned, but April 2015 is Transnet's latest target date. One reason for missing deadline after deadline is that dozens of kilometers were added by detouring via black residential areas.

The rerouting was done with excessive haste, resulting in an intense critique from SDCEA in 2008. Confirming SDCEA's predictions, former Minister of Public Enterprises Malusi Gigaba conceded in parliament last April that Transnet's management of the new pipeline project suffered 'unsatisfactory safety performance, poor environmental compliance, insufficient quality controls, and inadequate control and supervision.'

Earlier, in December 2012 after an investigation, Gigaba had admitted that 'Transnet Capital Projects lacked sufficient capacity and depth of experience for the client overview of a megaproject of this complexity. There was an inadequate analysis of risks. Transnet's obligations on the project such as securing authorisations - Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs), land acquisition for right of way, water and wetland permits - were not pursued with sufficient foresight and vigour.'

In 2008 when the new pipeline design was approved, Transnet's 'systematic failings' (in Gigaba's words) were overseen by Minister of Public Enterprises Alec Erwin, a man who just four years earlier won endorsement from Foreign Affairs journal (the main voice of the US imperial establishment) to become the World Trade Organisation's director-general, and by Ramos, who a year later was named by Fortune magazine as 9th most powerful woman in the world and who now leads the country's second largest bank (Barclays' subsidiary Absa).

In other words, this wasn't rank incompetence, it was systemic eco-social abuse by some of South Africa's leading public officials. As far as I can tell, they have faced no accountability for their own systematic failings in what was then Transnet's largest-ever project. Erwin and Ramos were amongst a single handful of managers of South Africa's neoliberal macroeconomic transition during the Mandela-Mbeki years (he was trade minister, she was finance director-general), but the damage they did also can be felt in many local contexts, including here in KwaZulu-Natal.

Neither Erwin, Ramos or others overseeing Transnet addressed widespread collusion by construction companies during tendering by one of the main Durban-Johannesburg pipeline beneficiaries, Group Five Civil Engineering. Many Transnet projects suffered unjustifiable 50% mark-ups thanks to the now notorious collusion. Corporate abuse of this sort affects the entire society, even the rich.

Indeed, the scene of the latest crime is Hillcrest's Greenvale Village gated complex, built after 1965, under which the Transnet pipeline crossed in spite of servitudes dating back years. Greenvale boasts comfortable mansions, and one reason for their desirability is the proximity (within 3 kilometers) of some of Durban's finest schools. This mink, Merc and manure belt, stretching along two highways from Assagay to Kloof, is truly a site of local ruling-class reproduction, just as much as Umhlanga, Durban North and Glenwood.

It was in places like this, SDCEA uncannily predicted in 2008, that Transnet's carelessness would become obvious: 'There is no emergency plan available regarding the existing pipeline so those living along its route have no way of knowing how to respond to an emergency or accident... There may be people living along the path of the existing pipeline who do not know it is there, what it may be doing to their land and water, and what to do if the aging structure bursts.'

In this bastion of smug wealth, the centre-right Democratic Alliance opposition political party is popular. Its eloquent local municipal councilor, Rick Crouch, appears aggressive in defending local interests. As he explained to The Mercury, 'More than a year ago we addressed the issue with Transnet. They took me on an inspection in loco to show me how safe it was to have a pipeline near residential homes. I still had my doubts.'

#### **Transnet's serial carelessness and overcapacity**

As well he should (though Crouch apparently kept them to himself), for Transnet was responsible for related disasters in 1998 and twice in 2013. Ramos' celebrated endorsement of corporatisation apparently allowed managers to short-change broader social and ecological considerations. As an insider source told The Witness: 'This is not the first time this has -happened. Within close proximity to the previous rupture site, the pipe had burst [in 1998] and they were warned of operating the line at high pressure. History repeats -itself.'

In 2013, the same pipeline leaked 300 000 liters on a dairy farm an hour west of Hillcrest. The incident was allegedly covered up by Transnet, but revealed the weakness of piping that was punctured by a farmworker ploughing the land. Remarked Bobby Peek, director of one of the country's leading environmental NGOs, groundWork, 'The fact that it took Transnet Pipelines three hours to arrest the flow of fuel from the rupture was an indictment on their ability to safely monitor their systems and act promptly in an emergency.'

In contrast, brags a government website, 'Transnet Pipelines continually monitors the integrity of its pipeline network. Internal inspection tools, known as Intelligent Pigs, are valuable devices for this work. They make use of the magnetic stray flux principle to determine and record possible areas of metal loss from corrosion or any other cause. The results of the most recent Intelligent Pig survey of the network indicate that the pipelines, which are methodically protected against electrolytic corrosion, are in a generally good condition.'

Right then, blame pipeline rot on what must have been a litter of rather Unintelligent Pigs.

But Transnet was also indirectly responsible for a very different Hillcrest attack in September 2013. Just a dozen kilometres from Greenvale Village along the main road to Durban, a driver named Sanele May lost control of his container truck as he rolled down the very steep Fields Hill on the M13 highway. May then crashed into two kombi taxis and killed 24 working-class black people after his brakes apparently failed.

Six weeks ago, the 23 year old Swazi immigrant pleaded guilty to culpable homicide, entering South Africa illegally, being in possession of fake driver's licences, operating a vehicle without a valid professional driving permit, and failing to comply with a road traffic sign. But the Taiwanese firm which owns the container - the world's fourth largest shipping company, Evergreen - and Sagekal Logistics truck company which hired May and encouraged him to avoid a toll station on the N3 (because the truck's registration was outdated) were not prosecuted, though they are to blame, in a systemic sense.

The structural problems driving the transport chaos remain unresolved, and Field's Hill remains a site of periodic fatal truck accidents. These reflect the risks involved when, after 1994, the government and Transnet consented to shifting the six-meter long containers from railways to road. Transnet had no sensitivity to the needs of ordinary commuters in Durban, to minimal regulatory safety measures or to climate change.

A year ago, Business Day newspaper put Transnet's climate denialism on the front page due to the parastatal's rejected EIA for the first phase of Durban's port expansion. In June last year, the company's revised EIA confirmed its lack of concern for sea level rise, as its Cape Town consultants (ZAA Engineering Projects) simply misinterpreted a major United Nations climate study. Once again, SDCEA offered a devastating EIA critique.

The parastatal agency is only in the early stages of moving containers back from the road to its mainly idle rail lines. One result of such procrastination is that in 2011, 7000 truck crashes caused 70 fatalities in the Durban area alone. But since the post-apartheid trucking deregulation began, importers have built so much warehouse space and related logistics infrastructure along Durban's main highways, that a shift back to rail will be nearly impossible under the logic of capitalist transport.

Moreover, at the South Durban port complex, Transnet's planned R250 billion expansion of the existing harbour plus a new dig-out port at the site of the city's old airport will, according to National Development Plan projections, raise Durban's annual container throughput from 2.5 million in recent years to 20 million by 2040. Regardless of whether that estimate is accurate or yet another thumb-suck fantasy, nearly all the containers will continue to be transported by truck.

In contrast, the main merit of Transnet's new oil pipeline is that far fewer truckloads of petrol and diesel are now being transported by truck. The new pipeline more than doubles the oil-transit capacity, because it uses 24-inch diameter size piping (double the old pipeline), and has a much stronger pumping system that, with much greater pressure possible, can triple the amount the Johannesburg region - with its 12 million residents - receives per year compared to the line that burst in Hillcrest.

Ironically, though, after a 2012 peak of 6.023 billion litres carried in the combined old and new Durban-Johannesburg pipelines (an increase of 87% from 2010 levels), the amount carried last year was only 5.340 billion litres. The assumption in 2006 was that petrol consumption would follow the 'Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa' economic plan, which in 2005 had projected annual GDP growth of 6% for the 2010-14 period. In reality, South Africa managed annual average growth of just 2.5% over the last five years.

As a result of aligning state mega-infrastructure spending to persistently optimistic macro-economic assumptions, South Africa's overbuilding craze was responsible for not just white elephant soccer stadiums built for the 2010 soccer World Cup (which are now draining most municipal coffers), but also massive overcapacity in new and renovated airports, the R25 billion Gautrain Johannesburg-Pretoria fast train (with just half the ridership anticipated), and also that region's hated e-tolled highway.

#### **Moving from trucks to piped petrol, while shifting pipes closer to poor black areas**

As for the extreme overcapacity now evident in the Durban-Johannesburg oil pipeline, the main official in the National Energy Regulator of South Africa (Nersa) responsible, Rod Crompton, also criticised Transnet for not

understanding why petrol pipeline volumes soon began to fall: 'This is a concern in view of the new pipeline capacity that Transnet has brought into operation.'

One reason for the disappointing performance, Crompton argued, was that 'There still appears to be scope to move more volumes away from road and rail transport to pipeline transport.' There is enormous scope, to be sure, but no incentive under the prevailing for-profit system.

Matters will probably not improve, because Transnet argues it must now charge customers vast increases to cover the new pipeline costs, and in March 2014 requested a 20% increase in overall revenue for the coming year. Crompton only awarded a 5% rise. This was not unusual, for in 2009, Transnet had requested a 74% pipeline-tariff increase but Nersa instead told it to cut tariffs by 10%.

However, it should be evident that the entire system needs rejigging, for as SDCEA pointed out back in 2008, 'The cost of petroleum does not truly reflect the environmental costs and the increase in availability of petroleum does not reflect diminishing supplies that can be anticipated over time. As a non-renewable finite resource, petroleum supplies will only decrease and their costs will rise as a larger population struggles to share less and less of it. The availability of petroleum today should reflect its limited life-span as a fuel source.'

Even though oil prices fell 40% in 2014, the application of full-cost accounting to cover climate change and local pollution is long overdue. But this kind of logical response appears far beyond Crompton's and the South African state's conceptual capacity.

After the Hillcrest blowout, another critical question concerns the safety of the new pipeline - with its dozens of extra kilometres traversing the southern part of Durban - since so many people live alongside its path. As Peek remarked after the latest spill, 'Now the residents of South Durban have the new pipeline next to their houses. In Hillcrest, the pipes pass through big gardens and are quite far from the houses, but in Umbumbulu it is literally next to the houses, on people's doorsteps.'

Back in 1965, when the original Durban-Johannesburg oil pipeline was commissioned, the 'dirty steel' used had 'sulphur inclusions' and also suffered weld defects including 'fatigue crack growth and preferential corrosion of seam weld.' Transnet commissioned an investigation into the pipeline by 'international experts' who 'confirmed the multiple inherent defect phenomena of the pre-1970 pipe used and recommended replacement.'

If so, given the excess capacity in the new pipeline, why was the old pipeline still being used on December 23, as well as back in 2013 at Mooi River? According to government's 2007 Energy Security Master Plan, 'When it comes to infrastructure investments in the South African liquid fuels sector, in the next five years, the single most important recommendation is the approval of a new appropriately sized, properly integrated pipeline, which should come on line in the 2nd quarter of 2010 at the latest.' The first diesel began flowing through the NMPP in January 2012, but failure to build two final pumping stations - in the case of the Durban harbour station, because of tank buckling - kept the pipe's throughput at just 50% of capacity, requiring ongoing use of the old line.

But Transnet apparently received word from pipeline managers that there was no problem with the existing pipeline. PricewaterhouseCooper infrastructure expert Georg Hofmeyr told the Financial Mail a year ago, in the magazine's words, that 'An assessment of the original pipeline revealed that it was in better condition than originally thought, and drag-reducing agents were introduced to increase its capacity.'

In its 2008 EIA filing against the new Transnet pipeline, SDCEA offered several critiques, including a re-routing that is 'suspiciously reminiscent of the environmental racism we in South Durban have become familiar with'; inadequate public participation; dubious motivations for the pipeline; government's failure to prevent, detect or manage pipeline leaks; and climate change. According to SDCEA, 'The pipeline threatens people with

potentially severe environmental safety and health problems (well known to refinery victims in South Durban), in a manner that is discriminatory along class and racial lines.'

An oil spill can be devastating to people in the immediate vicinity, D'Sa warned Hillcrest residents: 'Health studies in 2002 and 2007 found that the emissions from petro-chemical plants put the cancer risk at 500 times the norm (1:100 000) and that 75% of cancers in South Durban are caused by the release of chemicals from the petro-chemical facilities.'

Another threat to health posed by petroleum is its use in automobiles, an especially troubling phenomenon in Johannesburg since so much of the ambient air pollution there can be traced to highways in addition to the black townships whose low-income residents still rely upon dirty energy. As SDCEA argued in 2008, pollution 'will be exacerbated by the petroleum and other fuels distributed in this area by the Transnet pipeline. Again, Transnet's projections for fuel demands fail to reflect actual conditions by ignoring external factors such as deplorable air quality.' In May 2014, the World Health Organisation confirmed these fears, in a report that cited Johannesburg for particulate matters (10 microns) ten times the recommended maximum, putting Johannesburg in the same league as China's ultra-polluted cities.

More petrol to Joburg requires more refining in South Durban, a site whose local ecology is already toxin-saturated, SDCEA argued: 'Durban Bay, in which the harbour is situated, is struggling to cope with the pollution loads from harbour and associated activities, contaminated riverine and storm-water inflows. The expansion will require further removal of aspects of the Bay's ecosystem, which will in turn further reduce the assimilative capacity of this threatened and fragile estuary.'

Global-scale pollution was also noted in SDCEA's critique in 2008: 'The rise of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions that will be facilitated by the pipeline is immense, and is only referred to in the [EIA] Draft Scoping Report as a potential legal problem, with no details provided.' Three years later, at the end of 2011, SDCEA was the main local host for activists during the United Nations climate summit and its leader Desmond D'Sa led the march of 10 000 to protest what was termed the 'Conference of Polluters.'

### **Reducing demand - or increasing supply and redirecting the pipeline**

As SDCEA complained in 2008, 'We do not believe that Transnet should be rewarded by being allowed to install a new pipeline when they are unable to properly manage their existing one.' What, then, should have happened in early 2008, as Transnet prepared its final pipeline proposal and as load-shedding first hit South Africa?

A rethink was eminently feasible because in February 2008, a great deal of infrastructure was reaching its full capacity. The chairperson of Standard Bank, Derek Cooper, even advised Mbeki to limit Eskom's ultra-cheap electricity supply to BHP Billiton. In the words of BHP SA chairperson Vincent Maphai, who was at the same meeting, Cooper believed 'a quick way to the solution of our power crisis was shutting down Hillside' smelter in Richards Bay, advice that Maphai hotly disputed, threatening to end the firm's relations with the bank.

But the logic was inexorable, as Mining writer Michael Coulson affirmed in June 2008: 'The fact is that aluminium smelters, especially in a country with no supplies of the raw material, bauxite - which is one of the few minerals lacking in our rich resource base - are simply a way of exporting electricity. They don't create many jobs, and the capital investment per job is enormous. They were a luxury we could afford in the 1980s, but are now expensive white elephants that absorb capital and power that could much more productively employed elsewhere. In terms of power alone, an aluminium smelter consumes as much electricity as a medium-sized town.'

In 2009, in what was an otherwise cautious critique of the call from African National Congress youth to nationalize the mines, SA Communist Party deputy leader (and deputy minister) Jeremy Cronin agreed: 'An analysis of the systemic realities that are reproducing under-development in our country, must surely lead us to call for greater use of renewable energy sources, for the phasing out of aluminium smelters, and for the re-

nationalisation of SASOL.’

In 2012, when margins became dangerously low again, Eskom began paying smelters to shut down, saving 500 megaWatts of power. Just 140 high-consuming companies are responsible for 40% of South Africa’s electricity demand. BHP alone consumes in the 5-10% range of electricity depending upon the aluminium market’s profitability.

Sometimes it takes a crisis to focus thinking and redirect energies. If this degree of radical rethinking of South Africa’s electricity consumption was possible (and is needed again as more load-shedding looms), then why not rethink the shipping of petrol products to Johannesburg?

Indeed in 2005, there was a major petrol shortage in Johannesburg and Cape Town - but as with Eskom and electricity, instead of promoting economic sanity, resource conservation and public transport, the result was greater pressure for supply enhancement, especially a new Durban-Johannesburg oil pipeline.

**In early 2008, there were two routes forward:**

1. first, reconsider the costs of Johannesburg’s status as the most industrialised mega-city in Africa, and therefore decentralise new economic activity so as to better distribute future populations closer to the availability of resources such as water; or
2. second, simply continue to promote limitless consumption, suburban sprawl, the Sandton financial district’s growth (as Johannesburg’s economic motor) and other forms of maldevelopment, by ‘supply enhancement.’

That would entail mega-projects to provide Johannesburg consumers with more electricity (from three new coal-fired power plants), water (through new Lesotho dams) and transport (e.g. the OR Tambo Airport refurbishment and Gautrain for wealthy commuters).

Since the second option was chosen, the next question was whether the largest single infrastructure project up to that point, the new Transnet pipeline, should cross the paths of rich white homeowners and farmers, or instead, poor black residents under the thumb of local ethnic rulers and ruling-party politicians.

### **Out of white sight**

The latter route was chosen. One reason is that there were vocal opponents of new digging along (or nearby) the existing pipeline servitude, termed the ‘Northern Corridor’. Near Hillcrest, according to Transnet’s Zitholele consultancy, ‘Assagay landowners expressed grave concerns’ because ‘The likely construction damage and nuisance impact on the Northern Corridor is considered to be severe in the Assagay area as a result of the sensitivity of equestrian businesses to disruption.’ (South Africa’s 1% need their horses for recreation and showing off.)

One of the most effective Hillcrest activists was Lilian Develing, who headed the Combined Ratepayers’ Association in Durban. She was quoted as warning that Transnet’s existing pipeline developed underground leaks: ‘These took some time to discover, causing damage to grazing, and animals had to be moved.’

Other reasons Zitholele gave for routing the pipeline through a Southern Corridor included ecological, agricultural and public open space. Yet just outside Durban, the existing servitude on one long section of the old pipeline - from Merrivale to Cedar’s Post through Umgeni Valley Nature Reserve - is being used for the larger pipe, apparently without any such concerns.

The privileged Hillcrest community’s NIMBY strategy was apparently the key factor. As Peek argued in the wake of the December 2014 spill, ‘Hillcrest residents did not want the new pipeline in their area, so they fought it and Transnet decided to move it.’

Along with Peek, D’Sa was a recipient of the Goldman Environmental Prize for activism (in 1998 and 2014, respectively), and in an interview this

week he too was fuming: 'White monopoly capital had a huge influence in the new pipeline's placement. Even in South Durban, for the majority of white people living here, the pipeline goes nowhere near their houses.'

But, he added, local collaborators helped Transnet get access to black residential sites: 'The ANC councilors and chiefs in the areas affected by the new pipeline also sold out. They told everyone it would create jobs there. The councilors blocked us even talking to the people there. They were gatekeepers. They also need to be blamed. And other groups taking money from Transnet should also be held accountable.'

### **NIMBY - or NOPE?**

There was a bit of resistance in South Durban, to be sure. In August 2010, the black residents of Adams Mission resisted Transnet's 11-page temporary servitude agreement and an 'angry resident' complained about the construction: 'Our houses are beginning to crack because of the constant digging Transnet must take their pipes and find an alternate route far from our homes.'

The NIMBY narrative needs reworking. As Naomi Klein argues about the climate change threat, 'This changes everything.' Policy elites and community activists alike should be properly preparing for a post-carbon future. The appropriate narrative is then to question our overconsumption of fossil fuels, especially via an overpriced and dangerous pipeline whose long delay in construction resulted in the use of the existing pipe beyond its lifespan.

What is missing is a set of arguments and pressure strategies aimed not at 'an alternative route far from our homes' (of whatever race or class orientation) but instead at a different economic and transport strategy not so reliant upon fossil fuels, so instead of supply enhancement, demand-side management leads to major conservation gains.

The only way to do this is to realign community politics away from NIMBY and towards eco-socialism, and to insert bodies not just into EIA documents but onto the streets and into the fields to block pipelines like Transnet's. As Klein puts it in *This Changes Everything*, 'Blockadia is not a specific location on a map but rather a roving transnational conflict zone that is cropping up with increasing frequency and intensity wherever extractive projects are attempting to dig and drill, whether for open-pit mines, or gas fracking, or tar sands oil pipelines.'

First, if 'the trusty slur NIMBY has completely lost its bite' in this climate justice movement, who is staffing Klein's Blockadia? 'The people at the forefront - packing local council meetings, marching in capital cities, being hauled off in police vans, even putting their bodies between the earth-movers and earth - do not look much like your typical activist, nor do the people in one Blockadia site resemble those in another. Rather, they each look like the places where they live, and they look like everyone: the local shop owners, the university professors, the high school students, the grandmothers.'

For Klein, it is vital for people to link interests, in the way that has not yet happened between Hillcrest and South Durban: 'What is clear is that fighting a giant extractive industry on your own can seem impossible, especially in a remote, sparsely populated location. But being part of a continent-wide, even global, movement that has the industry surrounded is a very different story. Blockadia is turning the tables.'

She continues, 'The fossil fuel companies, in short, are no longer dealing with those Big Green groups that can be silenced with a generous donation or a conscience-clearing carbon offset program. The communities they are facing are, for the most part, not looking to negotiate a better deal - whether in the form of local jobs, higher royalties, or better safety standards. More and more, these communities are simply saying "No." No to the pipeline.'

**Instead of NIMBY, the new call-out is simply 'NOPE': Not On Planet Earth.**

The NOPE demand was made by SDCEA back in 2008, as it contemplated

Transnet's expenditure of billions on the pipeline, but the organisation also expressed the perceived need for a short-termist NIMBY narrative: 'Nearly every aspect of this pipeline project is contrary to national and global efforts to achieve environmental sustainability... The money should instead be invested in finding other ways of powering Johannesburg via renewable energy sources, or in the meantime, developing a shorter - and less environmentally racist - route for fuel delivery compared to the southerly route.'

There was more NOPE logic in SDCEA's submission: 'Global, climatologic and economic forces are pushing toward a sustainable energy package. It will ultimately cost South Africa more to put off adopting environmentally responsible programs because if we wait decades before working on the Long Term Mitigation Scenario commitments, the changes will not be able to occur gradually.'

Combining NIMBY and NOPE, SDCEA concluded, 'If the north route is found to be unacceptable then the pipeline idea needs to be abandoned in full. The billions of rand that it will cost to build the pipeline should be spent on renewable energy and other more sustainable means. This would be the preferred option in SDCEA's view because we feel that the presence of the pipeline will have adverse effects not only on the people of south Durban, but on the whole of South Africa, as it represents a major investment in an unsustainable energy program.'

Specifically, SDCEA suggested: 'Refurbishing the existing pipeline in an incremental manner (instead of doubling capacity), as maintenance is required, replacing the sections with a larger pipeline, using the existing route and servitudes, and installing additional pump stations, as and when required. Accelerating the upgrade of railways and public transport in Johannesburg, so as to get more people and product off the roads to minimise transport-related congestion, fuel burning, emissions and associated health effects, by establishing urban transport networks to enable safe and affordable rail transport, linked to park and ride centres with connections to bus and taxi routes.'

What tools are available? Klein endorses fossil fuel corporate divestment, and this tool is one that, as in its use against Transnet by anti-apartheid activists during the 1980s, can be very powerful.

After all, Transnet is not financially healthy. Although its March 2014 annual report showed profits of R5.2 billion on revenues of R56.6 billion, the Sunday Times offered a corrective: 'The bottom line is flattered to some extent by technicalities such as a sharp drop in the revaluation of assets, a drop which helped the 12.3% increase in earnings before interest, tax and depreciation to translate into a 25% increase in bottom-line profit.'

In June 2014, Transnet's credit rating was cut to BBB-, just one level above junk status. There were further financial 'problems in the pipeline for Transnet,' Business Day reported, as a result of declining confidence in the parastatal's ability to deliver. In mid-2013, for example, when Transnet offered a R750 million security to overseas investors, only R122 million was bid for, leading to the bond's abandonment.

SDCEA has threatened Transnet with a financial sanctions campaign before, due to the R250 billion port-petrochemical expansion in South Durban. The last such campaign it initiated, in early 2010, created a near-crisis for Eskom because once campaigning began, major World Bank shareholders ranging from Norway to the United States refused to support the Bank's largest-ever loan: \$3.75 billion for the Medupi coal-fired powerplant, even after a high-profile appeal from then finance minister Pravin Gordhan.

Infrastructure of this sort, wrote University of Manchester geographers Erik Swyngedouw and Maria Kaika in a pathbreaking article in the International Journal of Urban and Regional Research fifteen years ago, needs special attention. Projects like the Durban-Johannesburg pipelines are 'largely hidden, opaque, invisible, disappearing underground, locked into pipes, cables, conduits, tubes, passages and electronic waves. It is exactly this hidden form that renders the tense relationship between nature and the

city blurred, that contributes to severing the process of social transformation of nature from the process of urbanization. Perhaps more importantly, the hidden flows and their technological framing render occult the social relations and power mechanisms that are scripted in and enacted through these flows.'

It is our work in society, regardless of whether we live in South Durban, Hillcrest, Johannesburg, inbetween or far beyond, to unveil these power relations and wreck them, hopefully faster than Transnet's pipelines - old and new - continue to wreck and be wrecked.

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**Ukuchitheka kwamafutha aseNingizimu Afrika kungcolise lapho kubusa khona izicebi ezimhlophe  
Kodwa lenhlekelele eyenzeke kulesisigceme saseThekwini siveze obala ukuhlukunyezwa komhlaba okusabalele kanye nokubandlululwa ngezemvelo**

NguPatrick Bond Yahunyuswa nguFaith ka-Manzi

Ngesikhathi samaholidi, amakhasi aphambili amaphephandaba aseThekwini - idolobhakazi elikhulu lesithathu eNingizimu Afrika - ayememeza ngokuphindelela ngkuchitheka kwamafutha kadizili. Lapho kuhlal akhona abadla izambane likapondo eHillcrest mhlazingu23 kuZibandlela, ipayipi elisuka eThekwini liya eGoli eliphethwe imboni enkulu kakhulu ezimele kuthi engxenywe iphathwe nguhulumeni iTransnet yachitha amalitha angu220 000 ezingadini zemizi zezakhamizi eziyizicebi.

Lomzila wepayipi, owakhiwa ngonyaka ka1965 futhi manje osekudlule iminyaka emine uphelelwe isikhathi sawo, njalo ngonyaka uthwala amalitha ayizigidigidi ezintathu zemikhiqizo yamafutha ezimboni Obp, iShell kanye noEngen abanikazi bayo bangesizwe saseMalaysia. Othize ongafunangwa ukuthi laziwe igama lakhe osebenzela lemboni waqinisekisa kwiphephandaba iThe Witness ukuthi, 'Lelipayipi elingaphansi komhlaba laqhuma kanye nolayini wokuwelda owavela wadlebeleka.' Okhulumela iTransnet wafakazela ukuthi ukuhlanzwa kweHillcrest kuzothatha isikhathi 'cishe esingangonyaka'.

Awusondele ubukele eduze umonakalo nokuthi ubungavinjwa kanjani. Lokhu akufanele-nje kube udaba lokucatshangwa kabusha mayelana nokudakwa kwethu ngamafutha acekela phansi isimo sezulu kanye nesifundazwe saseGoli esingcolisa umoya ngokungenamqondo -futhi iziphi izinkulumo izishosho ezizoqhamuka nazo kwizimboni zamandla amafutha ezifana neTransnet.

Lawa ngamaphuzu enziwa kudala ngonyaka ka2008 ngenye yezinhlango zomphakathi eziphambili, iThe South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA), lapho basho ukuthi lengozi iyokwenzeka beshiso izinto abazaziyo esezike zenzeka ngaphambilini esizindeneni esikhulukazi sezimboni ezisabalele emhlabeni wonke okuncibilikiswa khona amafutha eAfrika. Ngonyaka ka2001, umzila owodwa wepayipi owawusetshenziswa nguShell kanye neBP wachitha amalitha angu1.3 wezigidi zamafutha komakhelwane baseBluff eNingizimu neTheku (isaziso: ilapho ngihlala khona).

Ngaphezu kwalokho, umkhuba wokuthi 'Hayi ngemuva kwezindlu zethu' wezakhamizi iningi lazo okungabamhlophe zaseHillcrest uvele wahlala obala, njengoba kwenza isixazululo seTransnet kulomzila omdala wepayipi: ompompa amafutha amaningi kusetshenziswa umzila omusha wamafutha odlula emaphandleni abantu abamnyama kanye nasezigcemeni ezingomakhelwane baseNingizimu neTheku lapho kuhlala khona ikakhulukazi abantu abamnyama abahola amaholo aphansi.

Lomzila Omusha Wemikhiqizo Eminingi -ipayipi lakhona elaqedwa eminyakeni emithathu edlule kodwa esalinde izigceme ezimbili ezintsha ukuthi igcwele ngokuchichima -libe nokubambezeleka kakhulu kanye nangokuchichimayo, kwanyuka imali ebibekiwe kusukela kwizigidigidi ezingu6.5 zamarandi ngonyaka ka2006 kuya kwizigidigidi ezingu23.4 kugcina ukubalwa.

Ngenyanga kaMandulo ngonyaka ka2007, ngisho nomphathi omkhulu weTransnet wangalesosikhathi owayejwayelwe ukunconywa uMaria Ramos wayeqagele ukuthi ukubiza kokugcina kwakuyizigidigidi eziyu11.2

zamarandi, okungaphansi kwengxnye eyanga kakhulu eminyakeni emithathu emva kokuba umzila usushintshiwe usudlula eNingizimu neTheku. Ngenxa yemikhiqizo ehlahlukene yamafutha (okumbandakanya kwangahlaziwe, udizili kanye namafutha ezindizamshini)udlula kuwona, kwakuyipayipa elinenkinga ukulendlala kumakhilomitha ngu544. Lomzila Omusha Wemikhiqizo Eminingi ubizwa ngohlobo lomzila omkhulukazi emhlabeni wonke.

Mayelana nesikhathi, ipayipi elisha kanye nezigceme zokumpompa kwakufanele ziqedwe ukwakhiwa ngonyaka ka2010 ngakho-ke umzila onqamula eHillcrest kwakse kufanele uyekwe, kodwa-ke usuku lwangenyanga kaMbaso ngo2015 ilona olungumlamajuqu olubekwe yiTransnet. Isizathu mayelana nalokho kuthi usuku oluhlale lumiselwe lokho luhlale luqhutshezelwa phambili ngenxa yamashumi shumi amakhilomitha abuye andiswa ngokuthi kususka kumzila owawukade uhleliwe okyiwa kulona osunqamula ezindaweni lapho kuhlala khona izakhamizi ezimnyama.

Ukwenziwa umzila kabusha wenziwa ngokukhulu ukuxhamazela, okwaholela ekugxekweni okumnangalisayo okwaqhamuka kwiSDCEA ngonyaka ka2008. Eqinisekisa ngokusho kwabo ngokwakuzokwenzeka owakushiwo yiSDCEA, lowo owayekade enguMongameli Wezemisebenzi Yemiphakathi uMalusi Gigaba wavuma ephalamende ngenyanga kaMbaso kunyaka odlule ukuthi ukulwawula kukaTransnet kweprojekti yomzila omusha wepayipi ubekhane nezingqinamba 'zokwenza okungagculisi, ukumelana nezemvelo okusesimeni esibi, kanye nokungalawulwa kokulawulwa kwamazinga ngokwanenele kanye nokunganeli kokulawula kanye nokuhlolwa.

I

Umzila omusha wepayipi leTransnet (umbala oluhlaza) ubhekene nomzila omdala (umzila onezidingiliza ezimnyama)  
Source: Transnet NMPP Environmental Impact Assessment Draft Scoping Report, 2008

Ngaphambilini, ngenyanga kaZibandlela ngonyaka ka2012 emva kophenyo, uGigaba wavuma ukuthi iTransnet Capital Project yayingenakho ukufukameleka okwanele kanye nokujula ngolwazi ngokubhekisiswa kwaloluhlelokazi olujule kakhulu. Akubanga khona ukuhlaziya okwanele ngokungase kube nobungozi. Ukuzibophezela kweTransnet kuloluhlelo njengokuthola izimvume - njengeEnvironmental Impact Assessments (EIAs), ukutholakala komhlaba ngelungelo lomzila, amanzi kanye nezimvume zomhlaba omatile - azizange zilandelwe ngokubhekelea okunobuhlakani kanye nomfutho.'

Ngonyaka ka2008 ngesikhathi ukudwetshwa kwepayipi elisha sekwamukelwe, ukwehluleka kweTransnet (ngamazi kaGigaba) kwakubhekelelwa nguNgqongqoshe Wezemisebenzi Yemiphakathi uAlec Erwin, indoda eminyakeni emine ngaphambilini eyayiphumelele ekuxhasweni ngumquluwe Foreign Affairs ( okuyilona izwi elihamba phambili kwisizinda sokubusa amanye amazwe ngokusabalala saseMelika) ukuthi abe ngumqondisi-jikelele weWorld Trade Organisation, nguRamos, futhi kwathi emva konyaka wethiwa iphephabhuku iFortune (uRamos) njengowesifazane wesishagalolunye onamandla kakhulu emhlabeni wonke futhi manje ohlola ibhange lesibili elikhulukazi kulelizwe (iABSA eyingxenywe yeBarclays).

Ngamanye amazwi, lokhu kwakungekhona ukwehluleka ngamazinga obuholi, kwakungokuqhubeka kwendlela yokuhlukunyezwa kwezemvelo kanye nezenhlalakahle ngezinye zezikhulu ezihlala phambili eNingizimu Afrika. Uma-nje ngingasho-nje, abazange babhekane nalokhu kwehluleka kulonahlelo noma projekti enkulukazi eyake yenziwa yiTransnet. UErwin kanye noRamos bayingxenywe yabanye abaphathi abambalwa bokushintsha kombuso wezomnotho wakuleli eNingizimu Afrika ukuthi kube ngowobungxiwankulu ngesikhathi seminyaka kaMandela benoMbeki (yena uErwin wayengungqongqoshe wezokuhweba, bese kuthi uRamos abe ngumqondisi-jikelele wezemizali), kodwa umonakalo abawenza ubonakala kakhulu ezindaweni eziningi kuleli, okumbandakanya nalapha KwaZulu-Natal.

Futhi bona oErwin, noRamos kanye nabanye abaphathi baseTransnet

abazange babhekane nokushayisana okusabalele phakathi kwezimbongi ezakhayo ngesikhathi kwukhishwa amathenda ngababezozuza ngalelipayipi elisuka eThekwini liya eGoli. iGroup Five Engineering. Ziningi izinhlelo zeTransnet ezahlangabezana nezinkinga ngokungafanele okwenyukela ngamaphesenti angamashumi amahlanu futhi ngalokho kubongwa lokhu kungaboni ngaso linye. Ukuxhaswazwa okwenziwa yizimbongi kwalendlela kunomthelela kwisizwe sonke, ngisho nabacebile.

Empeleni, okusanda kwenzeka okuyicala eHillcrest eGreenvale Village esakhiweni esicvikelelekile, esakhiwa emva konyak aka1965, lapho umzila wepayipi leTransnet wadlula khona noma kwakukhona ukungazibusi okusuke eminyakeni eminingi edlule. IGrenvale iziqhayisa ngezakhiwo zezindlu ezinkulukazi, futhi esinye isizathu esenza lendawo ithandekile ukusondela kwayo (ngamakhilomitha mathathu) kwizikole ezibiza izambane likapondo zaseThekwini. Lendawo yezicebi, nezimoto eziphambili kanye nomhlaba ovundile kusukela eAssagay kuya eKloof, ngempela uyindawo lapho kukhiqizwa khona ababusi bendawo, njengoba kwenzeka nasezindaweni ezinjengaseMhlanga, eNtshonalanga neTheku kanye naseGlenwood.

Kwakusezindaweni ezinjena, lapho, iSDCEA ngokushaya emhloveni ngonyaka ka2008 yasho ukuthi ukungacopheleli kweTrnasnet kogcina kuvele obala: 'Akukho cebo eliphuthumayo elikhona mayelana nalelipayipi elikhona ngakho-ke labo abaphila kulomzila abanayo indlela abazi ukuthi kufanele benzenjani uma kunesimo esiphuthumayo nomangase kudaleke ingozi... Kungenzeka kube nabantu abahlala kulomzila walelipayipi elikhona abangazi ukuthi likhona, nokuthi ngabe lenzani kumhlaba walo kanye namanzi, nokuthi benzenjani umangase lelipayipi eselilidala lingase liqhume.'

Kulesisinda lapho kuvikelwa khona ingcebo yomntakabani, iqembu lezombusazwe elimaphakathi ngokuyela ngakontamolukhuni iDemocratic Alliance ilona elinedumela. Ikhansela lendawo liamaspilala eliyiciko lokukhuluma, uRick Crouch, ubonakala enodlame ngokuvikela izidingo zabantu bakulendawo, Njengoba ayechaza kwiphephandaba iMercury, 'Sekuphele unyaka sikhuluma ngaloludaba neTransnet. Bangiyisa kohlola ukuze bangikhombise ukuthi lelipayipi livikeleke kangakanani ukuthi libe seduze nalabo kunemizi khona yabantu. Kodwa ngaqhubeka ngaba nokungabaza.

### **Ukuhlala njalo ukungacopheleli kukaTransnet kanye nokumumatha ngokwedlulele**

Njengokuba kwakufanele (noma-ke uCrouch loluzwazi azigcinela yena), uTransnet futhi wawumbandakanywa nezinye izinhlekelele ezifanayo ngonyaka ka1998 kwathi ngonyaka ka2013 zenzeka kabili. URamos wajabulelo ukuxhaswa kwokwenziwa kwesincomo semboni futhi kubonakala sengathi wasevumela abaphathi ukuthi bangabhekeli ngokeanele izimo eziningi zezehlalakahle kanye nezemvelo. Njengoba omunye umnyombo oqhamuka eTrasnet watshela iphephandaba iThe Witness ukuthi: 'Akukona okokuqala lokhu kwenzeka. Eduzane nalapho kuqhume khona, ipayipi laqhuma [ngonyaka ka1998] futhi baxwayiswa ngokusebenzisa ipayipi ngengcindezi ephakeme. Umlando-ke uyaziphinda phinda.'

Ngonyaka ka2013, lelipayipi lavuza amalitha angu300 000 liters kwelinye lamaplazi obisi indawo engangehora uma usuke empumalanga neHillcrest. Lesisiphihli kusolakala sengathi safihlwa yiTransnet, kodwa savezela obala ubuthakathaka bepayipi elalijojekile ngesikhathi umsebenzi waseplazini elima. Kubeka umbono umqondisi wasegroundWork enye yezinhlangano ezizimele ehamba phambili mayelana nobulungiswa kwezemvelo, uBobby Peek wathi, 'Indaba yokuthi kwathatha uTransnet Pipelines amahora mathathu ukunqamula amafutha ayevuza okwakuqhamuka lapho laliqhume khona ipayipi kwakukhombisa khona ukuthi benze icala mayelana nezindlela abahlola ngazo ukuvikeleka kwezinqubo zabo nokubhekana nalesisimo esiphuthumayo ngokushesha okukhulu.'

Mase futhi kubhekwa ngokuphikisana nalokhu, ngokuqhosha kwewebsite kahulumeni, 'iTransnet Pipelines ihlale ihlola isithunzi sabaxhumana mayelana nnalelipayipi. Ukuhlolwa kwamathuluzi angaphakathi, okwaziwa njengamaIntelligent Pigs, kuyizinto ezibalulekile kulomsebenzi. Bangasebenzisa amathuluzi okubamba ukubhekelela kanye nokuqopha

izindawo okungenzeka kube khona ukulahleka kwezinsimbi ngenxa yokushayisana noma uikuphi okungadala lokho. Imiphumela yokuhlonza okusanda kwenziwa yiIntelligent Pigs ukuthi imizila yamapayipi, evikelekelwe ekusahyiseni ngeelectrolyte, kujwayele ukuba sesimweni esihle.’

Kulungile-ke, akusolwe ukubola komzila wepayipi okubonakala sengathu kuyimfucuza yamaUnintelligent Pigs.

Kodwa uTransnet futhi nawo ufanele ukusolwa noma kungabhekene nakho ngqo ngokuhlaselwa okwehlukile okwenzeka eHillcrest ngenyanga kaMandulo ngo2013. Amakhilomitha ambalwa usuka eGreenvale Village uma uya emgaqweni oya eThekwini, umshayeli uSanele May waphulukudlelwa yitrukhi ayeyishayela ngesikhathi ehla ngalomgwaqo owehlelayo kuFields Hill kuthelawayeka uM13. UMay wakhwela amakhumbi amabili athutha abantu kwisibhicongo esabulala abasebenzi abamnyama abangamashumi amabili nane emva kokuba amabrakes avele ahluleka.

Emasonwteni ayisithupha edlule, lesisakhamuzi saseSwazini esineminyaka engu23 esikuleli ngokufika savuma ukubulala abantu ngokungenhloso, ngokungena eNingizimu Afrika ngokungemthetho, ukuba nencwadi zokushayela ezingekho emthethweni, ukusebenzisa isithuthi ngaphandle kwemvume esemthethweni yokushayela, kanye nokwahluleka ukuhlonipha uphawu olulawula ukushayela emgaqweni. Kodwa imboni owakuyiyona abanikazi becontaniner - okuyimboni enkulukazi yesine ngezokuthutha ngemikhumbi emhlabeni wonke, iEvergreen - kanye neSagekal Logistics imboni yetrukhi eyayiqashe uMay futhi yamgqugqzela ukuthi angahambi ngomgwaqo okhokhelwayo okuN3 (ngoba ukubhaliswa kwetrukhi kwase kuphelelwe isikhathi) futhi bona bazange bashushiswe, kodwa bebe nabo benecala, ngendlela ababeqhuba ngayo.

Izinkinga ezibhekene nenyakanyaka mayelana nezokuthutha azikaxazululwa, futhi isizinda sakuField’s Hill siyaqhubeka nokuba indawo lapho kuhlale kunezinhlekelele zezingozi zamatrukhi. Lokhu kukhombisa ubungozi obukhona lapho, emva kuka1994, uhulumeni kanye nohulumeni bavumela ukushenxa amacontainer amade ngamamitha ayisithupha ukuthi asuke kumzila wezitimela angene emigwaqeni. UTransnet awunazwelo mayelana nezidingo zabagibeli baseThekwini, ukuthi kube izindlela ezincane zokulawula izindlela zokuvikela noma ukuguquguquka kwesimo sezulu.

Esikhathini esingangonyaka esedlule, iphephandaba iBusiness Day yashicilela ukuphika kweTrasnet kwikhasi lokuqala ngenxa yokuthi lesisikhondlakhondla sanqaba ukwamukela umbiko wokuqala weEIA wokwandiswa kwechweba laseThekwini. Ngenyanga kaNhlangulela ngonyaka odlule, ukubuyekezwa kweEIA kwalembni kwaqinisekisa ukungabi namdlandla kwayo ngokunyuka kwamazinga olwandle, nejngoba abasebenza nabo waseKapa (iZAA Engineering Projects) yahluleka ukuhlaziya isifundo esenziwa Inhlango Yezizwe. Kanti-ke futhi, iSDCEA yakwazi ukugxeka ngokuthi lesisimo siyoba nomphumela omubi kakhulu.

Lesisikhondlakhondla sisasekuqaleni kumalungiselelo okususa amacontainer kusukela emigwaqeni kuya emizileni yezitimela esajamile. Umphumela owodwa walobubuvila ukuthi ngonyaka ka2011, kwaba khona izinhlekelele ezingu7000 zokushayisana kwamatrukhi okwaholela ekutheni kudlule imiphumelo engamashumi ayisikhombisa eThekwini-nje kuphela. Kodwa kusukela kuqala ukwenziwqa kabusha kwemigomo eyayilawula ngesikhathi sobandlululo, abathuthela izimpahla zangaphandle beziletha kuleli sebakhe izindawo ezinkulu zokugcina izimpahla kanye nezinye izingqalazinda kothelawayeka bemigwaqo yaseThekwini, kangangokuthi ukushintsha kubuyelwa emzilweni yesitimela kunbonakala kuzoba nzima uma sekubhekwana nendlela ongxiwankulu abathutha ngayo.

Ngaphezulu kwalokho, esakhiweni saseThekwini echwebeni, iTransnet ihlele ukwandisa ngezigidigidi ezingu250 zamadola kulelichweba elikhona kanye nokumbiwa kwalo kulesisizinda lapho kwakuyindawo yokusuka nokufika kwezindiza, lokhu, ngokubuka kweNational Development Plan projections, kuyonyusa isibalo samacontainer kusukela kwizigidigidi ezingu2.5 kuleminyaka kuya kumacontainer ayizigidigidi ezingamashumi amabili ngonyaka ka2040. Noma ngabe-ke ukuqagela kushaya emhloneni noma akukhona, cishe wonke amacontainer azoqhubeka athuthwe ngamatrukhi.

Ngokuphikisana nalokhu, okuhle-nje ngomzila omusha wepayipi leTransnet ukuthi asemalwa amatrukhi athutha udizili kanye namafutha ngamatrukhi. Umzila omusha wepayipi uphindaphindeke kabili ngaphezulu mayelana nokumumatha amafutha, ngoba usebenzisa amaintshi angu24 (ngokuphindaphindiwe umzila omdala wepayipi), futhi enendlela enamandla yokumpompa okungathi, uma kungase kusetshenziswe ingcindezi kakhulu, kungenzeka ngokuphindwe kathathu isibalo sesifunda saseGoli -esinezakhamizi eziyizigidi eziyishumi nambili -okutholakala njalo ngonyaka uma kuqhathaniswa nalomzila oqhume eHillcrest.

Futhi ngokungakholakali, noma-ke, emva kokwenyuka kwango2012 ngamalitha ezigidigidi ezingu6.023 okwakuthwelwe kwimizila yamapayipi ahlanganisiwe amadala namasha aseThekwini kanye naseGoli (ukunyuka kwamaphesenti angu87 kusukela kumazinga angonyaka ka2010), isibalo esathwalwa ngonyaka odlule sasingamalitha ayizigidigidi ezingu5.340. Umcabango ngonyaka ka2006 kwakungukuthi ukusetshenziswa kwamafutha ezokuthutha kuyolandela uhlelo lwezomnotho olwaziwa nge'Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa', lapho ngonyaka ka2005 yabheka ukukhula kweGDP kwangonyaka kwamaphesenti ayisithupha kwesikhathi esisuka ku2010 kuya ku2014. Empeleni, iNingizimu Afrika yakwazi ukukhulisa ngamaphesenti angu2.5 eminyakeni emihlanu edlule.

Njengomphumela wokuhlenganisa ukusetshenziswa kwakhulu kwezimali mayelana nezinqalasisinda ezinkulukazi mayelana nemicabango engapheli yezomnotho wezwelonke. Ukwakha okunobuhlanya baseNingizimu Afrika ikona okwaholela ukuthi kungabikhona-nje ukwakhiwa kwezinkundla zebhola likanobhutshuzwayo ngonyaka ka2010 ngesikhathi seNdebe Yomhlaba (okumanje enze imali kamasipala iphelele kuzona ngenxa yokunakekelwa), kodwa nezikhumulo zezindiza ezintsha nezilungisiwe ezimumatha ngokwedlulele, isitimela esigijima kakhulu esabiza izigidigidi ezingu25 zamarandi iUgatrain esuka eGoli iya ePitoli (njengoba abagibeli bayo beyingxenywe yalabo abalindelwe ukuba basisebenzise), kanye nothelawayeka abazondwa kakhulu abakhokhelwayo esifundazweni saseGoli.

**Ukuyeka ukuthuthwa kwamafutha upetroli ngamatrukhi, kusetshenziswa amapayipi abekwe eduzane nalapho kwakhe khona abantu abamnyama abanhlwempu**

Njengoba kunokuchichima okukhulu okusobala kumzila wepayipi lamafutha elisuka eThekwini liya eGoli, isikhulu okuyisona esihamba phambili esilawulayo ngokusemthethweni kwisikhungo iNational Energy Regulator of South Africa (Nersa) esiholela kulokhu, uRod Crompton, naye wayigxeka iTransnet ngokungaqondi ukuthi kwakungani ukuchichima kwalomzila wamafutha kwaqala kwahluleka: 'Lokhu kuletha ukukhathazeka mayelana nombono wokumumatha kwepayipi elisha uTransnet alisebenzisayo.'

Isizathi esisodwa esijabhisayo ngalokhu kwenza, kusho uCrompton, ukuthi, 'Kusalokhu kubonakala kunethuba lokuthutha amaningi amafutha kusukwa emgwaqweni kanye nasemzileni wesitimela kuthuthwa ngomzila wepayipi.' Alikho ithuba elikhulu kangaka, ukuqiniseka, kodwa ayikho indlela engaphansi ehamba phambili ukuze kwenziwe inzuzo.

Lokhu mhlawumbe ngeke kube nequbekela phambili, ngoba uTransnet ulokhu uthi kufanele ukhokhise abantu imali enkulu ukuze ukwazi ukumelana nokukhokhela umzila omusha wepayipi, futhi ngenyanga kaNdasa ngo2014 wafuna ukwenyukisa ngamaphesenti angamashumi amabili kwinzuzo kulonyaka ozayo. UCrompton yena wayinyusa ngamaphesenti ayisihlanu. Lokhu kwakungeyona into engajwayelekile, ngoba ngonyaka ka2009, uTransnet wayefuna amaphesenti angamashumi nesikhombisa nane okuthi kunyuswe imali yomzila wepayipi kodwa iNersa kodwa yathi ayiyehlise leyomali ngamaphesenti ayishumi.

Kodwa-ke, kufanele kube sobala ukuthi loluhlelo lonke ludinga ukwenziwa kabusha, ngoba njengoba iSDCEA yakhombisa kudala ngo2008, 'Ukubiza kwamafutha akukhombisi ngempela okwenzeka emvelweni kanye nokubiza kokubakhona kwamafutha akukhombisi ukuncipha ukulethwa kwalomkhiqizo okulokhu kuya ngokuphela ngokuhamba kwesikhathi. Njengoba kungumkhiqizo okwazi ukuthi wenziwe kabusha, ukulethwa kwalomkhiqizo wamafutha kyokwehla kuthi ukubiza kwawo kunyuke futhi ngalesosikhathi iningi labantu lazabalaza ukuthi liwuthole lomkhiqizo.

Ukuba khona kwamafutha namhlanje ufanel ngabe kukhombisa impilo yawo engaqhubeki njengomsuka wawo.’

Noma ngabe amanani amafutha awa ngamaphesenti angamashumi amane ngo2014, isicelo senani eligcwele ukubhekana nokuguquguquka kwesimo sezulu kanye nokungcola komoya kulendawo kufanele ngabe kade kwenzeka. Kodwa loluhlobo lwempendulo enomqondo lubonakala kokucabanga kombuso waseNingizimu Afrika kanye noCrompton.

Emva kwalenhlekelele eyenzeke eHillcrest, omunye umbuzo obalulekile umayelana nokuphepha komzila omusha wepayipi -kuhlangene nesibalo esiningi samakhilomitha anqamula inngxenye yeningizimu yaseThekwini -njengoba abantu abaningi behlala lapho kuhamba khona lelipayipi. Njengoba uPeek ephawulile emva kokuchitheka kwamafutha okusanda kwenzeka, ‘Manje izakhamizi zaseNingizimu neTheku sezinomzila wepayipi elisha eduzane nemizi yazo. EHillcrest, amapayipi adlula ezinsimini ezinkulu futhi akude nemizi, kodwa eMbumbulu liseduze kwezindlu, phambi kweminyango yabantu.’

Kudala ngo1965, lapho umzila wamafutha wokuqala osuka eThekwini uya eGoli kwakuthiwe awakhiwe, insimbi ‘engcolile’ eyzisetshenziswa ‘yayihlanganisa nesulphur’ futhi yaba nenkinga ngokushiselwa okwakuhlanganisa ‘ukuhlephuka okwakudala ukukhulu kokukhathala kanye nokushayisana kwalapho kwakushiselwe khona.’ UTransnet wawusuyalela ukuthi kube khona uphenyo olwenziwa ‘izazi ezaziqhamuka emazweni aphesheya’ ezaqinisekisa ukuba khona kokukhubazeka okuningi kwepayipi elalenziwe ngaphambi kuka1970 elalisetshenziswa zase zigququzela ukuthi kube khona elisha elizosesthenziswa.’

Uma kunjalo, uma sekubhekwe lokhukuchichima okukhulu kumzila wepayipi elisha, kungani umzila omdala wepayipi wawusasetshenziswa ngoZibandlela mhlazingu23, ngisho nango2013 eMooi River? Ngokusho kukahulumeni kwiEnergy Security Master Plan ngo2007, ‘Uma sekuziwa ekutshalweni kwezimali kwizinqalasisinda eNingizimu Afrika ikakhulukazi kwimboni yamafutha, eminyakeni emihlanu ezayo, into eyodwa ebalulekile okufanele yenziwe ukuvunyelwa kwepayipi elisha elikahle ngokulingana, okufanele libe khona ngengxenye yesibili yango2010.’ Udizili wokuqala owahamba ngalomzila udlula eNMPP ngenyanga kaNhlangulana ngo2012, kodwa ukwahluleka ukwakha izizinda ezimbili zokumpompa -njengasesezindeni sechweba laseThekwini, ngenxa yokuxega kwamathangi -okwenza ukuthi ukusebenza kwepayipi likwazi ukumumatha amaphesenti angamashumi amahlanu, okudinga ukuqhubeka nokusetshenziswa komzila omdala.

Kodwa kubukeka sengathi uTransnet uthole izwi eliqhamuka kubaphathi bomzila wepayipi ukuthi akukho nkinga mayelana nomzila wepayipi elikhona njengamanje. Ungcweti wezinqalasisinda wasePricewaterhouseCooper uGeorg Hofmeyr watshela iFinancial Mail ngonyaka odlule, ngokusho kwaleliphephabhukua, ‘Ukuhlolwa komzila wokuqala wepayipi wakhombisa ukuthi lisesimweni esingcono kunengendlela okwakucatshangwa ngayo, futhi izinto zokwehlisa ukuthatha zaletwa ukunyusa ukumumatha.’

Ukugcwalisa kweEIA ng2008 kumelene nomzila omusha wepayipi leTransnet. iSDCEA yaqhamuka nokugxeka okumbalwa ezimbalwa, okumbandakanya ukuthi ukuhambisa ngomunye umzila ‘kwakufana nobandlululo ngezemvelo lapha eNingizimu neTheku esesikujwayele’; ukungabikhona ngokwanele ukungenelela komphakathi; izizathu ezingathembekile zokwakha lomzila wepayipi; ukuhluleka kukahulumeni ukuvimba, ukusola kanye nokulawula ukuvuza komzila wepayipi; kanye nokuguquguquka kwesimo sezulu. Ngokusho kweSDCEA, ‘Umzila wepayipi uzofaka engcupheni abantu mayelana nokuvikelela kwezemvelo kanye nezinkinga zezempilo (okwaziwa kakhulu yizisulu zezingcibilikisi zamafutha eNingizimu neTheku), ngendlela ekhombisa ukubandlululwa ngamazanga okuphila kanye nangebala.’

Ukuchitheka kwamafutha kuba nomthelela omubi kakhulu kubantu absondelene nalapho kusuke kwenzeke khona lomonakalo, uD’Sa wazixwayisa izakhamizi zaseHillcrest: ‘Izifundo zezempilo ngo200 nango2007 zathola ukuthi ukuphafuka kwezisisi ezingcolisa umoya okuqhamuka ezizindeni noma ezimbonini zamafutha kanye

namakhemikhali kwenza ubungozi bomdlavuzwa bunyuke ngezikhathi ezingamakhulu amahlanu kunokujwayelekile (oyedwa enkulungwaneni - 1:100 000) (nokuthi amaphesenti angamashumi ayisikhombisa nesihlanu emidlavuzwa eNingizimu neTheku adalwa ukuphumela kwamakhemikhali aqhamuka ezimbonini zamafutha kanye namakhemikhaliand.’

Obunye ubungozi kwezempilo obulethwa ngamafutha ukusetshenziswa kwawo ezimotweni, ikakhulukazi lokhu okuyisimangaliso okwenzeka eGoli kusukela njegoba umoya omningi obukeka umuhle ongcoliyayo uqhamuka kothelawaye bemigwaqo kanye nokuthi izakhamizi eziningi ezihlala emalokishini abamnyama zisasebenzisa amandla kagesi angcolile. Njengoba iSDCEA yahso ngo2008, ukungcola komoya ‘kuyiqhutshezwa ngamafutha kanye nokunye okusabalaliswa kulendawo ngumzila wamafutha wepayipi likaTransnet. Futhi ukuqagela kweTransnet mayelana nokudingeka kwamafutha ezokuthutha kwahluleka ukusho izimo nngokuqondile ngokuzibana nezino eziqhamuka ngaphandle njengozinga elimbi kakhulu lomoya.’ Ngenyanga kaMbaso ngo2014, Inhlango Yomhlaba Yezempilo yaqinisekisa lokhu kwesaba, kumbiko okwaphawulwa ngawo Goli mayelana nalezizindaba enokuphindaphindwe ngeshumi ukungcola komoya njengokuvumelekile, okubeka iGoli libe sezingeni elilinganayo neChina mayelana namazwe anomoya abangcole ngokwedlulele.

Amafutha maningi aya eGoli adinga ukucwengwa eNingizimu neTheku, isizinda lapho ezemvelo zakulendawo vele isigcwele ukungcoliswa izisisi, iSDCEA yathi: ‘Isizinda lapho kunechweba laseThekwini, siyazabalaza ukubhekana nobuningi bokungcola komoya okusuka echwebeni kanye nezinye izezo ezenziwa khona, imifudlana esinelazezisi kanye nokungenelela kwamanzi adalwa izikhukhula. Ukunetshwa kuyodinga ngokudlulele ukuthi kususwe eminye imikhiqizo yemvelo, okuyobuyele kwehlise ukusebenza ngokwanele kwalendawo yezemvelo vele esisengcupheni.’

Ukungcola komoya okusabalele emhlabeni wonke futhi kwakhulunywa ngakho ngenkathi kumbono weSDCEA ngo2008: ‘Ukunyuka kokuphafuza kwesisisi icarbon eyaziwa ngeCO2 okuyodalwa ngumzila wepayipi kukhulu, futhi kubalwa yiuDraft Scoping Report yeEIA njengenkinga yezomthetho, noma-ke ingekho imininingwane ecacisiwe.’ Emva kweminyaka emithathu, sekuphela unyaka ka2011, iSDCEA eyayibhekelele izishoshovu ezazifikele kuleli ngesikhathi sengqungquthela yomhlaba mayelana nesomo sezulu seNhlango Yezizwe kanye nomholi wayo uDesmond D’Sa bahola imashi yabantu abangu10 000 ababebhikilishela okubuzwa ngokuthi Ingqungquthela Yabangcolisi Bomoya phecelezi ‘Conference of Polluters.’

#### **Ukwehlisa isidingo - noma ukunyusa ukuletha lomkhiqizo noma ukuhambisa ngenye indlela umzila wepayipi**

Njengoba iSDCEA yakhononfa ngo2008, ‘Asikholelwa ekutheni iTransnet kufanele ingixabezwe ngokuthi ivunyelwe ukufaka umzila wepayipi elisha ngesikhathi ingakwazi ukulawula kahle leli elikhona.’ Ngabe, kwwakumele kwenzekeni kusaqala unyaka ka2008, njengoba uTransnet walungiselela ukucelela ipayipi futhi nagesikhathi lapho ukunqamuka kukagesi kwakuqala kwasabalal eNingizimu Afrika?

Ukucabanga kabusha kwakungenzeka ngoba ngenyanga kaNhlolanja ngo2008, izinqalazizinda eziningi zase zizogcwala. Usihlalo weStandard Bank, uDerek Cooper, futhi wabonisa uMbeki ukulawula ukulethelwa kwamandla akagesi wamanani aphantsi kakhulu kwimboni iBHP Billiton. Ngamazwi akhulunywa ngusihlalo weBHP eNingizimu Afrika uVincent Maphai, owayekhona kulowomhlangano, uCooper wayekholelwa ‘indlela esheshayo kwisixazululo kwinkinga yethu yamndla kagesi ukuthi kwakungaba ukuvala isincibilikisi saseHillside eRichards Bay, ukubonisa uMaphai akuphikisa kakhulu, esabisa ngokuqeda ubudlelwano balemboni kanye nebhange.

Kodwa lomqondo awuzangwe uyekwe, njengoba umbhali ngezezimayini uMichael Coulson waqinisekisa ngenyanga kaNhlangothi ngo2008 ethi: ‘Iqiniso ukuthi izincibilikisi zealuminium, ikakhulukazi ezweni elinengenayo imikhiqizo yokuzimilela, ibauxite -okungenye yemikhiqizo esingenayo kwisizinda sethu esicebile esikhiqiza okumbiwa phansi -lokhu kuyindlela elula yokuthuthela emazweni angaphandle amandla kagesi. Akudali imisebenzi eminingi, futhi nokutshalwa kwezimali umsebenzi ngamunye kukhulu kakhulu. Kwakungumkhiqizo esasingakwazi ukuwukhokhela

ngeminyaka yama1980s, kodwa manje sekuyimikhiqizo edla kakhulu ibali kunokungenisa inzuzo futhi edla kakhulu amandla kagesi okungabayizinto ezingasetshenziswa ngokunomphumela kwezinye izindawo. Mayelana namandal kagesi wodwa, isincibilikisi se-aluminium sidle kakhlu ugesi ngokulinganayo kanye nedolobha ububanzi balo obuphakathi nendawo.’

MNgo2009, mayelana nokwakubonakala njengendlela yokumemezela yokugxeka enokucophelela eyayivela kwilusha lukaKhongolose ukuthi izimboni zekombiwa phansi zilawulwe ngumbuso, isekela lomholi weNhlangothi Yamakhomanisi aseNingizimu Afrika (futhi owayeyisekela likangqongoshe) uJeremy Cronin wavuma wathi: ‘Ukuhlaziya ngezindlele eziyiqiniso ezingakhiqiza kabusha ezwei elingathuthukile kakhulu lakithi, kufanele nakanjani lisiholele ekumemezeleni ukusetshenziswa kabusha kwezizinda zamandla kagesi, ukuze kuqedwe izincibilikisi ze-aluminium, knaye futhi nokulawula kabusha ngumbuso kweSASOL.’

Ngo2012, ngesikhathi imali eyayikhona isincipha kakhulu futhi, uEskom waqala ukukhokhela izincibilikisi ukuthi zivale, kwagcinwa amamewatts angu500 kamandla kagesi. Izimboni ezingu140 eNingizimu Afrika ezisebenzisa kakhulu amandla kagesi angamaphesenti angamashumi amane. IBHP-nje iyodwa isebenzisa phakathi kwamaphesenti amahlanu kuya kwayishumi kamandla kagesi lokhu futhi kuncike kwizinzuzo etholakalayo emaketheni lapho kwenziwa khona inzuzo.

Ngesinye isikhathi kuye kuze kudaleke inking ukubhekana nokucabanga nokuthi amandla ethu siwabhekisa kwenye indawo. Umangabe lelizinga lokucabanga kabusha mayelana nokusetshenziswa kwamandla kagesi aseNingizimu Afrika kwakungenzeka (futhi okudingekayo njengoba ukunqamuka kukagesi futhi sekuzoqala phansi), kungani njani uma singacabanga kabusha ukuthutha imikhiqizo yamafutha eGoli siyithuthe ngemikhumbi?

Empeleni ngo2005, kwakunokusweleka okukhulu kwamafutha eGoli kanye naseKapa -kodwa njengoba-ke uEskom kanye namandla kagesi, esikhundleni sokugququzela ukuphila ngomqondo mayelana nezomnotho, ukugcinwa kwemikhiqizo engumsinsi wokuzimilela kanye nezokuthutha imiphakathi, umphumela waba ingcindezi enkulu yokunyusa ukulethwa kwamafutha, ikakhulukazi kumzila wepayipi yamafutha osuka eThekwini uyaEgoli.

Usaqal u2008, kwakunemizila emili eyayiphambili:

- okokuqala, ukubhekelela kabusha ukubiza kwendawo yaseGoli njengelinye lamadolobhakazi elinezimboni kakhulu eAfrika, kanye nokusabalalisa izenzo zomnotho ukwenza kangcono uyisa kwezinye izindawo kwizizukulwane zangomuso ukuthi zibe seduze nezidingo ezifana namanzi; noma
- okwesibili, kalula-nje kuqhutshekwe nokugququzela ukusetshenziswa okungenamkhawulo, ukusabalala kwezindawo zezakhamizi ezidla izambane likapondo, ukukhula kwesizinda sezimali eSandton (njengesithuthi sezomnotho waseGoli) kanye nezinye izindlele zokuthuthukisa okucekela phansi, ngokusabalalisa ukulethe.’

Lokho kuyohlenganisa izinhlelo ezinkulukazi ukulethela abathengi baseGoli amandla kagesi ngokwengenziwe (okusuka ezizindeni ezintathu ezintsha zamandla kagesi eziphehlwe ngamalahle0, amanzi (azodlula emadamini amasha aseLesotho) kanye nezokuthutha (isibonelo-nje ukwenziwa kabusha isikhumulo sezindiza iOR Tambo Airport kanye nesitimela iGautrain kubagibeli abayizicebi).

Kusukela lokhu okwesibili kukhethiwe, umbuzo olandelayo kwakungabe uhlelo lwenqalasisinda eyodwa enkulukazi ngalesosikhathi, umzila omusha wepayipi likaTransnet, kufanele udlule lapho kunemizi khona yezakhamizi ezimhlophe kanaye nabanikazi bamapulazi, noma esikhundleni salkho, ezakhamizini ezimnyama ngaphansi kwesithupha noma kwengcindezi yamakhosi endabuko noma abezombusazwe beqembu elibusayo.

#### **Lokho okungekho emehlweni abantu**

Lomzila wokugcina iwona owakhethwa. Isizathu esisodwa ukuthi kwakunokuphikisana okwakhishelwa ngaphandle ngokumbiwa okusha eduzane nomzila wepayipi elalikhona. Eduzane naseHillcrest, ngokusho

kwababesebenzisana noTransnet, iZitholele, 'Abanikazi bomhlaba baseAssagay bazwakalisa ukukhathazeka kakhulu' ngoba 'Umonakalo owawungase wenzeka kwakhiwa kanye nomphumela kuMzila OseNyakatho ubonakala uzoba mubi kakhulu endaweni yase- futhi umphumela kube ukuphazamiseka ekuhwebeni ngamashashi.' (Ipheinti elilodwa labaseNingizimu Afrika lidinga amashashi ngokuzijabulisa noma ngokukloloda.)

Omune wezishosho ezinemiphumela kwezikwenzayo eHillcrest kwakunguLilian Develing, owayehola iCombined Ratepayers' Association eThekwini. Wezwakala exwayisa ukuthi lomzila vele okhona wepayipi leTransnet owawakhiwe ngaphansi komhlaba uyavuzisa: 'Bathatha isikhathi eside ukwazi lokhu, benza umonakalo ekudleni kwemfuyo, futhi izilwane kwafanele ukuthi zisuswe.'

Ezinye izzithathu ezashiwo iZitholele mayelana nokujika indlela ipayipi elalihamba ngawo ukuthi lithuthele eningizimu kwakumbandakanya ezemvelelo, ezolimo kanye nendawo evulelekile yomphakathi. Kodwa ngaphandle kwaseThekwini, ukuba ngaphansi kwabanye kwinxgenye ende yomzila omdala wepayipi - kusukela eMerrivale, kuya eCedar's Post kudlule eMgeni Valley Nature Reserve - kusetshenziselwa ipayipi elikhulukazi, kodwa ngaphandle kokuba nandaba nalokho.

Indlela yeNIMBY yezicebi eziwumphakathi waseHillcrest iyona eyaba isizathi esiphambili. Njengoba uPeek asho ngesikhathi kuchitheka amafutha ngenyanga kaZibandlela ngo2014, 'Izakhamizi zaseHillcrest zazingawufuni umzila omusha wepayipi endaweni yazo, ngakho-ke zalwa futhi-ke uTransnet wavele wanquma ukuwususa.'

Kanye nePeek, uD'Sa waklonyeliswa ngeGoldman Environmental Prize ngobushosho (ngo1998 nango2014, ngokulandelana kwabo), futhi kwinkulumbo kulelisonto wayedinwe eqhuma: 'Ukwenza kwabamhlophe ngenxa yokuthi banezimali ikhona okwaholetela ekutheni umzila wepayipi elisha ushintshwe. Ngisho naseNingizimu neTheku ngalapho kuhlala khona abanye abantu abamhlophe, umzila wepayipi awusondeli nhlobo eduze kwezindlu zabo.'

Kodwa, eqhubeka, abasebenzisana neTransnet baseduzane bona bathola kalula ukungenelela ezizindeni zezakhamizi ezimnyama: 'Amakhansela kaKhongolose kanye namakhosi kulezizindawo ezibhekene nalengwadla yomzila wepayipi elisha ibona abdayise ngabantu. Batshela bonke abantu ukuthi kuyodaleka imisibenzi kulezizindawo. Amakhansela avimba ngisho nathi ukuthi sikhulume nabantu kulezizindawo. Babengabagcini balezizindawo. Nabo kufanele basolwe. Kanye namanye amaqembu athatha imali eqhamuka kwiTransnet kufanele asolwe.'

#### **HEL - or HE? (PHECELEZI NIMBY AND NOPE)**

Kwaba khona ukumelana nalokhu okuncane owkavela eNingizimu neTheku, ukuqinisekisa, Ngenyanga kaNcwaba ngo2010, izakhamizi ezimnyama zaseAdams Mission zaphikisana namakhosi ayishumi nanye esivumelwano ayeqhamuka kuTransnet akuthi abuswe futhi elinye ilunga eliyisakhamuzi elalidinwe liganwe unwabu lakhononda ngalokhu kwakhiwa: 'Izindlu zethu seziqala ukuqhekeka ngenxa yokuhlala kumbiwa uTransnet kufanele uthathe lamapayipi futhi uthole omune umzila okude kunamakhaya ethu.'

Izingxoxo zeHEL zidinga ukusetshenzwa kabusha. Njengoba noNaomi Klein esho mayelana nenkinga elethwa ukugugququka kwesimo sezulu, 'Lokhu kushintsha Yonke Into.' Umgomo wababusi kanye nezishosho ngokufanayo kufanele bazilungiselele ikusasa elingenaso isisisi secarbon. Inkulumbo elungele lokho ukuthi simbuze mayelana nokusetshenziswa ngokwedlulele kwemikhiqizo yemvelo yokubasa, ikakhulukazi okudlula kumzila onobungozi futhi obiza ngokwedlulele, ukulibaziseka kwawo ekwakhiweni onomphumela wokusetshenziswa kwepayipi elisakhona ngale kuze kudlule isikhathi ebesibekiwe.

Okungekho izinkulumbo mpikiswano kanye nezindlela zokufaka ingcindezi ezibhekelele 'hayi umzila okude nemizi yethu' (noma ngabe iliphi ibala noma izinga lokuphila) kodwa esikhundleni salokho indlela ehlukile yezomnotho kanye nedlela yokuthutha engancikile kumandla emikhiqizo yezemvelo, ngakho-ke esikhundleni sokunyusa ukuletha komkhiqizo, akufunwe ezinye izindlela eziseceleni zokulawula eziholela lapho uzozua

ukugcinwa kwezemvelo.

Indlela eyodwa yokwenza lokhu eyokuhlanganisa ezombusazwe zemiphakathi zisuke kwiNIMBY zisondelele kwezenhlalakahle-zemvelo, kanye nokufaka imizimba hayi-nje efana nemibhalo yeEIA kodwa kuyiwe emigwaqeni kanye nasezindaweni lapho kuzovinjwa imizila yamapayipi afana nawakwaTransnet. Njengoba kubeka uKlein kwi 'Lokhu Kushintsha Yonke Into, 'Ukuvimba akukhona-nje endaweni ethile ekwibalazwe kodwa izindawo zokuvimba okusabalele emhlabeni wonke okubela ngesivinini esikhulu kanye nangokujula noma ikuphi lapho izinhlelo zokumba phansi zizama ukumba, noma ngabe imigodi evulelekile njalunjalo.'

Okokuqala, umangabe 'ukukhuluma ngokungacacile okwethenjwe kweNIMBY sekungasasebenzi' kumbuthano obhekelele ubulungiswa mayelana nesimo sezulu, ubanié ozoba ilunga laBavimbeli bakaKlein? 'Abantu abaphambili - abazogcwalisa imihlangano ebizwe ngamakhansela, ukumasha emadolobheni amakhulu, ukufakwa emavenini amaphoyisa, ukubeka imizimba yabo phakathi kwezokuthutha ezigudluza umhlaba kanye nenhlabathi - lokhu akubonakali kakhulu njengendlela izishoshovu ezijwayele ukwenza ngayo, noma futhi abantu absesizindeneni esisodwa Sokuvimba abazokwenza ngendlela efanayo nabakwesinye isizinda. Kodwa, zonke lezizindawo zifane nalapho behlala khona, futhi bafana nalabantu abahlala kulezizindawo: abanikazi bezitolo basendaweni, osolwazi basezikhungweni zemfundo ephakeme, abafundi basezikoleni zamabanga aphezulu, kanye nogog.'

NgokukaKlein. kubalulekile ukuthi abantu abahlanganisa izinto eziyizingo zabo ngokufanayo, ngendlela engakaze yenzeke phakathi kweHillcrest kanye neNingizimu neTheku: 'Okusobala ukuthi ukulwa nembali enkulukazi yezokumbiwa phansi uwedwa kubonakala kungenzeke, ikakhulukazi ezindaweni ezikude ezingenazo izakhamizi eziningi. Kodwa ukuba yingxenye yombuthano wezwekazi lonke, noma umhlaba wonke ezungeze imboni ngolunye udaba lolo. Ukuvimba kuguqula amatafula.'

Eqhubeka uthi, 'Lezizimboni zemikhiqizo yokubasa yemvelo. ngamagfushane-nje, awasabhekani nalawoqembu Amakhulu Aluhlaza (Big Green) akwaziyo ukuthuliswa ngokunikelelwa izimali ezinkulu noma ngokuthi kwenziwe izinhlelo zokugudluzwa kweisisi icarbon okubhekene nonembeza. Imiphakathi abhekene, ingxenye enkulu, hayi ukuthi axoxisane ngendlela engcono - mhlawumbe njengokuthi ithole imisebenzi, izimali eziphezulu, noma izindlela zokuphepha ezingcono. Ngokunyukela njalo, lemiphakathi kalula-nje ithi "Cha." Cha asiwufuni umzila wepayipi.'

Esikhundleni sokuthi HEL, isismemezelo esisha sithi kalula-je 'HE': HAYI EMHLABENI.

Ukuthi HEW kwenziwa iSDCEA kudala ngo2008, ngesikhathi isacabanga ukusetshenziswa kwezigidigidi zezimali nguTransnet kumzila wepayipi, kodwa lenhlangano futhi yamemezela isidingo esasibonakala sesikhashana esifushane senkulumo yeNIMBY: 'Cishe yonke idlela yaloluhlelo lwalomzila walelipayipi uphikisana nemizamo yezwelonke kanye neyomhlaba ukuthi kubhekwane nendlela ezogcina ezemvelo...Imali kufanele itshalelwe ekutholakaleni kwezinye izindlela yokulethwa amandla eGoli ngkusebenzisa amandla kagesi asetshenziswa kabusha, noma-ke ngalesisikhathi, ukuthuthukisa umzila omfushane, futhi ongabandlululi ngezemvelo- ukuze kulethwe amafutha kunokusebenzisa umzila odlula eningizimu.

Wawungekho umqondo kaHEW ngesikhathi iSDCEA iyothula inkulumo: 'Emhlabeni, ezesimo zezulu kanye namandla ezomnotho ziphushela kwindlela ezovikela amandla okubasa. Lokhu kuyogcina kubiza Iningizimu Afrika kakhulu ukulokhu iziba ukuthatha izinhlelo ezibhekelela ukunakekela ezemvelo ngoba uma silinda amashimi eminyaka ngaphambi ngokusebenzisa izibophezelo zeLong Term Mitigation Scenario, ushintsho ngeke lwenzeke ekugcineni.'

Ukuhlanganisa iNIMBY neHEW, sekuqeda Isdcea yathi, 'Umangabe umzila wasenyakatho utholakala ukuthi awamukelekile ngakho-ke umqondo womzila wepayipi kufanele uyekwe wonke. Izigidigid zamrandi kufanele isetshenziswe kumandla kagesi akwazi ukusetshenziswa kabusha kanye nezinye izindlela zokugcina. Lokhu kuyoba indlela enye engamukeleka

ngombono weSDCEA ngoba sibona ukuthi ukubakhona komzila wepayipi kuyoba nomphumela omubi hayi-nje kubantu baseningizimu neTheku, kodwa eNingizimu Afrika yonke, njengoba kuyimali enkulu kakhulu etshaliwe kuhlelo olushabalalayo lwamandla kagesi.’

Ikakhulukazi, ngokubeka umbono kweSDCEA: ‘Ukwenza kabusha umzila wepayipi elikhona ngokwandisa (esikhundleni sokuphinda phinda kabili ukumumatha), njengoba ukuligcina kudinga lokho, ukubeka kabusha ezinye izingxenye zomzila wepayipi, kusetshenziswa lomzila okhona kanye nokukhothama abanye ngenxa yebala, nokwakhwa izizinda zokumpompa, uma kudingeka. Ukwenyusa ukwenza kangcono ezokuthutha zemizila yezitimela kanye nezomphakathi eGoli, ukuze kutholwe abantu ngokwedlulele kanye nokukhipha lomkhiqizo emgaqweni ukwehlisa ukugcwala okudalwa ezokuthutha, ukushisa kwamafutha, ukukhiqizela umoya ongcolile emkhathini kanye nemiphumela yezempilo ehambisana nakho, ngokuqala izindlela zokuxhumana zokuthutha ukuthi kukwazeke ukuba khona okuphephile kanye nokungakhokheleka kwezokuthutha kwezitimela, okuxhumana namapaki nezindawo zokugibela kanye nemizila yamatekisi kanye namabhasi.’

Imaphi amathuluzi akhona? UKlein umemezela ukuthi kungabe kusatshalwa izimali kwizimbongi ezisebenza amandla kagesi emvelo. futhi nokuthi lelithuluzi ileli, elalisetshenziswa kumelenwe neTransnet yishosho ezaziphikisana nobandlululo ngeminyaka yama1980s, futhi elinamandla kakhulu.

Phela vele emva konke, uTransnet akaphilile ngezezimali. Noma-ke ngenyanga kaMbaso ngo2014 umbiko wonyaka wakhombisa inzuzo yezigidigidi ezingu5.2 zamarandi kwezentela yezigidigidi ezingu56.6 zamarandi. kodwa-ke iphephandaba iSunday Times yalilungisa lelophutha : ‘Eqinisweni imali eshiwoyo ihaba uma usubheka ukuncishiswa kokubuyekizwa kwezimpahla (zeTransnet), okwasiza ngokunyuka ngamaphesenti angu12.3 emaholweni ngapahmbi kwenzuzo, intela okuyikhona-ke okungathiwa ukunyuka ngamaphesenti angu25 kwenzuzo seyiyonke.’

Ngenyanga kaNhlanguvana ngo2014, isikweletu seTransnet sasifike kwizinga leBBB-, izinga elingaphezudlwana kwemfucuzo. Futhi kwaqhubeka kwaba khona izinkinga zezimali ngomzila wepayipi likaTransnet,’ kubika iphephandaba iBusiness Day, umphumela walokho kwaba ukwehla kwethemba kulemboni ukuthi ingakwazi ukwenza. Maphakathi nonyaka ka2013, ngokwesibonelo-nje, ngesikhathi uTransnet ehambisa izigidi ezingu750 zamarandi njengesibophezelo kubathali bezimali basemazweni aphesheya, kwakukade kucelwe izigidi ezingu122 zamarandi, okwenza leyomali igcinwe ingatholakalanga.

ISDCEA isabise uTransnet ngomkhankasela wokuthi iTransnet inswinywe ngezimali ngaphambilini, ngenxa yokwandiswa kwechweba lamafutha elidla izgidigidi ezingu250 zamarandi eNingizimu neTheku. Umkhankaso onjalo wokugcina owawuyenzile, usaqala unyaka ka2010, wadala ukuthi kucishe kube khona inkinga kaEskom ngoba ngesikhathi umkhankaso usuqalile, abanamashesha amakhulu beBhange Lomhlaba kusukela ezweni laseNorway kuya eMelika banqaba ukuxhasa imali enkulukazi yokubolekisa eyake yaba khona eyayenziwa yilelibhange: izgidigidi ezingu3.73 zamadola kwisizinda samandla kagesi aphehlwa ngamalahlale eMedupi, ngisho emva kwesicelo esasiqhamuka phezulu kulowo ngalesosikhatho owayengqongqoshe wezezimali uPravin Gordhan.

Inqalasisizinda yaloluhlobo, kubhala izazi zebalazwe oErik Swyngedouw kanye noMaria Kaika kumbhalo onobuyoninco kwilInternational Journal of Urban and Regional Research eminyakeni eyishumi nesihlanu edlule, sidinga ukunakekelwa ngokucophelela. Izinhlelo ezifana nemizila esuka eThekwini iya eGoli, ziywayelwe ukufihlwa, azivezwa obala, ziyicashiswa, ziphelele ngaphansi, zikhiywe kumapayipi kanye namakhebula. Iyona impela lendlela yokufihla eyenza ukuthi bube nzima ubudlelwane phakathi kwezemvelo kanye ndolobha futhi bungacaci, futhi okuholela ekwenzeni bucayi indlela yokushintsho ezenhlahakahle zemvelo uma kusukwa ekwakhiweni kwamadolobha. Mhlawumbe okubalulekile kakhulu, ukuhamba ngokufihla kanye nezobuchwepheshe kuthakathaka ubudlelwane bezenhlahakahle kanye nezindlela zamasemandlelni okubhaliwe futhi okufanele kwenziwe kuleminyakazo efihliwe.’

Kungumsebenzi wethu emphakathini, noma ngabe sikhala eNingizimu neTheku, eHillcrest, eGoli, noma phakathi nendawo noma kude ngaphesheya, ukuveza obala lobubudlelwano bamandla futhi bese sibucekela phansi, ngokuthemba futhi lokhu kwenzeka ngokushesha kakhulu kunomzila wepayipi leTransnet -emisha noma emidala -eqhubeka nokucekela phansi ekufanele icekelwe phansi.

*UPatrick Bond ungomqondisi eCentre for Civil Society esesikhungweni semfundo ephakeme eUKZN futhi ungumbhali wePolitics of Climate Justice.*

## Repression as big business in pre-Olympic Rio de Janeiro

Jason O'Hara 11 January 2015



Editor's note: For four years, Canadian documentary filmmaker Jason O'Hara has been working with communities in Brazil to document human rights abuses in advance of the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games, focusing specifically on the illegal forced evictions that have been taking place in Rio.

Now, with over 300 hours of unique footage documenting the evictions, protests and police brutality that have come to define the preparations in Rio, O'Hara has launched a crowdfunding campaign to realize a feature-length documentary, *State of Exception*, telling the essential and inspiring stories of community resistance at this critical moment in Brazil's history.

The circus has left town in Rio de Janeiro, which this past summer hosted the 2014 FIFA World Cup Finals as one of ten host cities for the tournament in Brazil. Next year, Rio will also host the 2016 Olympic Games, making it the first city in history to host the two mega-spectacles back-to-back.

As international tourists descended on Rio's iconic Maracanã Stadium to watch the final World Cup match in July, most Brazilians watched from television screens outside, while others took to the streets to exercise their constitutionally guaranteed right to protest. It was not mere opportunism that was bringing people to the streets, seeking to capitalize on all the attention garnered by the Cup – their grievances were very much tied to the international spectacle and the social legacy it will leave in their country.

When the circus leaves town, it is Brazilians who will be shoveling the shit for years afterward. It is very true that these events bring extraordinary benefits, but to whom are these benefits accrued? The benefits are privatized and profit an international elite – FIFA and the event sponsors – while the costs are socialized.

FIFA paid no taxes in Brazil, which made them compliant in one of the greatest heists in Brazilian history by the government upon its citizenry. "These projects, massive in their scope and scale, cost many billions of public dollars and leave behind ambiguous legacies. Nearly every global mega-event has resulted in financial losses for the host, temporary cessation of the democratic process, the production of militarized and exclusionary spaces, residential displacement, and environmental degradation," says event critic Helen Lenskyj.

### **Where is Amarildo?!**

The grievances being expressed in the streets are manifold: thousands of families forcefully evicted from their homes (often brutally, by riot police firing tear gas and rubber bullets); gross overspending on the stadium and other event-related infrastructure, while basic public services such as health care, education and basic sanitation are left unaddressed; and the militarization of the favelas in Rio, through the so-called favela 'pacification' program.

Initially, pacification brought much hope to communities that had long been suffering from the violence associated with criminal gangs and

militias. However, these hopes were dashed through egregious abuses by a new gun-toting gang perpetrating summary executions and disappearances, only this time the violence was officially sanctioned by the state.

One of the most notable examples of this new form of brutality is that of Amarildo Dias de Souza last year in the favela of Rocinha, whose case was only investigated after the international outcry following his disappearance. There was nothing particularly special about Amarildo's case — there have been thousands of Amarildos we will never hear about — but the timing of the incident coincided with one of the largest civil uprisings in Brazilian history (of June 2013), and the Brazilian people were fed up.

Another international media storm erupted in Rio in July, this time a gringo documentary filmmaker from Canada (me) was beaten up by a handful of police officers at a protest near Maracanã Stadium during the FIFA World Cup final. While the police have been beating, torturing, and disappearing poor favelados for a long time, on this occasion they had overstepped their duty and swung their batons at one of the international visitors they were tasked to protect.

The fact that this relatively minor incident garnered so much international media attention is emblematic of precisely the inequalities Brazilians were protesting against in the streets — the transformation of the urban landscape in Rio and throughout Brazil to serve people like me, international tourists and international capital, at the expense of the people who actually live there.

While the police repression we have been seeing in the streets of Rio during protests is shocking, it's a relative picnic when one considers the much worse lethal violence perpetrated by Brazilian police who kill on average five citizens every day. The vast majority of cases are not so much as investigated, let alone prosecuted, the culture of impunity runs deep among Brazilian policing institutions. The victims are almost always poor black favela dwellers. When a privileged white foreigner receives a mild beating at the hands of Brazilian police, it makes international headlines, whereas the same police carry out summary executions every day in the favelas with complete impunity.

Whatever the rhetoric about equality before the law, the value of a human life in Brazil is not universal.

### **The dictatorship's legacy**

While it's easy to dismiss my beating as an unfortunate incident perpetrated by a handful of 'bad apples', I think it is wise to take pause and consider the systemic context whereby the police are themselves victims of Brazil's oppressive political system under global capitalism.

They are pawns in the business of repression, most police are themselves favela dwellers who are poorly paid, poorly trained, and are (in most cases) pursuing a career in policing for lack of other opportunities — much like African-Americans in the United States, who are represented twice as much in the military as they are in the US population. This is not to dismiss the scandalous violence perpetrated by a handful of the police, but amongst any mass harvest (the 'thousands of new jobs created by the World Cup'), there are bound to be more than a few bad apples.

For the World Cup Finals, Rio saw one of the largest mobilizations of military and police forces in Brazilian history since the dictatorship, and it was not Brazilian citizens they were there to protect — rather, they were protecting FIFA and the associated interests of global capital. The police were sent to the streets to brutally repress and censor any dissidents who might spoil the party.

Theoretically, policing should be about citizen security. Unfortunately, in Brazil, policing institutions are a legacy of the dictatorship, at which time police were not tasked to protect the citizenry. On the contrary, their role was to protect the state from its citizens, the so-called 'internal enemy' — the political dissident.

And so, in the modern context, in the shadow of the dictatorship, the brutality we are seeing in the streets is a logical manifestation of this philosophy, without contradiction. The fastest growing category of international arms sales are not for fighting foreign enemies, but are used to repress and silence political dissent in many modern day 'democracies' like Brazil. It's difficult to raise one's voice when you are choking on tear gas.

### **Repression is big business**

One of the biggest players in this industry (Riot Control and Public Order Weaponry) is the Rio-based company Condor, which recently secured itself an exclusive \$22 million contract as part of the security budget for the World Cup and has expanded its business by 30% in the past 5 years.

Condor provides Brazilian security forces with 27 different categories of 'non-lethal' weapons of repression including rubber bullets, tear gas, tasers, light and sound grenades. Condor also supplied many of the weapons deployed in uprisings in Egypt, Turkey and Bahrain, where their products were repeatedly used against protocol and to systematically torture people.

The company has an exclusive deal with Brazilian Defense and Security Industries Association. "That means all public defense and security public institutions, such as the Brazilian police, may purchase without a government procurement process," says investigative reporter Bruno Fonseca.

Condor categorizes its products as 'non-lethal' despite a growing number of deaths of both protesters and bystanders as reported by the UN. The self-described categorization is important because it allows them to circumvent the Chemical Weapons Convention restricting the uses of toxic gases. Often classified as policing equipment, these weapons fall outside of arms sales restrictions and are thus mostly unregulated with hundreds of thousands of such weapons being funneled directly to Brazilian security forces without oversight. It appears that repression is good business in Brazil.

### **Exploit the many to comfort the few**

As most people watch the World Cup and Olympics from the comfort of their homes, in bars and restaurants in cities and towns across the globe, we should not forget the real cost of creating this spectacle – both the financial and social costs paid by Brazilians, who will be coping with the legacy of these events for years to come. The police sent to the streets for the World Cup were not serving Brazilians; they were serving FIFA, serving you, and protecting the status quo from the inevitable resentment that is going to boil up in host countries when the circus comes to town and doesn't consult or invite the people hosting the party.

The problem runs much deeper than the actions of a few bad apples. It is systemic and arises from the inherent dynamics of global capitalism. Events like the FIFA World Cup and the Olympics exemplify these dynamics. When FIFA and IOC come to town, a 'state of exception' is imposed, justified by the accelerated expediency required to prepare for such events. It is an exemplary legal framework that temporarily suspends the rule of law and strangles civil liberties such as the right to free movement and protest, among many others (such as housing rights in the case of the forced community evictions).

It might assuage our collective conscience to tell ourselves that our relative comfort is hard-earned through our own efforts, but such reductionist thinking dismisses the fact that much of our privilege rests on the backs of the global majority who constitute the oppressed classes of the world. From the shirts on our backs to the fantastic sporting events like the FIFA World Cup and Olympic Games, all are served to us through a global economic system that disenfranchises the majority to the benefit of the few. As consumers of these global spectacles, we are all implicated in this story.

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*Find out more about Jason O'Hara's upcoming documentary, [State of Exception](#), and support the project by visiting the [campaign page here](#).*

*Jason O'Hara is the founder of Seven Generations, a Toronto-based documentary production company committed to telling stories that inform and inspire, with a focus on themes of social and environmental justice.*