Justin Podur 20 December 2012

What constitutes a dictatorship? Haiti had an election in 2006, which the popular candidate won. It had an election in 2011, which had one of the lowest turnouts in recent history and which was subject to all kinds of external manipulation. Given these elections, is it unfair to call Haiti, a country that suffered 30 years of classic dictatorship under the Duvaliers from the 1950s to the 1980s, a dictatorship today?

When the institutions that govern Haiti today are examined, it is clear that the label ‘dictatorship’ applies. Haitians have no effective say over their own economic and political affairs. Their right to assemble and organize politically is sharply limited. Human rights violations are routine and go unpunished. Popular political parties are effectively banned from running.

How is Haiti Governed?
Since 2004, the armed force in Haiti has been controlled by the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, MINUSTAH. Haiti's police are trained, and effectively supervised, by a subset of MINUSTAH, a mission called CIVPOL (usually commanded by Canadians). The current president of Haiti, Michel Martelly, wants to bring back the Haitian Army, but when that army existed, it was also an instrument of another country (the U.S.) and its foreign policy – bringing back the Haitian Army would be no boost to sovereignty or democracy in Haiti.

Force is controlled from outside. What about finance? MINUSTAH has a budget of about $676-million. Since the 2010 earthquake, the big charities have spent about the same (around $600-million) in 2010 and 2011. Haiti's own government budget this year is based on $1.1-billion in aid and $1.25-billion in taxes. Perhaps most importantly, Haiti's economy is also supported by about $1.5-billion in remittances from the Haitian diaspora, year after year, one of the largest contributions to Haiti's $7.3-billion GDP.

These figures contain a few surprises. In terms of taxes and GDP, most of the contribution to Haiti's economy is by Haitians. Presented as an international basket-case, Haiti is actually more self-sufficient than its donors believe. And the aid – whether in the form of budget support, relief and reconstruction aid, or NGO expenditure – buys control. By contributing a fraction of what Haitians contribute, foreign donors purchase control over the direction of Haiti's economy, including the determination of an export- and foreign-investment driven model that keeps wages low and denies any protection to the country's agriculture, let
alone any local infant industries. Haiti's private sector is a subcontracting sector, featuring low-wage assembly plants and import-export monopolies, but little prospect of increasing productivity or long-term development.

Haiti's social services sector is controlled by non-governmental organizations. These NGOs are better described, using Peter Hallward's phrase, as “other-governmental,” since they are financed by, and beholden to, foreign donor countries. With daily welfare in the hands of a totally decentralized NGO economy, there is no prospect of any sort of national or regional coordination. This has real, and deadly consequences. Hurricane Sandy in 2012 provides an example. Cuba's early warning system and national government enabled that country to evacuate a huge hurricane-affected area before the storm hit, with hundreds of thousands of people being efficiently moved out of danger and back to their homes after the storm passed. With every NGO in the world, and half of the world's countries participating in MINUSTAH, the international community could not manage such an orderly evacuation in Haiti. This is one of the reasons Haiti, under international tutelage, loses more lives than sovereign countries do every hurricane season and why it lost more lives during the 2010 earthquake than countries like Chile or China (that were hit with severe earthquakes around the same time).

A final feature of dictatorships is impunity, a situation in which crimes committed by the regime go unpunished. There is now irrefutable scientific evidence that the United Nations brought cholera to Haiti, and that cholera has killed over 7500 people since it was introduced. MINUSTAH's initial position was to claim that there was no proof. Now that there is proof, MINUSTAH insists that it is not to blame because it was not done on purpose, even though no one ever claimed it was. But if the effective government of a country causes thousands of deaths and insists that no one is to blame, shouldn't it raise questions about how the country is governed?

**The Coup and Canadian Intervention**
The story of how Haiti's new dictatorship was imposed is also appalling. The MINUSTAH-international donor regime was imposed after the elected government was overthrown in 2004. That government, of Lavalas, saw its president, Jean Bertrand Aristide, kidnapped and flown to the Central African Republic, where he was held until he was basically rescued by an American delegation. The coup against the Lavalas government was accompanied by many claims that Aristide was a great human rights violator and participant in corruption. The factual basis for almost all of these claims has since collapsed, but the government that replaced Aristide engaged in real political cleansing, killing hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people since 2004, and the aid economy wastes
more money than most classic-mould dictators could dream of stealing.

The 2004 coup in Haiti followed a script, parts of which were used in 2002 in Venezuela (unsuccessfully), in 2009 in Honduras (successfully), and in 2012 in Paraguay (successfully). Studying the record of how the ‘international community’ has governed Haiti in the eight years since the coup should be important for those who are wondering where the next coups will be.

In 2005, a Canadian official told me that Haiti is a practice ground for how the ‘international community’ might handle the ‘Cuban transition.’ After securing key sites in Port au Prince to help the coupsters in 2004, Canadian missions have trained and supervised Haiti’s police throughout the worst periods of human rights violations since the coup. So when Canada’s minister of international cooperation Julian Fantino, a former police chief himself, went to Haiti at the end of November, it is perhaps unsurprising that he spoke about what Canada expects from Haiti: “The Government of Canada and Canadians expect transparency and accountability from the Government of Haiti given Canadians significant level of generosity. I will be expressing this expectation in my meetings with senior officials.” If only Haiti could expect the same level of transparency and accountability for what Canada has done in their country. Imagine how different the world would have to be for a Haitian to be able to say such words publicly.

When Fantino was in Haiti, I was on a book tour sponsored by the Canada Haiti Action Network (CHAN), a network that has tried to raise the issue of what Canada has been doing in Haiti since 2004 – tries to demand, in other words, some “transparency and accountability” from the government of Canada for its support of the coup and its role in post-coup governance. Mostly, crowds were small, but there were interesting people who found their way to events: the physio-therapist in Halifax who went on a two week medical mission only to discover that such missions aren't all that big a help and that the mission organizers made the medical volunteers afraid to leave their walled compound in Port au Prince; the young Haitians in Montreal who said it was refreshing to hear their own history told in a respectful way, as opposed to a contemptuous one; the black Canadian Forces soldier who answered an audience question about racism among international forces by telling a story of how French soldiers joked that Haiti needed to be recolonized by France.

In the 2004 coup, these kinds of people, people interested in helping Haiti, were the targets of propaganda. They were told that Haiti was faced with the stark choice between local corruption and international control. But the record shows that the government that was overthrown wasn't all that corrupt and that international control was a catastrophe. This is something
people who want to help Haiti badly need to know.

There are other ways, real ways, to help. The Cuban medical missions managed to train Haitian doctors and keep providing health care through every disruption; Venezuela provided oil at lower than the global market rate. NGOs like MSF and Partners in Health do great work in the health sector, and CHAN tries hard to stay in touch with grassroots Haitian organizations in the democratic movement. International solidarity, as opposed to aid, will require working around the structures of the dictatorship, something that can only be done if we see them for what they are.

www.zcommunications.org

Justin Podur is the author of Haiti's New Dictatorship (Pluto, Between the Lines, and Palgrave-Macmillan 2012).

The Insufferable Human Drama Of Evictions In Spain

Jérôme E. Roos 15 December 2012

With 500 families being evicted in Spain every day, foreclosures have become a source of great suffering. But luckily, there are still those who resist.

Throughout this crisis, there has always been a certain alienating quality to the pronouncements of European leaders and technocrats. Sometimes one is led to wonder if these people are actually talking about the same continent — or the same universe, for that matter. Just today, for instance, the European Central Bank announced that “the eurozone is starting to heal.” Indeed, the major weakness the central bankers could detect from the commanding heights of their glass-and-steel tower in downtown Frankfurt was “falling bank profits.”

But this morning, huddled together with activists and independent journalists in a small apartment in Madrid, the eurozone seemed to be far from healing. Together with Santiago Carrión from the Associated Whistleblowing Press, we were there because the Platform for those Affected by their Mortgage (PAH), which runs the Stop Desahucios (Stop Evictions) campaign, had called on the city’s indignados to protect Juana Madrid and her two daughters of 21 and 17, who were about to be evicted from their humble home in the poor neighborhood of Orcasur. The atmosphere, of course, was tense.
The living room was full of people, most of them photographers, while outside the first chants of activists could be heard as people prepared to physically block the entrance to the apartment. Nervously dragging on her cigarette, Juana’s baggy and dark-ringed eyes said it all: this was a woman on the verge of a breakdown. Her voice was calm and subdued, but her facial expression exuded despair. “We have nowhere to go,” Juana’s 21-year-old daughter Isa told us in the kitchen. “If they evict us today we will end up on the street tonight.”

Sadly, the story of Juana and her daughters is by no means an exception. Ever since the start of the crisis in late 2008, over 350,000 families have been evicted from their homes. According to government figures, Spain currently faces a staggering wave of 500 evictions per day — 150 of them in Madrid alone. The vast majority of these involve families whose main breadwinner lost his or her job in the recession and who have inadvertently fallen behind on their mortgage payments to the bank. At 25.02%, Spain’s unemployment rate is the highest in the developed world, higher even than in the U.S. at the peak of the Great Depression.

Recent months have seen a wave of high-profile suicides by people who were about to be evicted from their homes. The most paradigmatic case was that of a 53-year-old woman in the Basque Country, who jumped from her balcony and plunged to death as foreclosure agents made their way up the stairs of her apartment. The Wall Street Journal, meanwhile, tells the harrowing story of a Spanish locksmith who was taken aback when he pried open the door of a foreclosed apartment for police, and encountered a woman giving birth inside. According to the locksmith, it was “evident that the stress of the foreclosure had induced premature birth.”

Since then, a number of high judges have spoken out against the “inhumane” foreclosure laws in Spain, which they consider to be “overly protective of the politically influential banks”. Under immense media pressure, the conservative government finally passed an emergency law allowing the most vulnerable families to be spared from eviction. Still, the new law will only cover some 120,000 people and does not tackle the root of the problem, which is the fact that the government keeps squeezing workers, students, homeowners, pensioners and the sick and disabled in order to pay for the folly of a tiny elite of gambling bankers.

The human tragedy, after all, is only part of the story. The other part, as the Spanish indignados rightly point out, is the estafa: the fraud. Many of the mortgages that now shackle millions of families to unpayable debt loads, came about under highly dubious circumstances to begin with. The banks never cared if people would be able to repay their debts: as long as
house prices kept rising, a defaulting family could still be evicted and replaced by another. After the bank reclaimed the property, it could just re-sell it at a profit. The fact that lives are being destroyed and families shattered in the process is wholly irrelevant for the financial imperatives of the bank.

And thus, the people end up paying the banks triple: first through the usurious interest rates they pay on their mortgage loans (which are essentially conjured up out of thin air by the banks); second through the tax-payer-funded bailouts of the same banks, after many of these mortgages started going bad; and third through the homes they are losing and which subsequently fall back into the property of the bank, which can — a few years down the line, when real estate prices will have recovered somewhat — sell on the property to a third party.

Juana’s situation was a bit different, however. Unlike millions of others, who are being threatened by the bank because they are struggling to pay their mortgage, Juana did not even own a house: she lived in social housing. What’s more, she wasn’t even provided with a real reason for her eviction. Initially, on April 12 this year, she received a notice from the social housing office (IVIMA) that, because she had fallen into unemployment and was unable to pay her rent, she would be evicted — unless she immediately paid 1,250 euros in cash.

Within a matter of days, soliciting friends, neighbors and activists, Juana managed to secure the funds. But the people at IVIMA refused to accept it. In a second notice, they told her the real reason for her eviction was that they had received complaints from neighbors that she was a rowdy nuisance. Again, within a matter of days, Juana produced a document with signatures from virtually every person in her street attesting that she was a good neighbor and no one ever had any problems with her. And so again, the reason for her eviction shifted.

This time, the official reason Juana and her daughters were being evicted from their home was because Juana’s bike “scratched the walls of the staircase” when she carried it up into her apartment. According to Juana, this is blatantly untrue, but the broader point here is obviously the sheer absurdity of the official logic. As both Juana and PAH activists told us later, the real reason for the eviction is actually much more sinister. In fact, Juana’s eviction appears to be part of a massive privatization drive pushed through by the Rajoy government in order to pay for its 40 billion euro EU bank bailout. Apparently, even social housing is not immune to this drive.

Juana, assisted by a lawyer from the PAH, tried in vain to contact the social housing office, which simply refused to speak to her. Now the
reasons are clear. By forcing out families on the quasi-legal basis of nonsensical excuses, the city council can sell the houses on to third parties and make some much-needed money so Rajoy can continue to bail out the banks. In protest against this bizarre logic, Juana, in a state of total desperation, decided to stage a sit-in protest in front of the social housing office. But after sympathizers began to join her in front of the IVIMA office, police ordered the camp to be disbanded.

All of this underscores the fact that the European debt crisis, far from being resolved, is actually being used as an excuse to expropriate the homes of law-abiding families and engage in a massive redistribution of wealth towards a tiny elite of powerful bankers and privileged politicians. David Harvey, the famous geographer, coined a term for this: it’s called “accumulation by dispossession“.

Another way of putting it is to say that bankers and politicians are engaging in institutionalized theft. The capitalist class — obsessed as it is with the notion of private property — actually seems to care very little for personal belongings when that property is not its own.

The idiocy of Juana’s situation is clearly beyond words, and the sheer injustice of the evictions is so blatant as to render the story utterly incredulous. Yet it’s true. And it’s happening on a truly massive scale. Luckily, however, there are those who resist. Today, as the technocrats at the European Central Bank pretended once again that everything is under control, a few dozen indignant Spaniards came together and decided to take matters into their own hands. They occupied the doorstep of Juana’s home and refused to let police enter. And they won. Juana can keep her home. For now.

“Popular pressure has successfully paralyzed this eviction,” one lady of the PAH told the assembled press afterwards. “It’s a great victory, and we will keep on struggling. Unfortunately, however, it all comes too late for the lady who committed suicide this morning.” With a heartfelt sadness in her voice, she dedicated today’s success to Victoria Mesa, the 52-year-old who jumped from her balcony today after receiving a foreclosure notice in the mail. Swallowing back the tears, she lifted her hands towards the heavens. “I just hope she sees what we are doing here.”

Africa’s wealth and Western poverty of thought

A response to J. Peter Pham’s New York Times’ article on the Congo,
November 30, 2012
Toussaint Kafarhire Murhula, S.J. First Published in Pambazuka 13
December 2012

A recent article on the Congo replete with fallacies and half-truths is challenged by Toussaint Kafarhire Murhula, S.J., who argues it is time to end this Western poverty of thinking toward Africa and a promotion of Africa without Africans

Unlike in the past, the current situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) seems to capture both the media attention and scholars’ opinion and reflection in the West. This rise in interest and attention, however, is dubious for two reasons. First, the focus has been gradually shifting away from the alleged plausible causes of the enduring civil wars in the DRC to advocacy of quick fix solutions – like in Mr. Pham’s article of November 30 in New York Times. Second, few if any among these proposed sustainable solutions to Congolese crises show any concern regarding what the Congolese people think about their future, and how they feel about the present situation. The storyline often portrays DRC as a country that is rich in natural resources with a band of predatory chiefs who are fighting each other for control of the land to access these resources, but there are no people with faces, feelings, stories to tell and dreams to pursue. What kind of country could this be? Pham’s article that is replete, of erroneous and incomplete narratives, erroneous diagnoses and solutions ‘[to save the Congo’ by ‘[l]et[ing] it Fall Apart’, is the latest representation of this flawed advocacy with which take serious issue.

LET THINGS FALL APART (ILL)LOGIC
Specifically and to begin with, Mr Pham offers a cost-effective alternative to the squandering of international humanitarian resources that could be reallocated in a better way to relief and development, if the Congo were allowed to fall apart and to break into smaller states that would better governed. He views the UN Security Council’s support of the ‘sovereignty, independence, unity, and territorial integrity’ of what he characterizes as a fictional state as a costly in terms of lives and resources. While this proposal has some appeal because smaller countries like Rwanda and Uganda seem to be much better ran than the giant neighbouring Congo, the proposal is fallacious and too ideological. It not only fails to address the ethnic identity variable and the putative claim to state protection made by ‘Congolese’ Tutsi irrespective of the size of the country, but it also obfuscates the real underlying causes of the apparent grievances: political distribution of power and resources, territorial ambitions by Rwanda, and unfettered access to Congolese resources by Rwanda, Uganda, and their co-predators in DRC and their international sponsors in the West. The case of Southern Sudan speaks eloquently to
this argument. Thus, advocating for consolidation of democratic institutions, instead, would bear greater political value and economic returns to both the West and to Africans.

OMITTING THE ROLE OF IMPERIALIST SUPPORT
Secondly, the shallowness with which Mr Pham understands the history of the Congo is lamentable. Of course, one might argue that this is for the sake of brevity. Yet, again, the interpretation he makes of Congo’s political history as a succession of ruthless and predatory leaders fails to do justice to the Congolese people. For instance, the claim that ‘Congo’s mineral wealth has brought only an endless procession of unscrupulous ruler’ without mentioning the responsibility of those who have created and maintained in power these rulers (e.g. Mobutu, Tshombe, Laurent D. Kabila, Joseph Kabange Kabila) in spite of popular resistance and protests is another syndrome of colonial literature. One wonders why the key historic facts are omitted in Pham’s write up. As one Congolese voice once remarked, ‘Changes through democratic means and the rule of law in Africa are not as deserving of unequivocal support as changes through the barrel of a gun.’ (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2003)

A PEOPLE’S WILL IGNORED
Thirdly, Pham’s claim the international community has turned a blind eye to the reality of separatism in the Congo. I do not know from what reliable historic source he extracted this claim. Anyone who is familiar with the DRC’s political history (e.g. O’Brien 1966, Ndaywell 1998, Hochschild 1998, Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002) will wonder if this assertion is a scholarly blunder or an ideological and purposeful harkening back to Walter H. Karsteiner’s advocacy of the breakup of the Congo (1996; 1998). It is misleading to ignore that the Congo, as fictitious as it might be (just like most others in the world), has been able to maintain its unity against Rwandan and Ugandan military regimes’ balkanization at attempts since 1996. This is an eloquent testimony of its people’s strong collective will to remain one nation. To evoke the Katanga secession in the early days of independence as an illustration of the lack of unity and nationalism is to conveniently ignore the then pervading cold War politics, the Belgians mineral interests and the manipulation of Congolese leaders in Katanga (cf. O’Brien 1966). The Belgian-created Katanga secession cost the life of one of the greatest political leaders in the World (Patrice E. Lumumba), with the help of the CIA (cf. Weissman 2010; The ‘Church Commission Report’ and the ‘Belgian Parliamentary inquiry report on the Assassination of Lumumba.’)

FALLACIES AND HALF-TRUTHS
Fourthly, one of the greatest claims made in this article, which makes us believe that the text may be following some hidden agenda to spread falsehood about the Congo in the American public opinion, is to lump
together the M23 rebellion with the fighting of former Hutu génocidaires. By now, this should be regarded as a worn-out and fallacious connection! While it tends cunningly to legitimize any Rwandan overt or covert invasions DRC’s territory since 1996, it is ideologically charged and overlooks the many years that the Rwanda-Uganda coalition occupied the Congo for plunder, murder of millions of Congolese, and counter-genocide indiscriminately of Hutu in DRC, instead of tracking down the real Hutu génocidaires (cf. UN Report of October 1, 2010). Besides, anyone seriously concerned with the security situation in the African Great Lakes Region would acknowledge how violence and threat to ‘human life and human dignity’ have indistinctly affected people of various ethnic groups but not only a single one. The current genocide and atmosphere of terror in Eastern Congo is a result of repetitive wars by the CNDP, recently re-incarnated as M23.

**PROMOTING AFRICA WITHOUT AFRICANS**

I believe it is time to end this Western poverty of thinking toward Africa, a promotion of Africa without Africans. While Congolese civil society has a different approach to the crisis of identity, M23 rebels do not represent the Congolese people in anyway. They are no more than warlords who seek wealth and power opportunities with guns, while masquerading as victims of an incompetent and failed state under Kabila. What the people want is peace and security, which can be provided only through democratically established institutions that are governed under the rule of law, but not predatory strongmen. Pham would make an important contribution to the NYT readership by questioning US foreign policy toward the region, whether in supporting Mobutu, Museveni or Kagame, instead of engaging in half-truths. Would Pham have advocated the break-up of the US during the Civil War under the same logic?

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Britain’s Economy of the Walking Dead
Rob Sewell 11 December 2012

Far from heralding a new promise for the British economy, the 1% growth figure announced a month ago has already been buried by a pile of bad news. Few economists are looking towards 2013 with any real hope. Socialist Appeal editor Rob Sewell explains why.

The Economist has just marked France down as the “sick man of Europe.” However, British capitalism, another invalid of the crisis, is in intensive care and things have now just got a whole lot worse.

The British economy has been hit by a plague of zombies - businesses, households and banks – who are neither alive nor dead, according to the Bank of England.

“More and more companies are catching the zombie disease,” says Lee Manning, president of R3 (Association of Business Recovery Professionals). “It is symptomatic of a stagnant economy, with a combination of low interest rates, low liquidation rates and many businesses running at a loss.”

“Zombie companies cannot invest or innovate, they just sit there slowly losing employees and customers and dragging on the economy,” adds Mubashir Mukadam, head of the European special situations at KKR Asset Management.

Interest
These creatures of the walking dead are apparently the shape of things to come. Economists now believe that ultra-low interest rates have artificially kept these zombies alive and prevented the stock of debt falling to levels that would encourage recovery. With official interest rates at 0.5%, banks have been able to allow indebted households and companies to limp along without going under.

Zombies have also been blamed for holding back the non-existent recovery. Roughly three out of ten companies in the UK are now making a loss: 30% more than during the recession of the early 1990s but the number of bankruptcies is far lower than earlier. The Bank of England estimates that some 16,800 companies will have folded this year, while almost 25,000 went bust during the early 1990s. This low rate of mortgage repossessions and corporate liquidations in this downturn has become a worry for economists. They fear that productivity – the output of each worker – has stagnated as a result and is a drag on profitability. In other words, the slump did not get rid of sufficient excess capacity or over-production. According to a recent Financial Times, “insiders fear that
the recession did not generate sufficient destruction to enable the creation of more productive companies for an upswing.” (FT, 14 November)

**Blame**
What a condemnation of capitalism! The reason why there is no recovery is blamed on the failure of the slump to adequately destroy unwanted (zombie) factories and industry and create even greater mass unemployment. This is the madness of capitalism. To make businesses more profitable they need to eliminate the less productive (i.e. less profitable) sectors of the economy.

This “failure” to destroy less profitable parts of the economy, according to bourgeois economists, means that Britain is following the path of stagnation suffered by Japan in the post-bubble era since 1990. They fear that in five years’ time we will awake from this current nightmare facing weak growth, high debts and huge economic problems.

The fact that capitalism needs to periodically purge itself by a process they bizarrely call “creative destruction”, that is closing factories and throwing millions out of work, shows that the capitalist system has out-lived itself. No amount of economic bandages will disguise this fact.

**Recession**
The British economy “grew” by 1% during the summer, but this was aided by the Olympics, a one-off event. This has temporarily taken us out of a double-dip recession but the Bank of England says we are likely to return to recession in the fourth quarter of this year.

The Bank of England has now come out with its gloomiest assessment so far. Mervyn King, the governor, warned that the economy “may be in for a period of persistently low growth.” The economy is unlikely to return to its pre-crisis levels until late 2015 and banks are not lending because of debt problems and their credit is locked in “unproductive” companies.

“We face the rather unappealing combination of a subdued recovery, with inflation remaining above target”, stated King. In fact, inflation has been above its 2% target for 69 of the past 78 months. King added further, “growth is more likely to be below than above its historical average rate over the entire forecast period.”

He continued that the lost output of recent years could only be made up “if you take a very long-term perspective of DECADES”! (Our emphasis)

Such is the sober estimate of big business, which, given its previous forecasts, is still likely to be over-optimistic. Originally, the Bank’s forecast was a robust recovery but that has now been excluded given the
economy’s dire performance. “Eventually more losses will have to be realized for the economy to grow substantially again”, states the hard-nosed Financial Times. “This means girding the system for another wave of losses.” (FT, 15 November).

Logic
This is all they can offer. Bank of England officials admit that the prospect of mass repossessions, corporate liquidations and surging unemployment is not very appetizing. But however unappealing, what else can they do? This is the logic of capitalism in its zombie state.

Things are not getting better as formerly suggested. Surveys point to worsening business conditions, with inflation jumping up from 2.2% to 2.7% in October. There is no chance of exports growing as markets are shrinking in Europe and elsewhere. Sterling has risen 8% in value against other currencies over the past year, making exports even less competitive than before.

Spending on the high street dropped sharply last month by 0.8%, taking sales to their lowest level since May. Sales fell 0.6% between September and October in supermarkets and other food shops and 2.3% at clothing and shoe shops. Department stores also suffered, with sales down 0.7%. While internet sales continue to rise, they are at a slower pace.

Charlie Bean, Deputy Governor at the Bank of England, says, “It is striking that the sharpest falls in consumption were seen among high income, highly indebted households.” Vicky Redwood, an economist at Capital Economist, says she thought Britain was in the middle of a “lost decade” for consumer spending, which she believes will not return to the 2007 peak until 2016 or 2017.

Decline
As government expenditure continues to fall, spending on infrastructure, despite desperate announcements by ministers, is also tumbling. Recent figures show that infrastructure spending across the UK had declined 11.3% in the past 12 months. While the government had hoped that pension funds would invest £20bn over the next decade, and £2bn by early 2013, a year of talks has so far raised a mere £700m.

British capitalism is not investing, despite having £700bn in reserves. Indeed £750bn is sloshing around in liquid assets in company vaults and with £375bn in the bank vaults from QE, it makes that total figure most likely more than £1trn. Why invest when there is no market? Why invest when there is no demand? Why invest when there is over-capacity? And yet without investment, there can be no real recovery.
All these figures add up to a deepening crisis for British capitalism. The ruling class is floundering and the government is hell-bent on austerity, making the situation even worse. Vampire-like, the cuts are draining the very life-blood out of the economy. But, caught between a rock and a hard place, they have no other solution on a capitalist basis.

Zombie capitalism is a product of its twilight existence. The system has reached its limits as the contradictions continue to pile up. It can only offer a nightmare for working class people. It must be done away with.

**Alternative**

Rather than attempting to patch up a diseased capitalism, which will not work in any case, the Labour and trade union leaders should be offering a real alternative. The only alternative to this discredited market economy is a socialist planned economy, not run for millionaires’ profits, but democratically owned and run in the interests of the overwhelming majority, and based upon the real needs of society. That means taking over the banks, insurance giants and the big monopolies that control the British economy, and running them under democratic workers’ control and management. Only then can we guarantee everyone a decent job, decent wages, a decent roof over their head, as well as a real future for their children.

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**Something Rotten In The ANC State**

Hilary Wainwright 10 December 2012

‘We knew apartheid was a deeply rooted system, we knew it would be difficult, we knew it would take time – but we did not think it would take forever. Eighteen years. Eighteen years! And we are still living like this.’

‘This’, for Lennox Bonile, is a cramped sitting room, bedroom and cupboard of a kitchen in the Khayelitsha area of Cape Town, with a bucket instead of a toilet and no running water in the house.

Bonile is a shop steward in the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) at the city council. He and his wife Priscilla have graduated from a bucket toilet system to a ‘modified bucket system’. This means they have a ‘porta-toilet’ to empty their bucket into, and that toilet is itself emptied each week by casual workers working for a labour broker.
contracted by the city council.

Eighteen years after the mass of black South Africans lined the streets to vote in the first government of the African National Congress, 1.5 million people (almost all black or coloured) still live without proper flushing toilets; 1.7 million still live in shacks, with no proper beds, kitchens or washing facilities.

While there has been a very small narrowing of the gap between black and white people, as the result of a small minority of black people moving up the income ladder, there has been a widening of the gulf between rich and poor – and the majority of the poor are black. South Africa, as the World Bank reported in July 2012, remains one of the most unequal societies in the world. The bottom 20 per cent get less than 3 per cent of the total income, while the top 10 per cent of earners take more than 50 per cent. This is a wider gap than in Mexico, Brazil or even oligarch-filled Russia. Almost a third of South Africa’s population still lives on less than $2 a day. Child malnutrition is now even higher than under apartheid, as is unemployment.

**Broken promises**

‘There Shall be Houses, Security and Comfort!’ ‘There Shall be Work and Security!’ ‘The People Shall Share in the Country’s Wealth!’ These were the promises of the Freedom Charter, the document that inspired and united the struggle against apartheid. But more than two decades after Nelson Mandela walked free from prison, they are promises that have not been fulfilled.

‘It is disturbing, an affront to our dignity and respect,’ says Lennox Bonile, puzzled and frowning at why he and so many others should be living without basic services and comforts. For him and many like him, the Marikana massacre has marked their final disillusionment in the leadership of what he still wants to see as his party.

‘What I didn’t realise was the extent to which our leaders have been making money from the mines,’ he says. For him, in common with many long standing ANC members – he’d been a leader of the ANC youth as a young man, an activist in the South African National Civic Organisation, an organiser in the metalworkers union NUMSA and now a leader of the disabled people’s movement and a member of the South African Communist Party, as well as a SAMWU steward – this is part of a wider abuse of power that has stretched his loyalty to its limits. ‘We trusted too much,’ he sighs.

A short answer to Bonile’s puzzlement over why things turned out this way lies in the fact that before winning government the leadership of the
ANC effectively made a compromise with the corporate drivers of the recently constructed neoliberal world order. They planned a post-apartheid order that would be extremely friendly to capitalism. Marketisation and privatisation were welcomed as the main means of reconfiguring the apartheid state, codified in the ANC government’s 1996 programme – the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy.

Despite its name, GEAR made explicit the new government’s commitment to the private sector as the lead driver for economic growth, to opening up capital markets, reducing state expenditure and privatisation. GEAR was declared to be ‘non-negotiable’ by the government after a run on the rand in the first few months of 1996.

The strategy effectively replaced the more democratic, popular Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP) drawn up by the main trade union organisation COSATU. It built on, rather than dismantled, essential elements of the forced labour system in which South Africa’s large mining companies and corporate capital of many kinds were able to profit from cheap black labour.

A strategic choice
This accommodation with some of the worst aspects of neoliberalism was a clear strategic choice, and not a matter of global corporations and US-dominated bodies such as the IMF outmanoeuvring the ANC leadership. (For an excellent analysis of this evidence see John Saul’s ‘On Taming a Revolution’ in Socialist Register 2013.)

It was a choice that was heavily influenced by the South African Communist Party’s theory of ‘socialism in two stages’. This required – in the orthodox and dominant interpretation – the building of capitalism before the struggle for socialism could proceed. At the same time, there were the domestic political consequences of the implosion of the Soviet Union and the model of socialism – with a few parliamentary-oriented modifications – in which the SACP broadly believed. With the discrediting of this model, for the ANC leaders returning from exile without direct experience of the participatory democracy growing out of the internal resistance to apartheid, it appeared that there really was ‘no alternative’ to neoliberalism. Indeed, Nelson Mandela’s successor as president, Thabo Mbeki, is reported to have said with apparent glee on the launch of GEAR: ‘Just call me a Thatcherite.’

The pro-GEAR leadership had immense moral and political influence. It not only exercised this authority to impose the strategy on the tripartite alliance (between the ANC, COSATU and the SACP) with no debate; it also used its decisive influence to close down any alternative avenues of resistance. Most significantly, in 1990 it had encouraged the leadership of...
the unbanned and resurgent United Democratic Front, the mass movement that gave coherence and united force to a myriad of grassroots struggles against apartheid, to decide that with the release of Mandela and the commitment to free elections, its job was done and it should dissolve itself.

A minority insisted that with the prospect of the ANC in government, a new task was beginning: to watch over the government, remaining ready for mass action to press the commitments of the Freedom Charter. These dissenting views were defeated at the time, but they are now being remembered or arrived at afresh. Today veterans of the struggle and new young activists alike refer back to the UDF experience and the importance of rebuilding that grassroots co-ordination for the ‘new liberation struggle’ as they work to link and sustain the record levels of community protests and strikes.

**Free market weed**

In 2000, Rusty Bernstein, one of the members of the ANC and the SACP who drafted the Freedom Charter in 1955, wrote in his autobiography that the dissolution of the UDF ‘impoverished the soil in which ideas leaning towards socialist solutions once flourished, and allowed the weed of “free market” ideology to take hold’.

The weed of free market ideology has indeed taken hold among many of the office holders and seekers of whom Bonile speaks and who, along with many local activists like Bonile, will gather at the ANC conference early in December. Its spread was fertilised by the way Black Economic Empowerment became essentially a policy not of decent wages, good jobs and training but enabling politicians to abuse their power to distribute tenders, often as patronage and mutual economic gain.

At the same time, however, what struck me as I talked to public service workers and community activists fighting for decent services is what a strong politicised culture still exists. While officials at all levels use vacuous but grand-sounding socialist rhetoric to divert attention from inertia or self interest, strong traditions and passions of popular political education, politicised community organising and working class democracy have been kept alive and renewed.

One is constantly reminded that the other side of freedom fighters becoming ‘tenderpreneurs’ is that the compromises that have produced the present injustices were based on false promises not defeat – though an organisational and political weakening has inevitably taken place. It is clear, from the way the miners’ demand for 12,500 rand (£880) a month is echoing across from the mines to the factories, to the town halls and call centres, that there is a growing self-confidence to call in what those first
ANC voters and their families were promised.

**Struggling against corruption**

This is producing in some areas the union-community connections that made the UDF such a powerful force. One of the many examples I heard about when I attended municipal workers union SAMWU’s biennial conference was a struggle against corruption and for accountability and decent services in the North West province.

‘Communities come to us. There is no other voice they trust,’ Jacob Modimoeng, provincial secretary of SAMWU and a member of the ANC, told me. He was speaking the week after a 4,000-strong protest in Katone, where the mayor drives the latest Mercedes while municipal workers have no transport to get to the communities they are trying to serve. Katone is one of the small towns near Rustenburg, in South Africa’s rich mining area. Marikana lies nearby.

At the same time that miners are fighting for living wages, SAMWU locally is leading a struggle of public service workers and local communities, many of whom work or have family members or friends in the platinum mines. They are demanding that public money goes to public services, not private bank accounts.

Rustenburg is one of the richest municipalities of the North West province. It receives considerable revenue for the bulk water and electricity that the mines depend on. This revenue from the mining companies should easily be paying for water, electricity, sanitation and roads in Marikana and Katone and the small settlements that surround them. In reality, people in these areas are surviving without proper roads, with holes in the ground rather than proper sanitation and electricity as occasional as Christmas.

Some of the reasons for this became clear to SAMWU members. ‘Members kept coming to the office with similar problems,’ remembers Jacob Modimoeng. ‘The sense was growing that the community was being embezzled. Municipal money was being misdirected.’

The difficulties the union was up against in acting on this information became clear as shop stewards found themselves threatened. Modimoeng describes how ‘our shop stewards became targets. They told us they and their families received death threats. Unknown faces hung around them. Life became miserable.’ Some, on the other hand, were approached with bribes. ‘The mayor, Matthew Wolmarans, approached them and said I’ll give you one million,’ says Modimoeng. ‘But these guys were soldiers of the revolution...’
Murder and the mayor
The seriousness of the attempts to clamp down on whistleblowers became clear when an ANC councillor and trade unionist, Moss Phakoe, was shot dead as he left his house for work on 9 March 2009, two days after he had handed over a dossier on corruption that implicated mayor Wolmarans and a business associate. It was only in July 2012 that Wolmarans was jailed for 20 years for masterminding the murder of Phakoe. His driver was given life for firing the gun.

Justice might appear to have been done, after a concerted struggle by the community, the provincial organisations of COSATU as well as SAMWU, and many others. But the prison sentence seemed to alter little. At the time of writing, Wolmarans is still receiving a 35,000 rand (£2,500) a month salary. And in mid-September the local ANC was celebrating the ex-mayor, now convict’s birthday and de facto refusing to implement the instruction of the ANC’s national executive to terminate his party membership.

This is just one story. It is symbolic, though, of the endemic nature of corruption – a product of the privatisation of public services. By the same token, however, the campaign to bring his murderers to trial is symbolic of the determination, mutual solidarity and organising capacity of citizens, whether as betrayed service users or responsible public service workers, to pursue the democratic and social rights that they and their families believed they had won through the overthrow of apartheid.

For SAMWU, challenging corruption is not a distinct ‘single issue’. Rather, as the direct product of letting the profit motive come to dominate public services, it exposes the rotten core of neoliberal politics. The rot will also be on display in Mangaung at the ANC congress. It is questionable what influence the views of ANC members like Lennox Bonile and Jacob Modimoeng will have. But there are a growing number of them – and they are increasingly not just speaking out but organising with other community and trade union activists to build the power that could begin to unravel the accommodations made during the past two decades.

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Battle for the ‘heart and soul’ of climate finance
Climate change talks are underway in Doha. Until now corporate power and the interests of a global elite have dictated the direction of the negotiations. It will be disastrous if these interests carry the day on the future of climate finance.

The 18th Annual Circus of Global Climate Politics, COP 18, is upon us, and it is set to be filled with more than its usual dose of fossil-fuelled developed countries, some more than others, trying to squirm-out-of, ignore, distort or dilute the principles which were supposed to bring them together under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – those of equity and common but differentiated responsibility (CBDR) among others. As the usual horde of negotiators, fossil-fuel industry representatives, activists, journalists and others descend upon oil- and gas-rich Qatar, it is worth surveying the on-going battle for the ‘heart and soul’ of climate finance, for after all, climate negotiations are unfortunately yet to refute the time old saying that money makes the world go round.

As we prepare to leave the Fast Start Finance period of $30 billion in additional climate finance from 2010-2012 behind (despite the fact that the promises behind it have arguably not been met) we are entering a new rather undefined era of climate finance. The agreed goal ahead of us is $100 billion per year by 2020 – a number which seems to have been picked because it is round, sexy-sounding and in the distant future, thus allowing for inaction in the present, rather than because it matches the needs of countries predicted to be affected by climate change. For instance, $100-$400 billion is the estimated range of climate adaptation needs for developing countries alone, a number which does not even include mitigation considerations – adaptation and mitigation costs have been estimated to be jointly as high as $1.5 trillion per year.

The inadequacy of the 2020 goal aside, there remains a large gap between where we are now, how we get to that goal, and what we do in-between as commitments in that period are yet to be written on UNFCCC stone. In response the Climate Action Network and Christian Aid, among others, are calling for a doubling of the fast start financing levels as well as a commitment to the capitalisation of the Green Climate Fund. News from the Green Climate Fund (GCF), however, is a rather mixed bag.

On one hand, the GCF has found its home in South Korea, and will shortly be granted its own legal personality, thus ensuring its independence from the likes of the World Bank – an advancement which should put many minds at ease. On many other fronts the news is more
disconcerting. First, the fund has not yet pulled together the money it needs simply for administration (which weighs in at a far from negligible $7 Million until the end of 2013). This is a worrying sign, given the GCF’s much more ambitious financial mobilization goals.

Second, far from being a model of transparency and accountability, thus far the Green Climate Fund Board has operated in a much more closed manner than other UN predecessor funds such as the Adaptation Fund. Although these might be teething issues, the proceedings of the meetings are not being readily published, and observer participation is being neglected. As some civil society observers report, in the absence of a decision on disclosure, instead of an assumption of openness the co-chairs of the GCF Board are operating on an assumption of exclusion and confidentiality.

Compounding the above worries is the battle around the privatization of the GCF and the role of the private sector. Within this space there exist two major competing visions of the GCF. The first vision favoured by most developing countries sees the GCF as housed firmly under the COP, ensuring that it draws mostly on public funds from developed countries, thus fulfilling the principles of equity and CBDR by ensuring the transfer of funds from historic emitters in the developed world to those least responsible who are set to be affected by climate change. The competing vision is favoured, for soon to be obvious reasons, by developed countries such as the US and UK. It aims for a GCF more divorced from the UNFCCC and its principles and sees public finance as playing a limited role in order to leverage more private financing. Part of what the privatization of the fund allows for is for developed countries to weasel their way out of responsibilities under the principles of equity and CBDR by allowing private finance to fill the void of their unfulfilled promises.

While it would be foolish to bar the private sector from involvement in climate finance, as Kathy Sierra (formerly of the World Bank) points out, this should not interfere with the responsibilities that developed countries have to developing countries under the UNFCCC, responsibilities, which are arguably why the GCF was set up to allow for the fulfilment of in the first place. Private sector financing can be leveraged through other channels, but the GCF was arguably intended for another purpose, to fulfil international climate justice. Concerns for which are seemingly being overridden by other interests, which is a far from an unusual occurrence within the COPs. Indeed, this particular battle is reflective of a larger negotiated struggle to divorce the global climate regime from the principles of equity and CBDR that underpin the ideals of climate justice enshrined in the UNFCCC framework, as is reflected by the battle led by India for the inclusion of ‘equity’ in the Durban Platform, and the numerous attempts, most notably, by the US, to break down the firewall
between developing and developed countries with regards to mitigation obligations, as defined by CBDR.

In response, as the Times of India reports, an unusual coalition called the ‘Like Minded Developing Countries on Climate Change’ is emerging, consisting of China, India, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Egypt, Thailand, Malaysia, Argentina and about three dozen other developing countries. Their stated aim is to fight for equity and CBDR’s central role in climate negotiations. As the above indicates, the Green Climate Fund will be one of many places where their work will be cut out for them, and hopefully others will help fight to preserve a more noble and equitable development of the GCF.

The potentially worrying involvement of the private sector in the GCF does not end there, however. Many from developed countries are pushing for direct and indirect access to the GCF for private sector companies. According to Janet Redman of the Institute for Policy Studies, if such a proposal goes ahead ‘Shell and Exxon could get access to [the fund to] build a massive wind farm in Mexico that powers Walmart’ [2]. This is a worrying trend for developing countries who may have wanted to use the fund to bolster national attempts to respond to climate change. Whether that problem will be acquiesced by the ‘no objections’ principle set to be enshrined in the GCF, which allows countries to halt projects if they are seen to be contrary to their national interests, depends on how such a principle is defined going into the future, an important point of concern. What is considerably more worrying is revealed if we consider what the struggle for the nature of the GCF could mean for adaptation funding.

In line with the privatization of the fund some are calling for the fund to be structured and operated similarly to the Climate Investment Funds (CIF) under the World Bank. This has potentially dismal results for the supposed balance of the GCF between adaptation and mitigation interests, for if we look to the CIF we can see that from 2006-2011 only 2.4 percent of its funds went to medium or small sized companies, only some of which operate in the adaptation sphere. The majority of the remainder went to large scale mitigation projects, which, although important, does not do much to promote climate resilient development and thus fulfil the adaptation side of the equation.

Perhaps in order to protest the GCF following in the CIF’s large-scale mitigation footsteps one might appeal to the governing instrument of the GCF which states that the GCF should be balanced between needs for mitigation and adaptation. However, just what would qualify as a ‘balance’ is difficult to tell, as the term is ambiguous – an ambiguity which will most likely be hotly contested, as most ambiguities are within UN spaces. If past climate finance is anything to go by the balance is
certainly not an equal one, with just 15 percent of overall climate financing going to adaptation in the past according to ClimateFundsUpdate.org. In relation to this backdrop would balance entail continuing this ratio, or would it mean a 50-50 share, or alternatively would balance entail redressing the past unequal ratio between adaptation and mitigation funding? How do we define balance?

If the private sector is allowed to take the helm of the GCF, out from under the wing of the COP, as some are proposing, I fear that the definition of balance will not be defined through appeal to moral principles and the weighing of the interests of both future and current generations, but rather through the interests of private companies who dictate the agenda according to what serves their interests. And adaptation, for a number of reasons, just is not sexy or very profitable for private interests. Indeed, if we look to a report by the Climate Policy Initiative we see that just 5 percent of private climate finance goes to adaptation. Furthermore, if the GCF becomes a mitigation-heavy fund, we are in danger of it merely becoming a vehicle through which much of the developed world farms out their responsibility to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions to the developing world, while not addressing the current and potential damages and harm caused by the emissions that they have emitted and for the large part continue to emit.

Of course it is clear, as the figure alongside from the UNEP Emissions Gap Report illustrates, that as things stand we are failing rather dismally on the mitigation side, such that our current pledges, even if they are fulfilled, will set us on a track of 2.5 – 5°C warming by 2100. Thus mitigation is of course important and against this backdrop we have responsibilities to future (and current) generations to develop mitigation. But against these obligations, we must not forget the obligations to those being affected by climate harms now and in the near future. According to the Global Humanitarian Forum, headed up by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, climate change is responsible for 300,000 deaths a year and affects 300 million people annually. By 2030, the annual death toll related to climate change is expected to rise to 500,000 and the economic cost to rocket to $600 billion. For those most vulnerable to the effects of climate change (and sadly most often least responsible for causing the harms) adaptation is a priority whether our international political regime recognises it or not.

In sum, the battle for the heart and soul of the Green Climate Fund will most likely be a contested one as the competing visions outlined above play out against each other. As things stand, Omar El-Arini from Egypt has been one of the sole GCF board figures fighting for what I have outlined as the more noble vision for the future of the Green Climate Fund. Let us hope, however, that more join him on the frontlines of that
battle, for we can be sure that the support for the competing arguably less noble vision is substantial.

For too long we have allowed corporate power and the interests of a global elite to dictate the direction of climate negotiations and to set the very boundaries of what is possible for us to achieve in response to the burning issues of climate change. It will be a sad day indeed if we allow them to dictate the future of climate finance and, in doing so, overlook both the responsibilities of those historically responsible for climate change, as well as the real and violent impacts that climate change is having and is set to have upon the most vulnerable people across the globe. Let us hope that this year the air-conditioned halls of yet another COP will not allow us to forget about those for whom climate change is not a matter of mere political negotiation, financial figures and profits, but for whom the effects of climate change shape their ability to enjoy basic human rights, to survive and to lead a decent human life.

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Reference
[1] Many thanks to the Heinrich Boll Foundation for organizing a visiting tour to Washington DC around the players, procedures and politics around climate finance for adaptation action. Many of the insights from this article come from that tour.
[2] From a meeting with Janet Redman organized by the Heinrich Boell Foundation in Washington DC.

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DURBAN - This week’s World Toilet Summit offers an opportunity to contemplate how we curate our crap. Increasingly the calculus seems to be cash, generating contradictions ranging from local to global scales, across race, gender, generation and geography. Nowhere are they more evident than in the host city, my hometown of Durban. We’ve suffered an 18-year era of neoliberal-nationalist malgovernance including toilet apartheid, in the wake of more than 150 years of colonialism and straight racial-apartheid.

In central Durban, the mafia of the global water and sanitation sector – its corporate, NGO and state-bureaucratic elite – have gathered at the International Convention Centre, just a few blocks west of the Indian Ocean, into which far too much of our excrement already flows. They’re at the same scene of the crime as, exactly a year ago, negotiators dithered at the United Nations COP17 ‘Conference of Polluters’ summit.

Recall that the COP17 rebuffed anyone who fancifully hoped global elites might address the planet’s main 21st century crisis. The 1%-ers inside ignored outsider demands for climate justice: make airtight commitments to 50 percent emissions cuts by 2020; drop the ‘privatisation of the air’ strategy known as carbon trading and offsets; and cough up ‘climate debt’ payments from rich to poor countries.

Instead, that conference ended with a ‘Durban Platform’ that re-emphasized capitalist strategies, pleasing Washington especially. The COP17 deal eroded differences in responsibility between North and South, and moreover, as lead Bank of America Merrill Lynch carbon dealer Abyd Karmali told the http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/b666c322-240a-11e1-a4b7-00144feabdc0.htm], the Durban Platform was like a Viagra shot for the flailing carbon markets.” True, a tiny carbon price erection followed, but the effect soon wore off; the European Union Emissions Trading Scheme has been flaccid throughout 2012.

What the dog’s-breakfast Durban Platform confirms, then, was global-elite back-slapping generosity to each other, simultaneous with rank incompetence and utter disregard for the poor and environment, all of which are again on display this week at the COP18 in Doha, Qatar. Precedents matter, for lowering standards.

The commodification of crap
The World Toilet Organisation’s battle cry, ‘Scaling up – dignity for all!’, appears as a creative talk-left but turn-the-tap-right (i.e. off) strategy. The water mafia has long struggled to gain legitimacy for neoliberal
cost-cutting strategies, and now does so by invoking dignity (and they also have tried colonising the ‘water rights’ discourse) – but naturally not genuine equal access and consumer affordability, neither of which are possible under neoliberalism.

Another version of this is micro-scale privatisation, where NGOs and community organisations are encouraged to build local toilets and charge poor people for their use, to cover construction, cleaning, maintenance, the water bill and a tiny salary.

Last month in Nairobi’s Kibera and Huruma slums, I spent a day dodging the ‘flying toilets’ (plastic bags filled with faeces), thankfully guided in walkabouts by two admirable popular organisations whose young men – often drawn from ex-gang members – construct these toilets after fighting the small-scale local water capitalists who physically sabotage state suppliers. These systems of desperation-commodification, priced at US$0.10 per use (including one piece of loo paper), are vast improvements on the flying-toilet.

This travesty is the result of a more general neoliberal dogma that hit slums like Nairobi’s over the past quarter-century: cut-backs in state-subsidised water. The strong residue – both in World Bank techie talk and in populist-neoliberal micro-privatisation mode – is just as evident at the Durban Toilet Summit as it was at the World Water Forum in Marseilles nine months ago. That event reconfirmed the water-empire expansion of Paris mega-privatisers like Veolia and Suez, along with the likes of liquid-barons Coke and Nestle, all backed by the multilateral development banks.

Although for a dozen years, fierce anti-privatisation struggles have been waged in Cochabamba, Johannesburg, Accra, Argentina, Atlanta, Jakarta, Manila and many other urban water battlegrounds, it seems that recent US and European municipal fiscal crises offer a new opportunity for the water profiteers.

At the Durban summit, even more clever neoliberal stunts are being rehearsed. ‘Community-Led Total Sanitation’ (CLTS) popularized by NGOer Kamal Kar and academic Robert Chambers in Bangladesh passes yet more responsibilities for public hygiene downwards to poor people. The goal is to wean the lumpens off reliance upon state subsidies through social shaming.

Explains Petra Bongartz from Sussex University, “Through the tools employed by CLTS, a community comes to self-realization that their acts of open defecation are disgusting. In disgust, I have seen some people spit, others turn away from the direction of shit. Still others have vomited at the
sight of shit. Disgust is one of the key elements of a CLTS trigger. Disgust is ignited by the unpleasant sight of shit, more so when the shit is still in its fresh and wet state."

State funds to supply sanitation services are invariably in short supply, so such gimmicks allow smirking Finance Ministry technocrats in many countries to both decentralize the state and shrink it, and in the process, shift duties to municipalities and vulnerable people, in a process sometimes called ‘unfunded mandates’.

**Durban’s dirty water**

In this context, Durban residents like myself are having a hard time separating good from bad arguments when it comes to water quality and sanitation. First is the rumour, fed by media hysteria, that drinking Durban’s increasingly grey water is bad for us. As the city begins to mix recycled city sewage with river supply from the mercury-contaminated Inanda Dam (where signs warn local Zulu fisherfolk against eating their catch) and other E.coli-infected streams, will we end up as ill and thirsty as several unfortunate neighbouring Mpumalanga Province towns’ citizens?

In many little ‘dorpies’ stretching from Johannesburg east through Mpumalanga to the Mozambique border at Kruger Park, Acid Mine Drainage and related toxic effluent from coal mining corporations flow prolifically. The national environment ministry turns a blind eye. Between worsening climate change, declining air quality and widespread water pollution, it is terrible but true – as even the African National Congress (ANC) government admits in obscure reports – that apartheid’s ecology was better than freedom’s.

To illustrate, at the very tip of government’s free-market, fast-melting iceberg, Cyril Ramaphosa’s coal company was let off the prosecutorial hook last month for operating without a water license. Ramaphosa’s political clout was simply overwhelming, according to a leading Pretoria bureaucrat cited by The Mail&Guardian. Indeed it’s likely Ramaphosa will become the country’s second leader at an ANC conference in a fortnight’s time, notwithstanding his smoking-email role in the Marikana massacre, carried out by police 14 weeks ago at the behest of the multinational corporation, Lonmin, for which Ramaphosa serves as local frontman.

As for Durban’s tap-water quality, no, I don’t think there’s any worry, and still have no qualms about ordering my restaurant water straight from the tap. Much worse is the rise of plastic bottles – see [http://www.storyofbottledwater.org](http://www.storyofbottledwater.org) for gory details – which clog landfills and whose petroleum inputs soil the air in South Durban, Africa’s largest
refinery site.

There, children in the mainly Indian suburb of Merebank suffer the world’s worst recorded asthma rate. The Malaysian-owned Engen refinery and BP/Shell’s Sapref complex act like a massive pollution pincer on the kids’ young lungs. Last week, even the slobs at the US Environmental Protection Agency deemed BP – ‘Beyond Petroleum’ (hah) – such a filthy rogue that it may no longer bid for new oil leases there.

**Durban’s dirty water policy**

Other gossip making the rounds here concerns the world-famous water manager who runs Durban’s municipal system, Neil Macleod. Billionaire philanthropist and Microsoft founder Bill Gates blogged two years ago that Macleod “has been a leader in thinking through how to improve sanitation for the poor in Durban.” But last month Macleod was charged with corruption by his subordinates (whom he was investigating for the same crime).

This came just at the moment that former Durban city manager Mike Sutcliffe apparently intimidated his successor S’bu Sithole into out-of-court-settlement talks over corruption libel which may leave taxpayers shelling out as much as a million dollars to featherbed Sutcliffe’s supposedly injured ‘reputation’. Although the Manase Report into city corruption – from which Sithole made his claims that Sutcliffe should be jailed – remains a state secret, in both the Macleod and Sutcliffe cases, I’m convinced that they are being unfairly maligned.

How, then, might we more fairly malign these men, not personally of course, but for the society-corrupting, health-threatening, ecologically-destructive sanitation policies on their watch?

The most obvious evidence is the city’s repeated embarrassment at reports of high E.coli and toxin levels in the rivers feeding the ocean, especially after rains, leading to the loss of international ‘Blue Flag’ status at ten Durban beaches four years ago. This month is vital for attracting Johannesburg tourists, so the excessive recent storms make it doubly hard for our hospitality industry, given last week’s reports about unsafe beaches.

So why do long stretches of Durban’s beaches become unswimmable after rains? The primary cause is Macleod’s persistent failure to address the vast sanitation backlog in more than 100 shack settlements across the city. Here, Sutcliffe long refused to authorize standard municipal services – such as water mains and bulk sewage – because of their informal property-rights status, especially those near the traditionally white and Indian areas subject to forced-displacement pressure.
Most shack settlements, in which around a third of Durban’s 3.5 million people live, have only a few poorly- (or un-) maintained toilets, notwithstanding heroic efforts by their main social movement, Abahlali baseMjondolo – most notably at the Kennedy Road shack settlement of 4000 residents and 8 toilets (until ruling party thuggery forced them out) – to raise the profile of the problem.

As a result of loose excrement, E.coli flows into our streams at a rate far higher than the recommended ‘safe’ level of 100 parts per 100ml. The 2010 found the E.coli count in the “uMngeni River at Kennedy Road up to 1,080,000. Cause: Informal Community on the banks of the Palmiet River.”

**Power politics and toilet apartheid**

Five years ago, Macleod predicted to Science magazine that by 2010, “everyone [would have] access to a proper toilet,” while in reality, hundreds of thousands do not, today.

Neoliberal sanitation experts visiting Durban for the Toilet Summit may rebut that the world cannot afford 12-liter flushes for everyone, and that we must embrace some version of low-water toilets here. (I agree that low-flush bio-gas digesters could be a fine compromise, supplying cooking gas to nearby houses.)

Yet community critics regularly tell us that Durban’s water-less ‘Ventilated Improved Pitlatrine’ (VIP) and ‘Urinary Diversion’ (‘UD’ – or ‘UnDignified’) strategies are failing. If the municipality possessed a genuinely green consciousness, then middle- and upper-class areas would have such pilot projects – not just tens of thousands provided in the city’s low-income periphery.

I flush a few times each day and pay a small premium: more than Durban’s poor can afford, but still not enough for the sake of equity. Many South African readers of this column could easily cross-subsidise their low-income fellow residents, by paying more for the privileges of filling swimming pools and bathtubs, watering gardens, running washing machines and all the other liquid luxuries we enjoy. This is, after all, the world’s most unequal major country, and it’s far worse now than even during apartheid.

If those of us above the 80th percentile paid more to deter our hedonistic water consumption, and if Macleod adjusted tariffs downwards accordingly for poor people, then Durban would not be South Africa’s
second stingiest city for water, according to the University of the Witwatersrand Centre for Applied Legal Studies. (The worst is nearby Pietermaritzburg – both reflective of durable old-style Natal white settler-colonial mentality and latter-day Zulu managerial conservatism.)

If such logical reforms were made to water and sanitation prices, then better health and gender equity would result, and more funds could be raised for installing decent toilets across the city, as well as to repair sewage pipes whose cracks regularly infect our rivers and harbour.

After enormous herds of White Elephant infrastructure – underutilized stadiums, a fast train linking Pretoria and Joburg, and Durban’s new airport – were built across SA for the 2010 World Cup, no one in power can claim that construction capability or subsidized funding are lacking. What’s missing is a more favourable politics of and by the poor, and so what will continue to result is toilet-apartheid.

www.zcommunications.org

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

With US Blessing, Rwanda Backs M23 Rebels in Congo

More at The Real News

Kambale Musavuli: Obama ignores legislation he sponsored in US Senate calling for sanctions against countries interfering in the Congo

Kambale Musavuli interviewed by Paul Jay from the Real News Network

4 December 2012

PAUL JAY, SENIOR EDITOR, TRNN: Welcome to The Real News Network. I'm Paul Jay in Baltimore.

In the Congo, the M23 Movement, most people say backed by Rwanda, is waging armed warfare against the Congolese government, army, and, many say, the Congolese people. Now joining us to unpack this issue for us is Kambale Musavuli. He's a human rights activist originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo. He's a student coordinator and national spokesman for the Friends of the Congo. And Kambale's written for numerous international news publications. Thanks for joining us, Kambale.
So first of all give us a bit of the background. Where did M23 come from?

KAMBALE MUSAVULI, SPOKESPERSON, FRIENDS OF THE CONGO: So the M23 is a group of mutineers from the Congolese army. Formerly, before the Congolese army, there were rebels who were integrated into the Congolese army, and they used to be called CNDP. It's really a branch of a proxy militia supported by Rwanda. So they're integrated into the Congolese military. Today, they have left the Congolese army, and they are now attacking the Congolese government—of course, also the Congolese people at the moment.

JAY: Now, if I understand it correctly, there was an agreement which brought them into the Congolese army in—was it 2009? And the claim of M23, at least, is that there's provisions of this agreement that haven't been implemented, so that's why they've started fighting again. I mean, what are their demands, and what's the merit of them?

MUSAVULI: Well, the demand—the statement the M23 is making is really unfounded. The demands were to be integrated into the Congolese army, to have positions within the government, have better pay, and so on. I mean, we have to keep in mind we have integrated armed militia into the Congolese army, and their demands were met. Today they're saying that those demands are not met.

Many numerous reports for the past two years have shown how they've created a parallel structure of government. They've continued to appeal for Congo's resources while wearing the Congolese army uniform. And during many of the military operations, there were reports of the rapes they were committing on the women of the Congo in the region without impunity, because there were now Congolese generals and colonels within the Congolese military and no one could hold them accountable. We even had instances of one of the commanders, Bosco Ntaganda, who was wanted at the International Criminal Court, playing tennis in Goma while he has committed so many crimes there. So their claims [incompr.] still want to know what hasn't been met.

Now, the challenge is that this is not the first time this is happening. So, mostly it's a cycle where militiamen are integrating into the Congolese military, then they leave. There are more negotiation. At the end, the Congolese people continue to suffer because of this [incompr.]

JAY: So what size is the M23? How are they able to have enough force to actually take cities? In fact, they took Goma, which is a pretty big city. How do they get to that scale? Do they have any support amongst the people?
MUSAVULI: Well, they do not have the support amongst the people. You know, it was a couple of hundred of them who committed mutiny. And the context of the mutiny is because Bosco Ntaganda, one of the commanders, there was an order to actually get him arrested and send him to the Hague. So that's how this whole rebellion started.

But now a couple of hundred—so now we're talking about over 1,000 of them. We have UN reports clearly describing how the Congolese army is not fighting the M23, it's in fact fighting the Rwandan military. So the UN Group of Experts, they have documented how Rwandan forces have crossed the border to join into the battle helping the M23. Not only that, the Rwandan government have recruited children in Rwanda to enlist them into fighting for the M23 inside of the Congo. So we don't see any outrage in Rwanda.

JAY: So what is Rwanda's agenda here? What do they gain from this?

MUSAVULI: When the order came to get Bosco Ntaganda arrested, it was really to dismantle the mafia network that exists in the east. It was to get Bosco out of the picture and remove the parallel chain of command that exist of this rebel militia. That's what these rebels are actually fighting for. They're fighting to maintain the illicit network that exists in the east whereby Rwanda and Uganda will continue to pay for the resources. So Rwanda is now showing us that we are not willing to destroy this illicit network, and we are going to use our resources, our military, to show Congo that we will control the eastern part of Congo. That's really where the battle is. To maintain the parallel chain of command in the east, they allow militia groups to continue to loot Congo's resources at the benefit of Rwanda and Uganda.

JAY: So what's an example of what you're calling looting the resources? What does that mean?

MUSAVULI: So we have now these militias who control different mines in the region. They are extracting these minerals, such as gold, tungsten, tin, through Kigali and Rwanda. They are taxing population. So they have created different border control, where they are actually the one collecting the funds. I remember in 2011 the UN reports showed how in October 2011 the CNDP, which was already integrated into the Congolese army—and they're calling themselves today M23—they collected $700,000 in one month for illegal taxation of the people at the border. So they have created that mafia network. And where this money go? Right in Kigali.
So with this battle that we're seeing right now, it's really Rwanda saying that we are now going to stop it. But the challenge is Rwanda is a very tiny country and it cannot do it by itself. So which country supports Rwanda? The United States government has funded, trained, equipped the Rwandan military.

The United Nation Group of Experts tells us that the person who is commanding the M23 rebels is named James Kabarebe. James Kabarebe is the Rwandan defense minister. So the Rwandan defense minister in Kigali is commanding a rebel militia within the Congo with total impunity.

So the question should be asked to Carter Ham, the head of AFRICOM, is the U.S. training with AFRICOM to Rwanda aiding and abetting training rebels in the Congo?

JAY: What's the African Union doing about all this?

MUSAVULI: Unfortunately, the African Union has been really weak. You know, Zuma, the current African Union chair, she's in Washington right now, and she had a meeting yesterday with Secretary of State Clinton, and she was asking about the Congo, say, are we going to hold Rwanda accountable for what is happening? And Hillary Clinton defer the question to her. And Zuma's response was that we need to stop finger-pointing Rwanda at the moment, we are working for negotiation, and so on.

I think that we are past the point where people have to produce evidence for what Rwanda is doing in the Congo. For the past 16 years it's been the same story. It's time for action.

Now, the African Union is not acting on the behalf of the Congolese people to bring about peaceful solution to this issue, and the United States is actually silent on the issue. We have even report that at the United Nation, Susan Rice was—literally blocked the release of the report, the interim UN report documenting Rwanda's support of rebels in the spring. And now, lately, during the resolution to condemn Rwanda, Susan Rice actually made sure that Rwanda's name was off the resolution. They are speaking about external support. So when you read a resolution condemning the human rights violation of the M23 rebellion, then they say that we are calling for any external support to stop. And you ask yourself, is the external support aliens? We know who are supporting these rebels. Rwanda and Uganda are U.S. allies.

JAY: Well, President Obama knows very well who the external support
is, 'cause didn't, as senator, he actually coauthor or cosponsor a bill that actually called for sanctions against Rwanda if it continued to meddle in Congolese internal affairs?

**MUSAVULI:** Exactly. Exactly. And that's the sad thing that's happening. You know, earlier this week we saw in the news during the press conference at the White House that he's actually aware what's happening. He said—the statement from the White House is that President Obama is daily briefed around the situation in the Congo. This is why he sent assistant secretary of state Johnnie Carson to go to the Congo around this issue—to the region, actually. He has met with Kabila and Musaveni, but Kagame was not available for whatever reason that was. So he's aware of the situation.

He has written a law on the Congo, and the law is very specific on the sanctions. It says that the secretary of state has the power to withhold aid to any nation destabilizing the Congo. Do you know how much the United States has frozen after the evidence came out? They froze only $200,000, when we provide Rwanda with $200 million. Not only that, we provide them with military training. The UN is telling us that the militia groups are using night vision goggle, 120 mm mortars, which Congolese Army does not have. So we know they are getting it from Congo's neighbors. And yet we continue to provide support. So the complicity is—.

**JAY:** Now, didn't AFRICOM, the American military control command center, didn't they send 100 or more American troops to Rwanda recently to train the Rwandan army?

**MUSAVULI:** AFRICOM has been training the Rwandan army forever, for now quite a while. The—I think you were referring to the 100 special forces who were sent in Uganda to train the Ugandan soldiers to go after Joseph Kony. Remember, the last segment I was in with you, I did share clearly that this campaign against Kony is really a scam. You cannot train the Ugandan military when they are committing human rights abuse in the country and the region.

While I speak about Rwanda, I need also mention Uganda. Rwanda and Uganda are supporting the M23. So we're sending 100 special forces to go after Joseph Kony, who is somewhere in Central Africa. And, of course, I'll always maintain he's someone that needs to be brought to justice. But we have reports showing the Rwandan military kidnapping Rwandan kids to actually abduct them and put them in the rebel force, and we have yet seen a stop-Rwanda campaign. That's actually [crosstalk]

**JAY:** So what would you like to see?
MUSAVULI: A few things. One, the United States needs to be strong in this diplomacy. They need to sanction Rwanda at the Security Council. That's a call to Susan Rice. She's been a detriment to peace. The American people need to pressure Susan Rice to sanction Rwanda at the Security Council.

The second one is the enforcement of the Obama law, Public Law 109-456. Section 105 says that we are not going to give them our tax money if they are implicated in the Congo. We need to enforce that. Third, there needs to be pressure on the Congolese government, because they are not dealing with the issues in the Congo, of course, because in some way they are—the government in the Congo is an illegitimate government, because of the fact that the U.S. recognized an election in the Congo making Joseph Kabila the president while that wasn't the will of the people. And they did that because they wanted stability over democracy. Today, because of that, we have neither stability nor democracy.

So, one, sanction Rwanda at the Security Council; two, for Obama to enforce his own law, Public Law 109-456, by freezing aid—military aid, specifically—to Rwanda; and three, to deal with the issue of the elections in the Congo and create a platform where the will of the people will be recognized. And the U.S. can do that with its aggressive diplomacy.

JAY: Alright. Thanks for joining us, Kambale.

MUSAVULI: Thank you.

JAY: And thank you for joining us on The Real News Network. Don't forget we're in our year-end fundraising campaign. Every $1 you donate gets matched, up to $100,000. So please click the Donate button. Thanks for joining us on The Real News Network.

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Congo: Chaos By Design

Kambale Musavuli, a native of the Democratic Republic of Congo, is a human rights activist, Student Coordinator and National Spokesperson for the Friends of the Congo. Mr. Musavuli’s professional activities, publications, and public engagements reflect his unflagging commitment to realizing peace and justice in the Congo. Mr. Musavuli has written for The Washington Post, Foreign Policy in Focus, The Huffington Post and numerous other academic and news publications. He has also been interviewed on National Public Radio, Democracy Now, ABC News, Al Jazeera English Television, Radio France International and a number of other radio and television programs. He has been profiled in publications such as “Christianity,” “News and Record,” and a few other newspapers.
around the world. His film appearances in Iara Lee’s “Cultures of Resistance,” Martin Scorsese’s “Surviving Progress,” and “Crisis in the Congo: Uncovering the Truth” reflect his astute understanding of the economical, ecological, and political dynamics of the global age. His expertise in issues ranging from labor rights, to corporate accountability, international financial institutions, environmental justice, and social justice has qualified him to serve as a research consultant for a number of film projects, socially responsible investor groups, and government agencies at their request. While studying Civil Engineering at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University in Greensboro, North Carolina, he developed a deep sense of community service and commitment to justice for all peoples. This experience strengthened his organizing skills by working with local activists on issues ranging from raising minimum wage, to ending police brutality and improving immigrant experience. This work taught him the importance of enabling youth to become change-makers in their communities. He continues such work by supporting organizations, like “Congo Leadership Initiative,” an organization that empowers young leaders in the Congo and provides avenues for them to succeed and to ultimately remove the barriers preventing Congo from reaching its potential. He also engages students and communities worldwide in “breaking the silence” about the ongoing crisis in the Congo by encouraging them to organize Congo Week, an annual global initiative that commemorates the lives lost in the Congo during the conflict and elevates the profile of the Congo. Mr. Musavuli has received awards and acknowledgments affirming the essential nature of his work and the energy and impact of his voice. In 2008, he was appointed by Greensboro Mayor Yvonne Johnson as a member of the International Advisory Committee for the City of Greensboro, a committee that assist the mayor in elaborating policy and procedures that reduce gaps between United States Citizens and immigrants in Guilford County and its peripheries. In 2009, he received a Congolese Hero Award from the Congolese Development Center National Awards Program, an award given to Congolese citizens for exceptionally successful initiatives or achievements benefiting the community. In 2011, the United States Army awarded him a Commander's Coin for the educational workshop he conducted for military and government attorneys at Fort George G. Meade, Maryland. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum profiled him in “Community in Action,” a campaign to bring public awareness to individuals who “take action to confront genocide and related crimes against humanity today.” Mr. Musavuli tours the United States, Canada, and Africa speaking to university students, religious groups, global leaders, community organizers and many others, educating and mobilizing them to work as partners with a Congolese civil society that strives to end the country’s conflict, control its enormous natural wealth, and build lasting peace and stability in the heart of Africa.
Prime minister Cameron, the Murdoch empire and the police have been part of a web of mutual support and corruption
Judy Beishon, Socialist Party (CWI England & Wales) 3 December 2012

MPs’ expenses, bankers’ bonuses, corporate tax dodgers; this deep, long-term crisis of capitalism has brought with it a thorough-going crisis of legitimacy in capitalist institutions. The murky Murdochgate scandal implicated media bosses, political leaders and police tops and led to the setting up of the Leveson Inquiry into press standards. The report from the first part of the Inquiry is due to be released on Thursday 29 November.

Judy Beishon, from the Socialist Party executive committee looks at the background to the Leveson Inquiry.

The ‘Murdochgate’ phone hacking scandal brought out into the public arena the huge power that the press barons wield - intruding into the lives of any of us; threatening politicians with unfavourable coverage if they dare to defy their interests; using the propaganda they want; and so the list goes on.

Public officials, including police and prison officers, have been bribed by newspaper journalists and a number of top Tories had columns in Murdoch’s papers and journals, or book deals with his companies. Prime Minister David Cameron was very close to two of the News of the World editors, Tony Blair secretly became godfather of one of Murdoch’s children; there was a vast web of links involving mutual favours among the rich, along with corruption and some criminality.

When the phone hacking revelations were escalating and his own links became clear, Cameron felt compelled to shunt the scandal of the News of the World’s abuses into an inquiry led by a senior judge, Brian Leveson. The inquiry was subsequently widened to encompass other issues, including other newspapers, and links between the media and the police and politicians.

In the run-up to the inquiry’s report, there has been debate and panic in the media and among politicians over what Leveson might recommend. The right-wing Daily Mail, owned by Viscount Rothermere (who has wealth of £760 million according to the Sunday Times Rich List), devoted ten of its pages on 16 November to point out that there were ‘assessors’ working
with Leveson during his inquiry who support independent or statutory regulation of the press.

The Tory party is divided on the issue of regulation, with Cameron among those wanting no statutory regulation, while others are pushing for it.

Many of the politicians of all three main parties who are baying for blood in the form of curbs on the press are sanctimoniously arguing that it would be in the ‘public interest’. Some of their critics, though, have accused them of being motivated by rage at having been exposed by the press for over-claiming expenses and other corruption or suspect behaviour. No doubt they also want to reduce adverse media coverage of their parties before elections.

The Tories who oppose regulation in the interests of a ‘free press’ do so in the knowledge that most of the media is owned by their big business friends, so it’s better for them to leave it unhampered and exert influence over the media barons during dinners at elite clubs and other networking occasions than to risk unpredictable interference from a new body.

The present self-regulation of the press, the Press Complaints Commission (PCC), where newspaper editors make recommendations to each other - is clearly unable to stop unacceptable stories and methods. But does this mean that socialists should support ‘independent’ or statutory regulation?

**Big business barons**
Firstly we have to point out that the fundamental problem is not one of poor regulation, but is that the media is almost entirely owned by big business individuals and conglomerates who act in the interests of the capitalist class.

An apt adage is that the mainstream media tells part of the truth some of the time, but only so it can use lies and propaganda the rest of the time.

The BBC is publicly owned, but its trustees are appointed by the government and its senior managers are not far different from those in privately owned media firms in echoing the ideology and needs of the capitalist class.

Therefore its coverage and political line reflects the views of the government and establishment - not those of ordinary people. All the media’s class bias, excesses, corruption, profiteering, lies, inaccuracy, poor quality, repetition and monopolisation will only be consigned to irrelevancy and small audiences when substantial media resources are made available for genuine public use, under public ownership, control and accountability.
Then we would start to have a media that can provide accurate information, quality investigative journalism, quality entertainment, and that can be accessed by minority points of view.

Trade unionists and socialists face a virtual blackout in today’s media - prevented from putting forward a programme against cuts in services and other austerity measures.

This means there is no informed debate where all sides can be heard on these vital issues and others of crucial importance to working class people.

**Leveson inquiry**
It should be working class people who lead a democratically organised inquiry into phone hacking and other unacceptable practices by the press, not one appointed individual selected by the Tory prime minister - in this case Leveson. Representatives of media workers, media users and the trade unions should be fully involved in the inquiry, as well as the government.

Why should an unelected individual decide what is in the ’public interest’? Let us, the public, decide what’s in our interest! A survey by the Carnegie Trust last month found that 63% of people think that they should have an input into setting future guidelines for the press.

Most people are disgusted by the crimes and privacy invasions of the press that were revealed during the phone hacking scandal and generally don’t oppose the idea of denting the powers of the super-rich press barons to do what they like. Polls indicate that a majority of people support the idea of regulation of the press ’independent of the media and politicians’.

However, a recent poll by the Free Speech Network revealed that less than 1% of people think that regulation of the press is a priority - instead MPs should focus on issues such as improving the economy and health care they say. No doubt this stems from the fact that three out of every four people (according to a PBS UK survey) think that ”media outlets sometimes, or frequently, lie to their audiences”, and have probably understandably concluded that tinkering with ’regulation’ is a lost cause!

Maybe some of Leveson’s recommendations could - if agreed by the government, which is far from certain - curtail some of the invasions of privacy and other excesses of the press and give people a better route than the PCC to challenge some of the lies that are printed and broadcast.

But socialists need to warn that if regulatory powers are placed in the hands of an appointed committee, it certainly won’t be the views of the
majority in society that will be the benchmark, but those of the handful on the committee - with their vested career interests and drawn mainly from the ranks of big business or capitalism’s academia.

Why should they inflict their view of morals on the rest of us, and what’s to stop them from protecting the interests of the rich and powerful by reducing the right of papers like the Socialist to expose corruption and exploitation?

**Regulation by law**

Any introduction of statutory underpinning of regulation carries even more dangers. This could involve state licensing of newspapers, charging them a fee for doing so, and punishing papers that break a set of rules. This could potentially be extended to websites, blogs and other online activity. Nowadays many ordinary people become ‘reporters’ when they are involved in events, or just during their normal routine.

The full force of the law is already brought down on some tweeters and bloggers who are deemed to have broken certain laws when expressing an opinion or joking; more heavy handed treatment could rain down if statutory media regulation is brought in.

In Hungary there were demonstrations in January 2011 against media legislation that imposed restrictions on all broadcast, print and internet media. The new law created heavy penalties for content deemed not in the ‘public interest’ or in keeping with ‘common morality’, ‘public order’ or ‘balanced reporting’. An Amnesty International spokeswoman commented: "Facing the possibility of stringent fines or even closure, many journalists and editors are likely to choose the ‘safe’ option of modifying their content”.

There have been many repressive laws and attacks on democratic rights and privacy already brought in by our Tory-Lib Dem government and Labour before it. At present the Communications Data Bill is being discussed in parliament that will allow the state to store the content of the website visits, emails, text messages and phone calls of all of us if it becomes law.

The 2011 Global Press Freedom Index placed the UK only in 26th place, showing that our ‘free press’ is not so free when compared to 25 countries that were judged to have greater press freedom. Plenty of laws already exist that make practises like phone hacking and invading people’s medical records illegal, so there is a danger of a new regulatory body being introduced that further counters a ‘free press’ while being useless against future criminality. It’s also the case that increased regulation couldn’t cover online sources from abroad that everyone can access.
Socialists can’t support any new ‘privacy’ or other laws that would allow the greed and unscrupulous methods of big business and capitalist politicians to go unreported and make it harder to expose their attacks on trade unionists, socialists, anti-cuts campaigners, benefit claimants and immigrants; and to put forward an alternative.

We need to campaign for a genuinely free media that is neither under big business control nor state control. In a socialist society it should be a means of communication for everyone, with its parameters discussed and decided democratically involving the widest possible number of people. Then it can help with planning what people need and want, and lay the basis for a massive flowering of communication, art and culture.

**The Murdoch scandal**

Murdoch, Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation has 200 newspapers globally, over 50,000 workers and reaches a billion people daily. It also has TV shows, films, books and magazines with sales of $33 billion a year. In spite of the phone hacking charges at its now closed News of the World paper (NoW), shares of News Corp went up by more than a third in the year to August 2012, boosting Murdoch’s fortune by $2 billion.

Murdoch controls 70% of the newspaper market in Australia; In the USA he owns the New York Post, Wall Street Journal and Fox News TV channel; In Britain, News International owns the Times, Sunday Times and Sun.

Phone hacking. A 2006 police inquiry into phone hacking by NoW journalists was led by Andy Hayman, who by 2010 was himself writing for the Murdoch papers. That inquiry ignored a mountain of evidence that the deceit and illegal web of activity was massive. It confined the blame to just two ‘rogue’ people - journalist Clive Goodman and private detective Glenn Mulcaire, who were jailed in January 2007 for four months and six months respectively.

When the scandal later resurfaced, the government eventually announced, on 13 July 2011, the setting up of an inquiry led by Lord Justice Leveson. Despite its limitations, this inquiry further exposed the web of lies and crimes and it showed the close links between the owners of the media, top politicians, judiciary and police. The police estimate that over 700 people are likely to have been victims of phone hacking, and the latest figure of possible victims is over 4,700.

The crimes involved phone hacking, bribes, data intrusion, computer hacking and improper access to medical, banking and other personal records.
NoW’s methods went as low as hacking the phone of murdered teenager Milly Dowler. Murdoch considered himself beyond the law - able to do anything he wanted.

Cameron. Tory Prime Minister David Cameron has had very close links with editors of NoW and other press barons. He even employed former NoW editor Andy Coulson as his communications director when Coulson was still receiving money from NoW and had £40,000 of News Corp shares. Coulson had resigned from NoW because he accepted overall 'responsibility' for the first-revealed phone hacking cases.

Another former NoW editor, Rebekah Brooks, was a long-term close friend of Cameron - staunchly supporting him politically and having regular social interaction with him. She’s recently been charged with conspiracy to access voicemails, illegally paying public officials and other charges, along with six other former NoW staff and investigators, including Coulson. Also, six others, including Brooks’ husband and her chauffeur, have been charged with conspiring to pervert the course of justice. She received a £7 million pay-off after resigning from News International over the allegations against her.

BSkyB. The NoW scandal exposed connivance between top ministers and Murdoch over Murdoch’s bid to take overall control of TV company BskyB, including endorsement of Murdoch’s plan by Tory former Culture minister Jeremy Hunt; and an alleged deal under the Labour government that Murdoch would give more political support to Labour if funding was cut to the BBC and Ofcom. Murdoch had to suspend this drive when the phone hacking revelations escalated.

Bribery. The police and other public officials were bribed by NoW employees. The Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of the London Met police resigned over these revelations. Met chief Paul Stephenson and his wife had accepted a 20 day free stay at an expensive health spa via a Murdoch intermediary. Also, the Commissioner had hired Neil Wallis as his PR adviser, who was later arrested for suspected phone hacking at NoW.

One prison officer received payments totalling nearly £35,000 between April 2010 and June 2011 from News International, Trinity Mirror and Express Newspapers. Another prison officer at a different prison is reported as receiving over £14,000 from Trinity Mirror between February 2006 and January 2012. In July 2011 the 168-year old NoW was sacrificed by Murdoch. He needed to try to stop contamination to his other papers.
On 21 July 2012 Rupert Murdoch announced his resignation from the boards of a string of News International companies behind the Sun, Times and Sunday Times, plus some in the US. But he remained at the helm of News Corp. His son James had already resigned in February as chairman of News International and relocated to New York to spearhead other parts of the Murdoch empire; he remains on the board of BSkyB. News Corporation intends to separate its newspaper and publishing arm from its film and TV operations. There is speculation that Murdoch could decide to sell his UK newspapers.

In January 2011 Coulson resigned from Cameron’s team under pressure of the phone hacking revelations. Cameron said he was "very sorry" that Coulson felt "compelled" to resign. In May 2012 Coulson was charged with perjury - for allegedly lying to the high court in Glasgow when he gave evidence at the perjury trial of socialist Tommy Sheridan in December 2010.

Coulson was NoW editor when Tommy Sheridan won his defamation case against Murdoch’s News of the World Scotland. The Socialist Party and others are demanding that Tommy’s perjury conviction be overturned. Who owns the British press?

The Sun, Times, Sunday Times: Murdoch’s News International. Rupert Murdoch is estimated by Forbes to have wealth totalling £9.4 billion. He led the attack on the power of the print unions in Britain, strongly supported Thatcher’s war on the miners and was keen to try to destroy leading Scottish anti-poll tax fighter and socialist Tommy Sheridan.

The Telegraph: The Barclay brothers, with £2.2 billion of wealth according to the 2012 Sunday Times Rich List, bought the Daily Telegraph, Sunday Telegraph and Spectator in June 2004 for £665 million. The pair already owned the Scotsman and the Business papers; but the bulk of their empire was based around the Littlewoods catalogue and Ritz hotel.

Guardian and Observer: Owned by the Scott Trust, which is run by eleven people. Although the Trust’s trustee shareholders don’t receive dividends, they control the company’s publications. The Trust is chaired by Dame Liz Forgan, who made cuts as head of the Arts Council on behalf of the Tory/LibDem government.

Trinity Mirror: Encompasses five national and over 160 regional newspapers, plus over 500 digital products. Six large investment companies own a majority of TM’s shares. Sly Bailey announced in May that she was stepping down as chief executive following criticism from shareholders and questions about her £1.7 million pay packet.
Express newspapers: Owned by Richard Desmond, who has £1 billion of wealth according to the 2012 Sunday Times Rich List. He also owns Northern & Shell Media Group that runs TV Channel 5.

Daily Mail: Owner Viscount Rothermere has wealth of £760 million. He also owns regional newspapers.

Metro free papers: Owned by Cristina Stenbeck’s company Kinnevik media. She has wealth of £369 million.

Financial Times: Owned by Pearson plc, a multinational education and publishing company that is the largest education company and largest book publisher in the world.

http://www.socialistworld.net/doc/6065

Congo: War over mining wealth

More human catastrophes impend, as tens of thousands flee Goma
Per-Ake Westerlund (Rättvisepartiet Socialisterna, CWI in Sweden) 29 November 2012

The military fighting in Congo-Kinshasa is at root about control of mining areas and huge profits. The war is conducted far above the interests of the population. Over 60,000 people have recently been displaced.

On Tuesday, 20 November, Goma, North Kivu, the biggest city in Eastern Congo, was captured by ‘M23’ rebels, a Rwanda-backed armed movement which was formally established in May 2011.

Already before this, about one million people in Kivu have been forced to leave their homes. New columns with tens of thousands of refugees from Goma and other cities are seeking out makeshift camps and school buildings that mostly have no food or medicines.

Over six million people have died as a result of the wars in the Congo-Kinshasa since 1998, most of them from malnutrition and disease. The basic reason for the Congo wars is the enormous natural wealth, such as gold, copper and a number of unique minerals. It is a continuation of the colonial and imperialist looting that has lasted for 130 years.

The US and EU, as well as the rulers in China, have supported Joseph
Kabila’s regime in the hope of achieving sufficient stability to continue the exploitation of Congo’s raw materials. Despite electoral fraud, severe repression and military conflicts, the corrupt president has received financial support and the UN has contributed with 20,000 soldiers.

The M23 was formed in 2011, but has its origin in a previous armed movement, the CNDP, which was close to taking Goma in 2008. M23 is controlled by Bosco Ntaganda, who in January 2009, took over the leadership of CNDP from the notorious Laurent Nkunda. The latter went into hiding in Rwanda.

The movement takes its name from the ‘peace deal’ of 23 March 2009 between the Congolese government and the CNDP. The agreement stated that the CNDP’s military forces and parallel local authorities would be integrated with the state army (the FARDC) and government agencies.

Bosco Ntaganda, who alongside Nkunda is wanted by the International Criminal Court in The Hague, was for over two years after the settlement a high ranking officer in the Congolese army. But collaboration between the former leaders of the CNDP and President Joseph Kabila’s government in Kinshasa was impossible.

"Financial rivalry ... for control of mines", The national army, the FARDC, was split by the conflict between the old and the new officers of the CNDP. Underlying this was the "financial rivalry ... for the control of mines", especially in Walikale territory in North Kivu, reported the International Crisis Group. Bosco Ntaganda himself is a rich businessman. In February 2011, a shipment of gold was discovered on his private jet in Goma.

The government troops, for a time led by Bosco, did not manage to defeat other armed forces of the regions, such as Mai-Mai groups and the Hutu FDLR militia, which controls several mining areas. Instead of peace, new armed groups were formed, some only to defend their village against armed attacks, looting and unofficial tax levies from both the army and militias.

Fighting against the FDLR has a special meaning in neighboring Rwanda’s government. The FDLR is led by Hutus from Rwanda who participated in the extermination of one million Tutsis in 1994. Only recently as August this year, Rwandan troops left Rutshuru in Congo, where they were stationed for over and had fought FDLR forces. The UN criticises Rwanda for financing and supporting the M23.

According to news agencies, the M23 only has over one thousand soldiers but still managed relatively easily to oust the government army from
Goma. UN troops in the city supported the army with helicopters, but did not intervene against the M23 on the ground. As on previous occasions, locals and refugees directed harsh criticism and anger against the UN.

The M23’s stated goal is to proceed to take more cities in eastern Congo, to then direct a blow against the capital, Kinshasa, 1,500 kilometres west. They would then repeat Laurent Kabila’s road to military victory in 1996-97, when he overthrew Mobutu’s rule. In 1998, the big war started, when Kabila’s regime was seriously challenged, in particular by Rwanda and Uganda-backed troops. Once again Rwanda is giving ‘secret’ backing to forces in the Congo, this time to the M23.

The M23 faces an ultimatum from the government in Kinshasa and a number of African governments that are backed by the US and the EU. However, the Rwandan President did not participate at this weekend’s African Summit.

The summit, which only lasted an hour, also drew up entirely unrealistic plans for a new joint military force combining the army and M23, along with ‘neutral’ troops from Tanzania, all with South African funding.

Can government troops dislodge M23?
The question is whether government troops can militarily dislodge the M23 if the rebel force does not leave Goma. “The truth is that [the government] troops’ morale is very low. They have lost faith in their officers,” a UN source told Reuters. In Minova town, controlled by the army, the “government soldiers went on plundering raids for the second night in a row,” said one source.

Warlords, such as President Kabila and M23’s Bosco Ntaganda, use the population as cannon fodder and slave labour. They collaborate with multinational companies, such as Swedish Mineral Invest and Lundin Mining, which both operate mines in Congo. Poorly paid and fed soldiers on all sides commit terrible atrocities - rapes and massacres - against the civilian population. UN and the Western powers are allies of the companies and the regime, not the people of Congo.

The task for socialists and anti-war activists in Congo is to build the unity of working people and the poor, for a new democratic socialist struggle movement in Congo. Wealth must be owned and controlled by the workers and the poor, not the warlords and international corporations. A new socialist movement must organise all the oppressed and exploited, regardless of ethnicity, to fight and to defend themselves against the militias’ abuses, against all warlords and against the meddling of local and regional reactionary regimes and imperialism.
Congo has 70 million inhabitants
-6 million have died in wars since 1998. 200,000 women have been raped
-2.4 million people are displaced within the country and 450,000 in neighbouring countries
-4.5 million are starving
-Life expectancy is 54 years
-GNI per capita is less than a US dollar a day
-27,000 cases of cholera have been reported in 2012.
http://www.socialistworld.net/doc/6059

Egypt: The new pharao ignites wrath amongst the masses

Hamid Alizadeh 26 November 2012

Two funeral processions turned into mass protests on the streets of Egypt today. Over the last 5 days thousands of people have taken to the streets in order to protest against a decree announced by the Egyptian president, Mohammed Morsi, allowing him to rule more or less autocratically. The events have publicly displayed the true nature of the Muslim Brotherhood who once claimed to be representatives of democracy in Egypt. At the same time these events show that none of the contradictions which led to the revolution have been solved and that under the surface a new wave of revolution is being prepared.

"If I fail to come back, I ask the people to continue with the revolution and claim our rights," wrote 16 year old Gaber Salah on his Facebook page shortly before his death fighting against police forces near Cairo’ Tahrir square last friday. Today thousands answered his call by joining his funeral that went through that same iconic square.
Also in the funeral of Islam Masoud a 15 year old that was killed on Saturday fighting against Muslim Brotherhood forces, was attended by thousand in Damanhour. Saleh was killed as he participated in a mass protest that attacked the offices of the Muslim Brotherhood in Damanhour on Saturday. Before going to another protest on Friday (which also happened to be the first anniversary of the deadly clashes between revolutionaries and security forces on Mohamed Mahmoud street near Tahrir square) Saleh wrote on his facebook page:

"I am going for the sake of the blood of our brothers and sisters; I am going to Mohamed Mahmoud for the sake of the revolution; I, am also going because I carried with my own hands my friend, Ahmed Osama, after being killed; I am going to regain my country."

**The New Pharoah**

Today’s mass protests followed 4 days of protests which erupted on 22 November 2012, when president Mohammed Morsi issued a declaration which in practice concentrates all state power in his hands. He declared that all of his decisions and the laws he issues are immune from any challenge and cannot be overturned. He also said that no judicial body can dissolve the constituent assembly, a thoroughly non-representative organ firmly controlled by Morsi’s Muslim Brotherhood. Not even the overthrown president Hosni Mubarak enjoyed such wide-ranging powers.

While trying to cover the key points of his declaration he also announced a few concessions such as a new investigation into some of the crimes committed by members of the old regime. This is a demand that the revolutionaries have fought for since the first day of the revolution. But it is clear that Morsi is not going to apply this – at least not at top level where all of the SCAF and even some of his own ministers, such as Ahmed Gamal who heads the hated interior ministry, are directly linked to the old regime.

In June when Morsi was elected as president, he leaned on the masses to strike blows against parts of the old regime that were not willing to share power with him. But it is also clear that Morsi and the SCAF immediately struck a deal after the elections which meant that the SCAF would allow the Muslim Brotherhood to take a share of power while the Brotherhood would keep the old state apparatus including the armed forces intact.

This time, having the army off his back, Morsi thought that by giving a few concessions as well as focussing on taking power away from the hated judiciary he could divide the movement and push his main agenda through.

The judiciary initially responded by declaring a national strike, but this
measure was quickly abandoned as the Supreme Judiciary Council, watered down its opposition to the decrees.

It told judges and prosecutors to return to work and announced that its members would meet Mr Morsi today to try to persuade him to restrict immunity to major state decisions like declaring war or martial law or breaking diplomatic relations with foreign nations. In other words the judges are making it clear that they are willing to strike a deal with Morsi as well.

**Intense clashes**

Morsi’s power grab was correctly seen by the youth as an attack against the revolution. On Friday thousands poured into Cairo’s Tahrir square to show their opposition to the President. In scenes which resembled those on the first days of the revolution the protestors were shouting slogans like “The people want to bring down the regime,” and “Down, down, Mursi-Mubarak.”

Throughout the day as more and more people gathered in the square, violent clashes broke out between the protestors and the security forces.

But the protests weren’t limited to Cairo. Through the weekend there were major protests in Alexandria, Port Said, Suez, El Behaira, Dakhalia, Assuit, Qena, Luxor, Aswan, Damanhour, Tanta and many more towns and cities.

At least in Alexandria, Port Said and Suez – all three old strongholds of the Brotherhood – the offices of the ruling party were attacked. In the major industrial city of El-Mahalla El-Kubra, the members of the MB had to organise defence teams to stave off angry protestors who wanted to storm their offices.

In Damietta a protest in front of the MB headquarters was attacked by a small group while the police withdrew from the scene. In Aswan, there were also clashes between protestors and security forces at the MB headquarters in the city.

A blogger wrote about the Port Said and Suez:

“Port Said was on fire for real last night. There was an attempt to storm the FJP HQ in Port Said last night just like Alexandria but armed Salafists unleashed attack on the protestors. According to eye witnesses these Salafists got automatic guns and came in tracks. There were many injured in these clashes. No police was found. Morsi got 46% of the votes there.

In Suez the protestors attacked the Muslim brotherhood HQ in the city
with rocks and Molotov cocktails. The protesters also attacked the FJP HQ in Suez and there have been clashes between and the Salafists who appeared suddenly to protect it. The protesters accused MB supporters of using gunshots and bird shots against them.”

The responses of the state to the protests were very violent. It is clear that in many places the Muslim Brotherhood, the Salafists and the police were coordinating their forces with the police acting as defence guards and the Salafists as shock troops. Throughout the weekend more than 500 people were injured and several – all oppositionists – have been killed.

Which stages are we passing through?
The Egyptian revolution is entering a new stage. “Everything has changed, nothing has changed” this is an often heard statement in Egypt. The revolutionary masses brought down a ferocious regime that had a massive state apparatus and a fully developed repressive system as well as the full backing of all major powers of the world. They did this without a plan, without a programme, without an organisation and without a revolutionary leadership.

But after almost two years of struggle nothing has fundamentally changed in society. People are tired of constant demonstrations and mobilisations that do not bring about any feasible results. They are therefore less prone to aimlessly taking to the streets and the broadest layers of the feel disoriented and without a clear perspective.

But the Morsi’s decree has been a wakeup call. Especially the advanced layers feel that the revolution is in danger. This process is common to all revolutions. After the initial stages of euphoria, the advanced layers as the first ones realize that all is not good. They see that behind the scenes a deal is being struck with the old rulers to sell off the revolution. This radicalises them and spurs them to an offensive against the reactionary leaders who are about to sell off the revolution. This is a very dangerous time because the advanced layers are in danger of being isolated and thus vulnerable to attacks from the counter-revolution. But never the less they anticipate a process which will also take place amongst the masses.

Tomorrow there is a call for a million man march against the regime. The Muslim Brotherhood has also called for a demonstration – Also in Tahrir square. This is clearly a provocation, and it could seem that the MB feels strong enough to a direct encounter with the revolution. But it is not at all certain that the Brotherhood will walk out of this clash all safe and sound.

The Muslim Brotherhood achieved 10 million votes in the parliamentary elections last year, but already by at the first round of the presidential elections that vote had been halved. On the other side the revolution at its
peak had 15-20 million people on the streets. A public and open move against the revolution might be what spurs the broad layers of the masses back into struggle and crushes the Brotherhood all together.

Contradictions of the revolution
Almost two years after the revolution began it is clear to most Egyptians that not much is changed. Many people, although they did not necessarily fully supported the Brotherhood were thinking “they are not like the old ones, they have clean hands and they are democratic”. But as the fog of religion which the Brotherhood used to hide behind clears up, many people are starting to realize that there are no fundamental difference between Morsi and Mubarak. While the faces at the top have changed, the old state apparatus remains in the hands of the old ruling class in Egypt.

But as we have said many times before: In the final analysis, the question of democracy cannot be separated from the question of bread. But capitalism today, being in a deep crisis on a global scale, not only cannot afford to give concessions, but is forced to attack living standards of the working masses. Egypt is no exception to this. Since 2011 GDP growth has fallen from 6 percent to 1.8 percent, pushing millions deeper into poverty. Unemployment has risen to 12.6 percent. Foreign direct investment has fallen to just $218 million in the first quarter of this year, compared with $2.1 billion in the same period of 2011.

In this context, ever since the revolution there has been a rising workers movement developing with millions of workers going on long and militant strikes for their modest demands. Only in the last month there have been more than 1,000 strikes; a figure which has only been higher in the months immediately after the revolution. But the regime – to which the MB and the Salafists now also belong – which is incapable of fulfilling the demands of the workers, is increasingly meeting the strikes and protests with repression defending the interests of capital and big business.

The only way of reaching even the most modest demands of the working class, it is necessary to break with the capitalist system as a whole. It is necessary to expropriate the property of the ruling class and its imperialist bosses and introduce a democratically planned economy to develop society. As long as the revolution fails to break the rule of capital in the country misery and poverty will continue to prevail. In the final analysis, the dictatorships in the Middle East are all are reflection of this contradiction.

The revolutionary masses will learn these lessons the hard way, through many bitter setbacks and defeats. Had there been a Marxist mass organisation like the Bolshevik party in Russia in 1917, this process would have been quicker. But the lack of any real revolutionary leadership
for the working class turns this process into a long and protracted one.

But never the less this process is taking place. While a certain hopelessness and disappointment prevails on the surface, there is a profound process going on beneath. Especially the youth and the advanced workers are becoming more and more radicalised by the day and they are looking for ideas that can explain a way out of the impasse. They are beginning to understand that a fundamental change of the system is necessary.

The Egyptian revolution is far from finished. While reaction might seem to be firmly in control of the situation, their base is very fragile. At the same time the masses remember that they alone, without any help, brought down the Mubarak regime. This weekend’s protests reveal a corner of the anger that is simmering beneath the surface.

The Brotherhood is a bourgeois party and have no choice but to continue to carry out the attacks of capital on the working masses. But every new murder and every new act of injustice fills the minds of the masses with more bitterness and hatred. Sooner or later this will lead to an open clash. Nothing has been settled yet – a new revolution is being prepared.

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LÉONCE NDIKUMANA, DIRECTOR OF THE AFRICAN POLICY PROGRAM, PERI: Thank you very much for the opportunity.

JAY: So part of the new research was that you looked at Northern African countries. Your previous research was more on the south. So what did you find?

NDIKUMANA: As you correctly mentioned, most of our research in the past has been on Sub-Saharan Africa, looking at how much capital flight has been fleeing the continent, the subcontinent over the past four or five decades. But this time we have [incompr.] on North African countries. We have looked at four countries—Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia. And we find that [incompr.] in Sub-Saharan African countries there has been a large amount of capital flight from those countries. And the pattern [has been] very similar.

JAY: Before we go further, just for the people that haven't watched the previous interviews, just talk quickly again about what this capital flight is and why it matters.

NDIKUMANA: Our analysis looks at capital flight because we believe it's an important development issue. It's a process where money comes to Africa in the form of loans. Money is generated from exploitation of natural resources and then goes missing. And it's deposited in private accounts abroad and is not recorded with government officials. That amounts to a net loss to African countries.

Normally, it's typically the product of corruption, embezzlement by African private and political agents. But this is facilitated by the [incompr.] hand from global financial centers that are waiting to accept and take in this money and put it in private accounts and not report it to government officials, so what is referred to as secrecy jurisdictions, safe havens, in around the world.

JAY: Yeah. An important point I think you just mentioned, but this is all done with the connivance of the big banks in Europe and North America, who know this is happening, and they facilitate it.

NDIKUMANA: Yes. And what is really appalling is the fact that world is [incompr.] Africa with one hand [incompr.] with the other, in the sense that we find that more than half of the money borrowed by African countries ends up in private accounts in the form of capital flight.

JAY: You looked at North African countries. What did you find?
**NDIKUMANA:** In North African countries, for the four countries over the period of 1970 to 2010 we find that as much as $450 billion have gone missing out of these countries. If you look in terms of how much that amount to, this amounts to about 88 percent of the combined GDP of these countries or $2,900 per capita, which means that the average North African countries have lost about $2,900, which is a large amount. Think about alternatively this is money that could have been invested in health, education, and it would have improved the well-being of the population in these countries. So even though in North Africa the living standards are a little bit higher than in Sub-Saharan African countries, the evidence shows that these countries could have achieved even more if this money would have been invested in social services in these countries.

**JAY:** Now, we discussed in the previous interview this concept of odious debt, that there's a basis in international law for saying that if the lender knows the country borrowing the money, number one, can never repay it, and number two, that it's going to be embezzled, that that's—the people of that country shouldn't bear the burden of that debt, and it's declared odious—and if you want to know more about that, watch the other interviews, 'cause they're going to be linked just below this video. But in that regard, there is now actually some attempt by Tunisia, if I have it correctly, to actually declare some of its debt odious. Tell us what's happening there.

**NDIKUMANA:** The new government of Tunisia, which is the one that came after the revolution, is basically calling for a close scrutiny on the past debts incurred under the Ben Ali regime, because, really, if you look at the massive amount of wealth amassed by Ben Ali and his family, the family of his wife, then you wonder where all that money was acquired from. And the question is whether some of the past loans may have contributed to this private wealth accumulation. So the government is calling for a detailed analysis or audit of the past debts. And there is a lot of public support for this call. And there is also global support for this kind of initiative.

I just want to mention that from the donor side, Norway has just approved a new regulation which authorizes audit of its own loans to developing countries, and the process is going to start immediately, and a report should be out by the end of next year. We really hope that this will give an example to all other donors, other lenders, public lenders, and hopefully of private lenders, to really embark on transparency on full speed, which would help both the lenders and the borrowers.

**JAY:** And the point is, if this audit shows that some of this debt never went to the good of the people of the country or, for example, to the
infrastructure projects it was supposed to go to, then the country in question should be able to say, we're not going to pay it.

**NDIKUMANA:** Exactly. If the debt audit shows that money was, arguably, lent to the country, cannot be tracked down on bona fide government public development projects, then it becomes the responsibility of the lender to show where the money went. It's not the responsibility of the people anymore to pay the loan, because they did not benefit from the resources.

**JAY:** Is there any movement like Tunisia's in some of the other North African countries?

**NDIKUMANA:** I haven't heard any similar movement in the other North African countries, but [incompr.] in 2011 where Tunisia was the vanguard [incompr.] revolution. We hope that this movement is going to spread not only in North Africa, but also the rest of Africa.

**JAY:** Just for people that haven't seen the earlier interview, just one more time go over some of the numbers. I think the fundamental conclusion was that Africa actually would be a creditor nation if this capital flight and mostly embezzled money was returned. What are those numbers again?

**NDIKUMANA:** So, as I said, we have now updated our numbers and have covered North Africa, so we have data for 37 African countries, including 33 Sub-Saharan countries and four North African countries. And if you look at those countries from 1970 to 2010, the total amount of capital flight that had left the continent, if you have assumed that this money would have accumulated interest, amounts to $1.6 trillion over that period, $1.6 trillion.

Now, these same countries, if you look at the debt that they owe to the rest of the world, it's only about $277 billion. So they are vastly a net creditor to the rest of the world. The amount of [incompr.] that has left the country far exceeds the amount of FDI, which is about—it's about $461 billion.

**JAY:** FDI being foreign direct investment.

**NDIKUMANA:** Foreign direct investment, $461 billion. It exceeds the amount of official aid that was given to these countries, which amounts to $867 billion. So the perception that Africa is heavily indebted to the rest of the world, is debt-dependent on the rest of—or aid-dependent vis-à-vis the rest of the world, is really not factually true, 'cause if Africa could keep all its resources onshore, they would not need to borrow and they would not need to go around asking for aid.
JAY: Thanks very much for joining us, Léonce.

NDIKUMANA: Thank you very much.

JAY: And don’t forget we’re in the midst of our year-end fundraising campaign. Every dollar you donate gets matched till we reach $100,000. So somewhere around this video player you’ll find a Donate button. If you don’t click it, we can’t do this. Thanks for joining us on The Real News Network.

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Léonce Ndikumana is a Professor of economics at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. He served as Director of Operational Policies and Director of Research at the African Development Bank, Chief of Macroeconomic Analysis at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), and visiting Professor at the University of Cape Town. He is an Honorary Professor of economics at the University of Stellenbosch. He has contributed to various areas of research and policy analysis on African countries, including the issues of external debt and capital flight, financial markets and growth, macroeconomic policies for growth and employment, and the economics of conflict and civil wars in Africa. He is co-author of Africa’s Odious Debt: How Foreign Loans and Capital Flight Bled a Continent, in addition to dozens of academic articles and book chapters on African development and Macroeconomics. He is a graduate of the University of Burundi and received his doctorate from Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri.

The new Obama Doctrine: From Gaza to Goma

Vijay Prashad First Published in Error! Hyperlink reference not valid. 26 November 2012

Obama’s second term opens with the worst kind of display of US power – backing two clients, Rwanda and Israel, who are hell-bent on creating mayhem against their neighbours. UN will do nothing against these two.

The Israeli assault on Gaza continues. The death toll rises over 100, infrastructure is destroyed, and the UN relief agencies are at wit’s end. A desperate tone has entered the dispatches from the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which has operated in occupied Palestine since 1950. On November 19, the agency noted:
'Israeli Air Force (IAF) strikes were supported by the Israeli navy during the night. The ongoing airstrikes have again targeted leaders of militant groups, infrastructure, the security apparatus, but increasingly residential buildings as well. One hit destroyed a four-storey building belonging to the Al Dalou family in a highly-populated area in Gaza city. The families present in the house were buried under the rubble. At least 11 people died in the strike and over 20 were injured – all of them civilians, including women, an infant, and children. This is an extremely worrying development. There has been a significant increase in civilian casualties during the past 24 hours.'

Israeli air strikes not only hit the UNRWA compounds in Gaza, but they killed a Grade 4 female student from the UNRWA Beach Preparatory Girls’ School.

The UN mission in Goma, a major city in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), removed all non-essential staff from the area. The peacekeepers, with a threadbare Congolese army force, remain to defend the city. On its outskirts sit the M23 (March 23) Movement rebels, backed by the Rwandan armed forces. They moved rapidly to get to this crucial city, the capital of North Kivu. There are already 2.4 million internally displaced people in the DRC, with 4.5 million suffering from food insecurity, and a million children under five suffering from severe acute malnutrition. The UN Office for the Coordinating of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said on November 19, ‘This new escalation in fighting in and around Goma, and elsewhere in the Kivus, adds to what are already monumental humanitarian needs in the DRC.’

‘The UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) warned, ‘The renewed conflict is putting children and their families at risk, leaving them exposed to physical harm and mental distress.’

Over the weekend, the UN Security Council met for an emergency session, listening to the UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Hervé Ladsous. The Council considered a French resolution on Goma, which condemned ‘the resumption of attacks by the M23 and demand their immediate cessation.’ There was a tepid finger raised toward Rwanda, whose armies have not only armed the M23, but they seem to be directing them. In 2010, the UN’s Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights published a comprehensive report, ‘DRC: Mapping Human Rights Violations, 1993-2003’, which showed the complicity of Rwanda’s government in war crimes, crimes against humanity and even genocide in the Congo. This damning report, solicited by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay, was barely given any consideration. It should
have been at the center of a UNSC discussion on eastern Congo. But it has not.

Neither Rwanda nor Israel will ever be hauled over the UN coals. The United States will prevent any serious discussion of the military adventures of its allies: Israel and Rwanda. For the former, Israel, there is a formal doctrine (Negroponte Doctrine) that enjoins US ambassadors to the UN to block any criticism of Israel. There is no such formal statement for Rwanda, but there might as well be. Criticism of the M23 movement is allowed, but there will be no allowance to criticise its sponsor, the Rwandan government of Paul Kagame.

During the Clinton administration, three heads of government were chosen as the new generation of African Renaissance leaders – Uganda’s Yoweri Museveni, Eritrea’s Isaias Afwerki and Rwanda’s Kagame. All three have atrocious records in their own countries, and as far as Kagame and Museveni go, in the Congo. The DRC’s Lambert Mende said that M23 is a ‘fictitious force,’ and that the ‘real aggressor’ is Kagame’s Rwanda. But there is silence on this, as both Israel and Rwanda are immunized from any serious criticism by the UN, and therefore the ‘international community.’

Dossiers filled with appalling behaviour and genocidal language flood the UN missions. Paul Kagame is on record as having called the Congolese, in his native Kinyarwanda, Ibicucu, nobodies or good for nothings (by Colette Braeckman in Les Nouveaux Predateurs, 2003). He speaks cavalierly about their ‘removal.’

Former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s son, Gilad, who is a member of the Kadima Party, wrote an op-ed in the Jerusalem Post (November 18), with genocide on his mind, ‘Flatten all of Gaza. The Americans didn’t stop with Hiroshima – the Japanese weren’t surrendering fast enough, so they hit Nagasaki, too.’ Such comments should raise the eyebrows of the UN Human Rights Council, whose silence on both Goma and Gaza is as stark as its loud noises during the lead-up to the NATO intervention in Libya. Navi Pillay, who called for the 2010 report on Rwanda’s behavior in the Congo and who tried her best (along with her legal advisor Mona Rishmawi) to implement the Goldstone Report, was allowed to fulminate about Libya and Syria but is subdued on Goma and Gaza. When atrocities are useful for US foreign policy, morality and outrage are muted.

By November 19, the UN Security Council had not acted on Gaza despite the Moroccan draft that has been before them since November 14. Russia’s Permanent Representative to the UN Vitaly Churkin made it clear to anyone within hearing range when he left the Council that he was
frustrated with US obduracy. Palestine’s Permanent Observer Riyad Mansour indicated that absent US resistance there would be a UN resolution, and therefore an official indication to Tel Aviv of its isolation in its pummeling of Gaza. Meanwhile, the UNSC sanctioned the M23, but did not put any pressure on Kagame. That UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon called Kagame and DRC’s Joseph Kabila to come to some kind of accommodation, shows that there is open acknowledgment that the M23 acts with Rwandan backing. Yet, no sanctions on Rwanda.

Obama’s second term opens with the worst kind of display of US power – backing two clients who are hell-bent on creating mayhem against their neighbours. Coming to the defense of Israel in Bangkok, Obama made himself the laughing stock of the world. He said, ‘There is no country on earth that would tolerate missiles raining down on its citizens from outside its borders,’ forgetting, of course, that US drones rain hellfire on Droneland – from Yemen to Pakistan, in violation of the UN’s own position on such extra-judicial assassinations, and it was Israel that began this particular episode with its own extra-judicial killing of Ahmad Jabari. There is no ‘reset,’ no new liberalism. Drone strikes and other exaggerations of US aerial power, fanatical defense of its allies, and refusal to come to terms with the emergent multipolarity – this is the Obama Doctrine, now at work in Gaza and Goma.

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Vijay Prashad is the author of Arab Spring, Libyan Winter (AK) and Uncle Swami (New Press).

Another Disgrace In Durban?

Rising ‘sub-imperialism’ as newest threat to the people and planet
Patrick Bond 23 November 2012
The heads of state of the Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa BRICS network are coming to Durban in four months, meeting on 26-27 March at the International Convention Centre (ICC), Africa’s largest venue. Given their recent performance, it is reasonable to expect another ‘1%’ summit, wreaking socio-economic and ecological havoc. And that means it is time for the first BRICS counter-summit, to critique top-down ‘sub-imperialist’ bloc formation, and to offer bottom-up alternatives.

After all, we have had some bad experiences at the Durban ICC:

- in 2001, in spite of demands by 10,000 protesters, the United Nations World Conference Against Racism refused to grapple with reparations for slavery and colonialism or with apartheid-Israel’s racism against Palestinians (hence Tel Aviv’s current ethnic cleansing of Gaza goes unpunished);
- the African Union got off to a bad start here, with its 2002 launch, due to reliance on the neoliberal New Partnership for Africa’s Development (Nepad) promoted by Pretoria;
- the 2003 World Economic Forum’s African regional meeting hastened governments’ supplication to multinational corporate interests in spite of protests;
- in 2011, Durban’s UN COP17 climate summit – better known as the ‘Conference of Polluters’ – featured Washington’s sabotage, with no new emissions cuts and an attempted revival of the non-solution called ‘carbon trading’, also called ‘the privatization of the air.’

**Eco-disasters made in Durban**

“The Durban Platform was promising because of what it did not say,” bragged US State Department official Trevor Houser to the New York Times. “There is no mention of historic responsibility or per capita emissions. There is no mention of economic development as the priority for developing countries. There is no mention of a difference between developed and developing country action.”

The Durban deal squashed poor countries’ ability to defend against climate disaster. With South African foreign minister Maite Nkoana-Mashabane in the chair, the COP17 confirmed this century’s climate-related deaths of what will be more than 180 million Africans, according to Christian Aid. Already 400 000 people die each year from climate-related chaos due to catastrophes in agriculture, public health and ‘frankenstorms’ like last month’s Sandy.

Degeneration of global governance is logical when Washington unites with the BRICS countries, as was first demonstrated three years ago with the Copenhagen Accord. At that COP, Jacob Zuma, Brazil’s Lula da
Silva, China’s Wen Jiabao and India’s Manmohan Singh joined Barack Obama to foil the Kyoto Protocol’s mandatory emissions cuts, thus confirming that at least 4 degrees global warming will occur by 2100. “They broke the UN,” concluded Bill McKibben from the climate advocacy movement 350.org.

The negotiators were explicitly acting on behalf of their fossil fuel and extractive industries. Similar cozy ties between Pretoria politicians, London-based mining houses, Johannesburg ‘Black Economic Empowerment’ tycoons and sweetheart trade unions have since been exposed at Marikana, with another blast against climate anticipate as fracking begins in the Western Cape, Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal’s Drakensburg Mountains, driven by multinational corporate oil firms led by Shell.

The 2012 Yale and Columbia University Environmental Performance Index showed that aside from Brazil, the other BRICS states are decimating their – and the earth’s – ecology at the most rapid rate of any group of countries, with Russia and South Africa near the bottom of world stewardship rankings.

Looting Africa
Like Berlin in 1884-85, the BRICS Durban summit is expected to carve up Africa more efficiently, unburdened – now as then – by what will be derided as ‘Western’ concerns about democracy and human rights.

Reading between the lines, its resolutions will:

· support favoured corporations’ extraction and land-grab strategies;
· worsen Africa’s retail-driven deindustrialization (SA’s Shoprite and Makro – soon to be run by Walmart – are already notorious in many capital cities for importing even simple products that could be supplied locally);
· revive failed projects such as Nepad; and
· confirm the financing of both land-grabbing and the extension of neo-colonial infrastructure through a new ‘BRICS Development Bank’ likely to be based just north of Johannesburg, where the Development Bank of Southern Africa already does so much damage following Washington’s script.

The question is whether in exchange for the Durban summit amplifying such destructive tendencies, which appears certain, those of Africa’s elites who may be invited can leverage any greater power in world economic management via BRICS. With SA finance minister Pravin Gordhan’s regular critiques of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), there is certainly potential for BRICS to ‘talk left’ about the global-governance democracy deficit.
But watch the ‘walk right’ carefully. In the vote for Bank president earlier this year, for example, Pretoria’s choice was hard-core Washington ideologue Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the Nigerian finance minister who with IMF managing director Christine Lagarde catalyzed the Occupy movement’s near revolution in January, with a removal of petrol subsidies. Brasilia chose the moderate economist Jose Antonio Ocampo and Moscow backed Washington’s choice: Jim Yong Kim.

This was a repeat of the prior year’s fiasco over the race for IMF Managing Director, won by Lagarde – in spite of ongoing corruption investigations against her by French courts – because the Third World was divided-and-conquered. BRICS appeared in both cases as incompetent, unable to even agree on a sole candidate, much less win their case in Washington.

Yet in July, BRICS treasuries sent $100 billion in new capital to the IMF, which was seeking new systems of bail-out for banks exposed in Europe. South Africa’s contribution was only $2 billion (R17.5 billion), a huge sum for Gordhan to muster against local trade union opposition. Explaining the SA contribution – initially he said it would be only one tenth as large – Gordhan told Moneyweb last year that it was on condition that the IMF became more ‘nasty’ (sic) to desperate European borrowers, as if the Greek, Spanish, Portuguese and Irish poor and working people were not suffering enough.

And the result of this BRICS intervention is that China gains IMF voting power, but Africa actually loses a substantial fraction of its share. Even Gordhan admitted at last month’s Tokyo meeting of the IMF and Bank that it is likely “the vast majority of emerging and developing countries will lose quota shares – an outcome that will perpetuate the democratic deficit.” And given “the crisis of legitimacy, credibility and effectiveness of the IMF,” it “is simply untenable” that Africa only has two seats for its 45 member countries.

But likewise, South Africa’s role in Africa has been nasty, as confirmed when Nepad was deemed ‘philosophically spot on’ by lead US State Department Africa official Walter Kansteiner in 2003, and foisted privatisation of even basic services on the continent. In a telling incident this year, the Johannesburg parastatal firm Rand Water was forced to leave Ghana after failing – with a Dutch for-profit partner (Aqua Vitens) – to improve Accra’s water supply, as also happened in Maputo (Saur from Paris) and Dar es Salaam (Biwater from London).

As a matter of principle, BRICS appears hellbent on promoting the further commodification of life, at a time the greatest victory won by ordinary
Africans in the last decade is under attack: the Treatment Action Campaign demand for affordable access to AIDS medicines, aided by India’s cheap generic versions of drugs. A decade ago, they cost $10,000 per person per year and a tiny fraction of desperate people received the medicines. But now, more than 1.5 million South Africans – and millions more in the rest of Africa – get treatment, thus raising the SA collective life expectancy from 52 in 2004 to 60 today, according to reliable statistics released this month.

However, in recent months, Obama has put an intense squeeze on India to cut back on generic medicine R&D and production, as well as making deep cuts in his own government’s aid commitment to funding African healthcare. In Durban, the city that is home to the most HIV+ people in the world, Obama’s move resulted in this year’s closure of AIDS public treatment centres at three crucial sites. One was the city’s McCord Hospital, which ironically was a long-standing ally of the NGO Partners in Health, whose cofounder was Obama’s pick for World Bank president, Jim Kim.

‘Sub-imperialism’?
So we must ask, are the BRICS ‘anti-imperialist’ – or instead, ‘sub-imperialist’, doing deputy-sheriff duty for global corporations, while controlling their own angry populaces as well as their hinterlands? The eco-destructive, consumerist-centric, over-financialised, climate-frying maldevelopment model throughout the BRICS works very well for corporate profits, but the model is generating crises for 99% of the people and for the planet.

Hence the label sub-imperialist is tempting. As originally formulated during the 1970s, Ruy Mauro Marini argued that his native Brazil is “the best current manifestation of sub-imperialism,” for these reasons:

- “Doesn’t the Brazilian expansionist policy in Latin America and Africa correspond, beyond the quest for new markets, to an attempt to gain control over sources of raw materials – such as ores and gas in Bolivia, oil in Ecuador and in the former Portuguese colonies of Africa, the hydroelectric potential in Paraguay – and, more cogently still, to prevent potential competitors such as Argentina from having access to such resources?
- “Doesn’t the export of Brazilian capital, mainly via the State as exemplified by Petrobras, stand out as a particular case of capital export in the context of what a dependent country like Brazil is able to do? Brazil also exports capital through the constant increase of foreign public loans and through capital associated to finance groups which operate in Paraguay, Bolivia and the former Portuguese colonies in Africa, to mention just a few instances.
“It would be good to keep in mind the accelerated process of monopolization (via concentration and centralization of capital) that has occurred in Brazil over these past years, as well as the extraordinary development of financial capital, mainly from 1968 onward.”

Matters subsequently degenerated on all fronts. In addition to these three criteria – regional economic extraction, ‘export of capital’ (always associated with subsequent imperialist politics) and internal corporate monopolization and financialisation – there are two additional roles of BRICS if they are genuinely sub-imperialist. One is to ensure regional geopolitical ‘stability’: for example, Brasilia’s hated army in Haiti and Pretoria’s deal-making in African hotspots like South Sudan and the Great Lakes, for which a $5 billion arms deal serves as military back-up.

The second is to advance the broader agenda of neoliberalism, so as to legitimate continuing market access – typical of South Africa’s Nepad, China, Brazil and India’s attempt to revive the WTO, and Brazil’s sabotage of the left project within the ‘Bank of the South’ initiative. As Belgian political economist Eric Toussaint remarked at a World Social Forum panel in Porto Alegre in 2009, “The definition of Brazil as a peripheral imperialist power is not dependent on which political party is in power. The word imperialism may seem excessive because it is associated with an aggressive military policy. But this is a narrow perception of imperialism.”

A richer framing for contemporary imperialism is, according to agrarian scholars Paris Yeros and Sam Moyo, a system “based on the super-exploitation of domestic labour. It was natural, therefore, that, as it grew, it would require external markets for the resolution of its profit realisation crisis.” This notion, derived from Rosa Luxemburg’s thinking a century ago, focuses on how capitalism’s extra-economic coercive capacities loot mutual aid systems and commons facilities, families (women especially), the land, all forms of nature, and the shrinking state – and has also been named ‘accumulation by dispossession’ by David Harvey, and in special cases evoking militarist intervention, Naomi Klein’s ‘Shock Doctrine’.

Along with renewed looting are various symptoms of internal crisis and socio-economic oppressions one can find in many BRICS, including severe inequality, poverty, unemployment, disease, violence (again, especially against women), inadequate education, prohibitions on labour organising and other suffering.

The rising inequality within BRICS – except for Brazil whose minimum wage increase lowered the extreme Gini coefficient to at least a bit below South Africa’s – is accompanied by worsening social tensions, which in
turn is responded to with worsening political and civil rights violations, such as increased securitisation of societies, militarisation and arms trading, prohibitions on protest, rising media repression and official secrecy, debilitating patriarchy and homophobia, activist jailings and torture, and even massacres (including in Durban where a notorious police hit squad killed more than 50 people in recent years, and even after unveiling by local media and attempted prosecutions, continues unpunished today).

The forms of sub-imperialism within BRICS are diverse, for as Yeros and Moyo remark, “Some are driven by private blocs of capital with strong state support (Brazil, India); others, like China, include the direct participation of state-owned enterprises; while in the case of South Africa, it is increasingly difficult to speak of an autonomous domestic bourgeoisie, given the extreme degree of de-nationalisation of its economy in the post-apartheid period. The degree of participation in the Western military project is also different from one case to the next although, one might say, there is a ‘schizophrenia’ to all this, typical of ‘sub-imperialism’.”

As a result, all these tendencies warrant opposition from everyone concerned. The results are going to be ever easier to observe, the more that BRICS leaders prop up the IMF’s pro-austerity financing and catalyse a renewed round of World Trade Organisation attacks; the more a new BRICS Development Bank exacerbates World Bank human, ecological and economic messes; the more Africa becomes a battleground for internecine conflicts between sub-imperialists intent on rapid minerals and oil extraction (as is common in central Africa); and the more specific companies targeted by victims require unified campaigning and boycotts to generate solidaristic counter-pressure, whether Brazil’s Vale and Petrobras, or South Africa’s Anglo or BHP Billiton (albeit with London and Melbourne hqs), or India’s Tata or Arcelor-Mittal, or Chinese state-owned firms and Russian energy corporations.

One opportunity to link issues and connect-the-dots between campaigns so as to find a unifying anti-subimperialism that aligns with our critique of global capitalism, is within a Durban uncivil-society counter-summit next March 23-27. Like the rest of South Africa, Durban has witnessed an upsurge of socio-economic conflict in recent months, and it is incumbent upon visitors to understand where tensions are emerging so that similar processes in the other BRICS are not left isolated.

An overall objective is to ‘rebuild BRICS from below’, so the usual ‘globalisation-from-the-middle’ talk-shops – featuring speeches by petit-bourgeois NGO strategists and radical intellectuals (like myself) – must be balanced through community-based teach-ins where Reality
Tours and sharing between oppressed peoples take precedence.

One of the most critical sites is South Durban, where a $30 billion project to destroy two black neighbourhoods (Clairwood and Merebank) through 10-fold expansion of shipping, freight and petro-chemical activity is being vigorously contested. The narratives of the communities resisting go well beyond ‘Not in My Back Yard’ reasoning, and instead much more widely question the extractivist, export-oriented model of maldevelopment that has seduced the current South African government, as well as other BRICS.

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Watch for more details from some of the welcoming groups:
http://ccs.ukzn.ac.za http://www.groundwork.org.za,
http://www.sdcea.co.za
http://www.amandla.org.za

Patrick Bond directs the UKZN Centre for Civil Society - host institution for last year’s COP17 counter-summit - and authored Politics of Climate Justice, UKZN Press.

Anatomy of the Walmart Strike

Walking Out, One Day at a Time
David Bacon 22 November 2012

In the lead-up to Black Friday, Walmart workers - supported by a number of unions - have organized a series of work stoppages to protest low wages and unfair working conditions. Here is an inside account of a day in the life of the strike.

On past Black Fridays, the nation's annual post-Thanksgiving shopping celebration, Walmart stores have seen such a crush of shoppers that people have been trampled trying to get through the doors. On this coming Black Friday, however, shoppers are more likely to see protesting workers.

People have been criticizing the chain's low wages and unfair competition with local businesses for years. But for a long time the company has been able to keep its workers from joining the critics. Where it could, Walmart has tried to give itself a paternalistic, we're-all-one-big-family face. Where that hasn't worked, it's resorted to the age-old tactics of firings and fear.
But Walmart workers are waking up. Supported by a number of unions, they've organized a series of work stoppages, the latest and most extensive of which will take place on Black Friday. They call their organization OURWalmart (Organization United for Respect at Walmart).

Strikes at Walmart stores are usually short walkouts by groups of mostly-young people, propelled by pent-up anger at abuse by managers and wages so low no one can really live on them. My heart goes out to these workers. I, too, was fired more than once for trying to organize a union where I worked. I remember how it felt to be an open activist in a plant where the company made no secret of its hatred for what we wanted - a union.

So when I went to take pictures at a walkout at the San Leandro, California Walmart, I wanted to make visible the faces of people with the courage to defy their boss. And I wanted to see how people who like that union idea, as I do, can help keep the company from firing them. This is what I saw.

We got together in the parking lot of the BART rapid transit station a few blocks from the store. Several dozen supporters joined a handful of workers who'd already been fired, along with a couple of associates (as the workers call themselves) from other Walmarts in the area. Together, they marched down Hesperian Boulevard, through the parking lot, to the doors.

Once enough people had gathered, both fired and currently-employed workers held a brief memorial for Enrique, an associate who'd recently died. Inside the store, they'd set up a small memorial outside the break room. The crowd outside walked solemnly through the doors and down the aisles heading for it, carrying Enrique's photograph in front.

Raymond Bravo, who works in the Richmond store, and other workers held a banner as they walked past the shelves and shoppers. Misty Tanner later told me she'd been fired after several years at Walmart because she wants the right to organize. Her most recent work there had been as a member of a crew doing renovations at the store in Richmond. What must she have felt, walking through the aisles of Walmart, where she'd been terminated not long before?

These fired workers are very present in the minds of those still working. I remembered my own experience, after I and several friends were terminated and blacklisted at a Silicon Valley semiconductor plant. We tried not to disappear, too. It wasn't just that we didn't want to feel the company had beaten us. We found it actually reduced the fear among the
union supporters who were still working. They could see we didn't just disappear (what the company undoubtedly wanted). We refused to become a bad dream to frighten people. Everyone knew we'd been fired anyway. Remaining present in people's lives meant we weren't a dark secret people feared talking about.

I could see that the Walmart workers, both working and fired, still cared for each other. They too were not about to forget what the company had done, or let anyone else forget, either.

At the door to the break room, a worker who'd clocked out, Dominic Ware, stood by as we laid our carnations on the floor in memory of Enrique. Two store managers stood by watching us. Another followed us, yelling in a loud voice that we had no right to be there. He was especially bothered by photographs, and kept putting his hand in front of the camera to stop me from taking them.

It was pretty obvious that they wanted to disrupt what was intended to be a respectful and solemn remembrance for Enrique. Even further, they tried to make absolutely sure that every worker in the store knew exactly how much the company hated what was happening. Dominic stayed calm, an example to his coworkers that no one needed to be frightened.

Supporters and workers together put their flowers on the store floor. I wondered how long it would take for managers to remove them, and all the evidence of this job action.

After we left the store, Dominic spoke at a short rally outside, while the sun set and it grew dark. Nurses from the California Nurses Association, longshore and warehouse workers from the ILWU, machinist union representatives, young community activists and other supporters stood together with the Walmart workers.

Three workers from this store, Dominic Ware, Marsela Lopez-Navarro and Cecilia Gurule, had clocked out and joined the rally. That took courage. Everyone in the store knows the company not only hates unions, but also has fired workers who want to organize.

Once the rally was over, workers were unsure whether the company would let them return to their jobs. So everyone got behind them and marched back to the door, where a manager met them. Dominic, Cecilia and Marsela then read him a statement declaring their right to participate in collective action - the basic activity involved in forming a workers' association or a union. If the company tried to keep them off the job or retaliated against them, they warned, it would be a violation of federal labor law.
Then we all walked back into the store, accompanying Dominic and Cecilia to the break room. There the key test was whether they would be able to punch the time clock and go back to work. It's hard to describe how good it felt to see Dominic come out of the break room in his work vest and go back to his job.

I was never able to go back to work at National Semiconductor, or the other workplaces where I was fired. In our Walmart demonstration there were fired workers who shared that bitter experience. But for this one evening, we were able to help Dominic, Marsela and Cecelia do what should be their right without question - challenge their employer and declare their open support for the right to organize.

No one should have to be afraid that such a basic right of free thought, speech or association might cost them their job. Yet the reality in this country is that it so often does. And at Walmart, the human casualties are very much present.

But for one evening, direct action by courageous workers, supported by people living in the community around them, kept firings from happening. That was a big step toward making that right something that exists in real life, not just on paper.

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David Bacon is a writer and photographer. His new book, "Illegal People - How Globalization Creates Migration and Criminalizes Immigrants," was just published by Beacon Press. His photographs and stories can be found at http://dbacon.igc.org.

Goma falls to Rwanda

Justin Podur 22 November 2012

Rebels, called the M23, have taken Goma, the main city of North Kivu, one of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)’s eastern provinces. Their plan is to march to Bukavu, the main city of South Kivu, and from there, they say, across the massive country to Kinshasa, the Congo’s capital.

A geographical note is in order. The DRC’s principal cities are part of greater urban areas that cross international borders. Look at the capital,
Kinshasa, on a map, and you will see Brazzaville, the capital of the other Congo, right next to it.

Bukavu, which the M23 rebels threaten to go to next, borders the Rwandan city of Cyangugu. Goma, which the rebels currently control, borders the Rwandan city of Gisenyi.

The geographical note should be accompanied by an historical note. This military pattern, of a rebellion seizing Goma, then Bukavu, then marching west deeper into the DRC, has happened before. It happened in 1996, when the rebels, who called themselves the AFDL, overthrew Mobutu. The AFDL was militarily and politically subordinate to the Rwandan army, and had help from the Ugandan army as well. They were successful. Mobutu was ousted, Laurent Kabila was installed, and the country was renamed from Zaire to the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The same pattern repeated itself in 1998, when the rebels, then called the RCD, took Goma and attempted to get rid of Laurent Kabila. The RCD, like the AFDL, was a creation and an instrument of Rwanda and Uganda. The RCD was not as successful as the AFDL: it was stalemated when Laurent Kabila got military help from Angola and Zimbabwe. The RCD split, with Rwandan and Ugandan controlled factions coming to blows over the spoils of the Congo.

But even though they did not get to impose their will nationally, the Rwandan-sponsored militia groups (the spawn of the RCD) did impose their will in the east. They continued to control the mines, they continued to effectively occupy and rule the Kivus, and eventually, they were incorporated into the Congolese Army through processes called brassage and mixage.

There are nuances to this story, but it can be summarized in one phrase: the eastern Congo is under Rwandan control, and has been since 1996. The DRC's government has tried, since 1998, to re-assert control over the Kivus, and the warfare in the east is over control: of the land, of the people, and of course, of the mines.

Rwanda, of course, denies that it has anything to do with these rebels. But a look at one of M23’s commanders, Bosco 'The Terminator' Ntaganda, is indicative. Ntaganda was born in Rwanda, and fought in the Rwandan civil war of 1990, on the side of victorious RPF that took over Rwanda in 1994. When Rwanda invaded the Congo along with its creation, the AFDL, Ntaganda was there, and he stayed. He was part of two other Congolese armed groups, both of which opposed the Congolese government: The Union of Congolese Patriots in Ituri, and the CNDP (National Congress for the Defense of the People), before he joined the
M23. Every group Ntaganda has been a part of has committed amply documented war crimes and crimes against humanity. The CNDP, like M23, is abundantly documented to have been supported by Rwanda.

Ntaganda is indicative, but not unique. An examination of other leaders of Congolese rebellions, like James Kabarebe and Laurent Nkunda, reveals similar career paths: from the Rwandan army, into Congolese rebel armies, and sometimes back and forth.

The rebels are supported by Rwanda, but Rwanda is a small country and the DRC is a huge one. Why is Rwanda able to do so much to its giant neighbour? The Rwandan army has been particularly well-organized since the 1990s, and the country's President, Paul Kagame, is a favourite of the US (where he went to military school). Kagame's Rwanda has always looked for military solutions to political problems, because of its disproportionate strength in that arena. Rwanda has also had important diplomatic support from the US and the UK, although a few other European countries have withdrawn diplomatic support and aid after exposures of Rwanda's violent role in the eastern Congo.

Since October 18, Rwanda has been on the United Nations Security Council, which probably provides more diplomatic cover for crimes than it does additional scrutiny, but Rwanda is vulnerable politically. Where it is not dependent on stolen Congolese wealth, it is dependent on international aid – as well as the crucial military and diplomatic support from the US. A few weeks before this rebel offensive, on October 25, a group of gunmen attempted to assassinate one of the eastern Congo's most visible activists, Dr. Denis Mukwege, who has done important medical work in Bukavu and important work raising the profile of the DRC and those who are behind the war in the east at the United Nations and other international forums (http://www.killingtrain.com/node/904). In every phase of Rwanda's “rebellions” over the past decades, Congolese and international activists and journalists have been targeted. If these “rebellions” had the effect of exposing the Rwandan occupation of the east, if Rwanda's own sponsors were unable to control the information about the war in the Congo, Rwanda could be forced to stand down and allow the Congolese a space to breathe, and rebuild.

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Farm Workers “Catch-up” with Militant Mineworkers
Two weeks have passed since thousands of vineyard farm workers from the area of De Doorns in the Western Cape went on strike. They are demanding that their daily slave wage be doubled to a minimum of 150 rand ($17) per day; currently they are earning R69.39 per day. But there is more behind this genuine issue of low wages. In our “democratic era” since the fall of Apartheid, this is and will probably be the longest period on strike for these farm workers in this region.

The militant mood is spreading from the mines throughout South African society. Picture - Striking minersIn this strike, just like in many other protests this year, workers have taken a lead by their own actions and subsequently the leadership has joined in. But what is lacking is an understanding that the collective indignation lying on the surface of events is itself a manifestation of the contradictions beneath the surface. The current events unfolding in the Western Cape are also the embryonic revolutionary consequences of Marikana, and each sector will soon catch the fever. By the way, we have already witnessed this contagious process when workers in the transport sector have demanded the same concessions that had been made to the Marikana workers.

The employer of the farm workers has only made a revised offer of 80 Rand from the 69 Rand slavery wage, clearly not much of an increase. The abhorrent conditions have been heating up the temperature at the workplace for some time now, but the bosses' offer clearly shows that they have misread the thermometer. The workers instructed their representatives to demand nothing less than $17 per day as anything less is not for mediation. The workers' representatives clearly feeling the pressure from below could not back down from these demands and that led to the deadlock over the employer’s revised offer.

De Doorns produces table grapes, mainly for the export market. It currently provides 8,000 full-time and 8,000 seasonal jobs. It has the ambition to increase exports by 5% but does not state how long this will take. It estimates that this will add R432 million to the province of Western Cape. Yet at the same time these ambition are always followed by a deepening of the extreme exploitation of the workers by the company.

**Conditions at the Workplace**

Apart from the wages issue there are many other issues which confront workers at the vineyards and farm workers in general. The situation is much worse than during the apartheid era. This was expressed on a radio station, SA FM, by the secretary of NUMSA (National Union of
Metalworkers of South Africa), Irvin Jim, and subsequently admitted by a representative from the Agricultural department on the same show today (13/11/2012).

The post-apartheid era has not meant much change of the working conditions of these workers. A report from August 2011, details a long list of rights abuses practiced by the farmers of these areas. The list goes from housing on farms unfit for living; labourers being exposed to fertilisers and pesticides without the proper safety equipment; a lack of access to water while working in dehydrating conditions; the lack of toilet facilities for workers; and pressure put on workers to stop them from joining unions. It also detailed threats of evictions made against residents who had stayed on farms for long periods of time.” [Download the full report on this link: www.hrw.org/reports/2011/08/23/ripe-abuse-0]

Labour Brokers
Another is that of Labour Brokers. In South Africa, there are three parties involved in the Labour-Broking-System, at least the ones we are concerned with in this article, namely: The Broker, The Client and The Worker. The following describes these role players with their operational roles:

1. Broker: The labour broker handles the interviews, recruitment, HR, discipline, admin, payroll, transport, ensuring all legislative requirements are met, etc. Labour brokers specialize in the supplying of temporary workers to any of the following industries in South Africa: mining, transport, logistics, as well as in the construction sector and other services in the business sector. The broker employs the worker.

2. Client: Buys the labour-power of a worker through negotiations with the Broker

3. Worker: Due to the material conditions confronting society the worker is forced to sell his labour-power to the employer through the broker.

How this process works can be explained by the following example. An employer who is looking for workers, for a normal job offer of say R22 (per hour), would consult a labour broker and negotiate for a lower price (to cut the costs of production), which the broker is always prepared to secure because he is also in competition with other brokers who are always available. After reducing that normal price to the employer (client) the broker will deduct his own share and pay the worker, for example, R16 (per hour), and this worker hired through a broker is expected to do the same amount of work as his work mate who is paid at the normal rate of R22.
The casualization of the work force in South Africa, through the widespread use of labour brokers, has undermined wages and working conditions a lot. These conditions might have been researched and eloquently expressed in journals, but the real pain can only be expressed by the worker on the ground who are left with scars that tell a tale of real exploitation.

**The Trade Union leaders**
The reaction of some union leaders to the struggle of the De Doorns has also been interesting. Tony Ehrenreich, provincial secretary of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) has taken up the demands of the workers and has stated that there is no justification for the farm workers to be treated in a slave manner with horrendous conditions in the new democracy. The fact that these words come from Tony Ehrenreich, shows the pressure that is building within the ranks of the workers. For many years these same conditions have been met with silence by these trade union leaders. Nonetheless, Ehrenreich has made the right call in the current process unfolding in De Doorns. He appealed to all workers to stay away from work from last Monday.

COSATU’s actions in the Western Cape are informed by an objective factor, and it appears for now they have learnt a lesson from the mineworkers of Marikana. This is reflected in Tony’s analysis in the Business Day journal of the current situation. "They are also making the point that agriculture is the wealth of the nation; like mining, it belongs to everyone. They are making the same plea as the mineworkers for a decent salary and a share of the profits”

**The State**
Before the The De Doorns workers embarked on their strike they had written to the Department of Agriculture, informing the department of the situation at the workplace and complaining about the slave wages. The department only responded after the farm workers set 30 hectares (74 acres) of vineyards ablaze early last week, and even then it was clear on which side they stood. The vanguard of the elite, the State, through the office of the agricultural minister, immediately issued a statement appealing to the workers not to vandalize the private property of the farm owners. The opposition leader, Helen Zille, who is also the premier of the Western Cape province, echoed the same sentiments. This was not surprising since she is an openly capitalist politician advocating a free market economy, even when this system is driving humanity towards an abyss.

For Marxists, the burning of the farms is an expression of the concentrated frustration among workers, who are the real producers of wealth, but who are at the same time subjected to abject poverty and extreme working
conditions. This is the main contradiction that needs to be solved. Unfortunately though, under the current Capitalist system, which is all about profit maximization, this is not possible.

The system, especially now that it is in a historically deep crisis, cannot offer a solution to any of the main problems faced by the workers today. What is needed is a planned social system for the people by the people, through meaningful participative procedures of workers and society in general.

**What is to be done?**

Workers learn from experience, not only from their direct interactions with this brutal system but also through the experience of workers in other sectors. In this sense the struggle of the farm workers is in many ways picking up where the mine workers left. However, the lack of a revolutionary leadership is still limiting the struggles of this militant emerging power of the proletariat to a mere programme of reforms.

In the struggle the farm workers must set up their own rank and file bodies with the task of assessing the conditions and directing their struggles. The workers must only trust in their own forces, but this does not mean that they should break with COSATU. The task of COSATU, or any vanguard of the workers, is to equip the masses with the necessary basic scientific theory to understand the nature and character of capitalism and show a way out of its impasse.

In the long term, any attempt to increase wages to meaningful rates will be met with economic sabotage and a strike of capital by the capitalists of the farming commercial industry. Our response must be to demand an expropriation of the businesses and land owned by these gentlemen. If they can't afford to provide decent living conditions to the workers and poor of South Africa, then the workers and poor of South Africa cannot afford them.

The struggle of farm workers, like the continuing struggle of mine workers, goes to the heart of the nature of the negotiated settlement which brought the apartheid regime to an end. That agreement was the by-product of the revolutionary struggle of the South African proletariat and the poor. The ruling class was so afraid of a revolutionary overthrow of the regime in which they would lose their property, wealth and privileges, that they were forced to make concessions in the field of formal bourgeois democracy. This, they knew, would lead to an ANC government. Therefore, any agreement had to be based on the ANC leaders agreeing to respect private property rights and a guarantee of no nationalizations. That is, bourgeois democracy would be conceded, but capitalism would remain firmly in place.
18 years later it is abundantly clear that within the limits of capitalism not a single one of the pressing needs of the working class and poor masses of South Africa have been solved. In most cases their living conditions are the same as under apartheid or even worse. Yes, they can vote in municipal and national elections and they have consistently voted for the ANC, but the basic problems of agrarian reform, control over the mineral wealth and the economy, as expressed in the Freedom Charter, have not been resolved, not even started to be addressed. A minority of former liberation movement figures have joined the ranks of Capital, but Capital is firmly in charge. The big mining monopolies, multinational companies, capitalist farmers, still dominate South Africa.

The only way forward is to bring the movement back to its founding principles and the understanding that the pressing demands of the masses can only be solved through the expropriation of the country’s wealth so that it is democratically planned and controlled by the working masses for the benefit of the majority.

NOTE: Since this article was written, COSATU leaders issued a statement suspending the strike for 2 months but without any guarantees that the main demand of the workers (R150) was going to be satisfied. The farm workers have continued their strike regardless and this has spread to other towns. Police opened fire killing 1 farm worker and injuring another five, which has only served to increase the resolve of the workers.

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Letter from Israel: The cowardice of Zionism

Asher Levy (First Published on http://www.marxist.com)16 March 2012

We received this letter from Israel, which makes some interesting comments on Netanyahu’s latest attack on Gaza.

Dear comrades,

Netanyahu like a spoilt child has once again initiated rocket attacks from Gaza on Sothern Israel because he can’t attack Iran’s nuclear installations... We have to ask ourselves some questions. First: Who is he attacking, and who are the victims?

Gaza is the most densely populated stretch of land on earth. Its people are
the poorest in the region that includes Israel. They have massive unemployment. While Israel steals Palestinian water from the West Bank, Palestinians in Gaza have no clean water. Poor families are forced to buy contaminated filthy water that causes Cholera from unscrupulous vendors.

Israel does of course say it is Hamas who are to blame, but Hamas were elected democratically. Is that not what the USA is always going on about, “We want democracy in The Middle East”? But democracy is only “Democracy” when it is the type that complies with America, and Israel’s wishes.

We will soon see how in what light the new democratic Egypt will be received when it finally forms its government. We know it will have an Islamic party at its head. Who have already stated they will want to renegotiate the Peace Treaty with Israel. The Islamic Brotherhood will be the largest party in the new Egyptian government, it is a populist party, and we know that the present Peace Treaty with Egypt negotiated under the former Egyptian dictatorships was widely hated by the masses in Egypt.

The rockets that are fired from the Gaza Strip are wildly inaccurate. They fall mostly on open ground, but when they do find a target in Ashdod, or as they have today (Sunday 11/03/12) on Be’er Sheva, the victims just like in Gaza are the poor. The descendants of the Jews from Arab states that were sent there when the Jewish state was first founded, or the New Immigrants from the former Soviet Union. As in Gaza, there is high unemployment compared to the super affluent centre of Israel. Crime, as in any deprived area, is rife, so is alcoholism, drug taking, and all that it spurns.

The Iron Dome rocket interception system
To counter the home made rockets, Israel has built a short range interception system called Iron Dome. Total investment in this system is US$50,000,000. Each missile costs US$40,000. In May 2011 President Obama asked, and got US$205 million for the further development, and deployment of the Iron Dome system. On May 9, 2011, the Israeli newspaper Haaretz, reported that Defense Ministry director general Maj. Gen. (res.) Udi Shani said that Israel plans to invest nearly US$1billion in the coming years for the development and production of Iron Dome batteries.

Comrades please consider the figures quoted here. They are astronomical, when compared to the costs of the Gazan homemade Qassam rockets that have only a short range of a few kilometres. Surely it would be better to invest all these millions of dollars in the poverty of the south of Israel where the rockets fall.
What caused this new spate of rocket attacks?
Last week the IDF [Israel Defence Force] took out a prominent member of an Islamic “terror” group, knowing full well that the consequences of this action would lead to rockets falling on the southern part of Israel close to the Gaza Strip.

Israel routinely eliminates these people, saying it ensures Israel’s security. This reminds me of a fair ground shooting gallery, as soon as you shoot one figure down, another one pops up. So how many of these leaders will Israel have to eliminate, before Israel is secure?

Zionism is an outdated ideology; it belongs to the 19th century where it was conceived. It is the ideology of colonialism, of acquiring territory. How ironic that the only country that still pursues this outdated, twisted ideology, is a country founded as a refuge from the tyranny of others, who had learned the lesson that imperialism only brings death, and destruction, who now live in relative peace with one an other.

It is only when we all recognize that we are all the same, that the resources of the planet belong to all, not for the benefit of some, and to be denied to the masses, will we have peace and justice for all. If any one should need reminding it is called Socialism!

Comradely,
Asher Levy, March 11, 2012
www.marxist.com

The peoples’ position on Sierra Leonean elections

Pan-Afrikan Community Movement First. Published in Pambazuka 21 November 2012

This Sunday, Sierra Leoneans head to the polls where President Ernest Bai Koroma faces his main rival Julius Maada Bio. But key issues affecting the people have not featured in the campaigns.

The Pan-Afrikan Community Movement (PACM) is a newly formed grassroots Pan-Africanist community-based movement of youths, students, women and employed and unemployed workers in urban and rural Sierra Leone. We believe and uphold the Pan-Africanist ideology of Africa’s total liberation, unity and socialist transformation. We stand for
the self-emancipation and self-determination of the oppressed and exploited Afrikan masses at home and abroad. We are opposed to privatisation, racism, sexism, neo-colonialism and imperialist proxy wars in Africa. We are part of the worldwide resistance to neoliberal globalisation, the struggle for global social and economic justice and the worldwide Pan-Africanist movement.

Ahead of the November 17 2012 presidential, parliamentary and local council elections in Sierra Leone, PACM believes that democracy means more than just voting every five years. Democracy for us means the total emancipation, involvement and reorganisation of society in all economic, social and political spheres. Democracy is not an every-five-years event; it is a process of struggle for the people to secure the full benefits of their labour and wealth of their land and to obtain the full and total emancipation of women from all backward traditional and social obstacles to their progress and to ensure that political power is exercised BY and FOR the people.

The reality in Sierra Leone is that since the last elections in 2007, scarcely anything has changed in the lives of the majority of Sierra Leoneans. Over 70 percent of the people are still living in poverty; structural violence, corruption, inequality and identity politics remain unchanged making President Koroma’s claim of bringing ‘transformation to Sierra Leone’ a false claim.

We in PACM are appalled that none of the political parties has a clear plan to eradicate illiteracy in their manifestoes. The current 65 percent illiteracy rate in the country is unacceptable. It seems that the APC-SLPP regime is happy to perpetuate illiteracy so that they can continue to dominate the people and rule for their selfish ends and the interest of their foreign backers – big mining companies, land grabbers, etc.

We in PACM also express grave concern over the silence of all the political parties on the issue of the out of control large scale land grabbing by foreign multinational companies in connivance with our rulers. We note that the trend of foreign land grabbing in Sierra Leone is deepening poverty, increasing suffering, violence, hunger, landlessness, social alienation and loss of livelihoods among the poor rural farmers.

PACM notes with alarm, the silence on the part of politicians and political parties in addressing the burning issue of economic justice and how people can more meaningfully benefit from mining, oil and other natural resources.

**LIBERAL DEMOCRACY VS MASS PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY**
Three post-conflict elections have not brought any fundamental change in the lives of ordinary people. The recent cholera epidemic is a testament to the collective neglect of the people for which the APC-SLPP are squarely responsible. The provision of the most basic needs of life – water and sanitation, health care, food, education and housing – has been neglected, with the leaders choosing instead ethnic based politics, bribery of political opponents and state violence on ordinary citizens.

**FURTHERMORE PACM:**
- Condemns the current political parties and their continued practice of ethnic based politics. Identity politics started under colonialism and is still used by the current neo-colonial ruling elites to serve powerful political and economic interests.
- Calls on ordinary people of Sierra Leone to demand full accountability from ‘elected representatives’. We call on people to demand MPs regular (monthly) report to the people at constituency level. Today MPs are only interested in their own personal interests and those of private big businesses, mining companies, foreign land grabbers, etc.
- Calls for citizens to demand that all bills put before parliament and discussed at constituency levels and voted for by constituents before such a bill is passed in parliament to enhance mass participatory democracy.
- Urges the citizens of Sierra Leone to demand full democratization and accountability of all state institutions including the judiciary, police, military etc.
- Demands the introduction of citizens right of recall. This means that citizens can recall an MP, a Councillor, Mayor or even the President at any time if they deem him/her unsuitable or not working in their interests.
- Condemns any attempt by politicians to engage in violence or instigate violence during the elections. Youths cannot be blamed for the violence as politicians are the real instigators of violence for their selfish interests.
- Calls on the masses to struggle for their own interests - clean water for every citizen, decent housing fit for human beings, quality education, decent pay and clean environment, etc.
- Maintains that workers are the key to social transformation. Workers should demand a better life for themselves and engage in Class Struggle – the process by which the exploited and disposed workers and peasants struggle against exploitation and “owners” of banks, factories and mines for a fair distribution of wealth and the collective ownership of the means of production. Working class victory always leads to improvements in living conditions of workers, peasants and the masses generally.
- Calls for the recognition of full labour rights and right to work, an end to casualisation of labour, living wages for all workers and right to organise and form trade unions.
- Demands the nationalisation of all minerals – iron ore, rutile, diamond, gold, oil, gas and other strategic economic areas, under worker/community control to serve the socio-economic interests of
ordinary people.
• Calls on workers to demand six months paid maternity leave and benefits plus free child-care facilities in all places of work.
• Calls on workers, farmers, unemployed, students, youths and grassroots groups to build mass organisations to demand their full political, economic and social rights.
• Calls on the masses of Sierra Leone to advocate and struggle for a just egalitarian society.

Down with elections violence! The people united will never be defeated!

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Israel's 'Right To Self-Defense'

A Tremendous Propaganda Victory
Amira Hass 20 November 2012

One of Israel's tremendous propaganda victories is that it has been accepted as a victim of the Palestinians, both in the view of the Israeli public and that of Western leaders who hasten to speak of Israel's right to defend itself. The propaganda is so effective that only the Palestinian rockets at the south of Israel, and now at Tel Aviv, are counted in the round of hostilities. The rockets, or damage to the holiest of holies - a military jeep - are always seen as a starting point, and together with the terrifying siren, as if taken from a World War II movie, build the meta-narrative of the victim entitled to defend itself.

Every day, indeed every moment, this meta-narrative allows Israel to add another link to the chain of dispossession of a nation as old as the state
itself, while at the same time managing to hide the fact that one continuous thread runs from the 1948 refusal to allow Palestinian refugees to return to their homes, the early 1950s expulsion of Bedouin from the Negev desert, the current expulsion of Bedouin from the Jordan Valley, ranches for Jews in the Negev, discrimination in budgets in Israel, and shooting at Gazan fishermen to keep them from earning a respectable living. Millions of such continuous threads link 1948 to the present. They are the fabric of life for the Palestinian nation, as divided as it may be in isolated pockets. They are the fabric of life of Palestinian citizens of Israel and of those who live in their lands of exile.

But these threads are not the entire fabric of life. The resistance to the threads that we, the Israelis, endlessly spin is also part of the fabric of life for Palestinians. The word resistance has been debased to mean the very masculine competition of whose missile will explode furthest away (a competition among Palestinian organizations, and between them and the established Israeli army). It does not invalidate the fact that, in essence, resistance to the injustice inherent in Israeli domination is an inseparable part of life for each and every Palestinian.

The foreign and international development ministries in the West and in the United States knowingly collaborate with the mendacious representation of Israel as victim, if only because every week they receive reports from their representatives in the West Bank and Gaza Strip about yet another link of dispossession and oppression that Israel has added to the chain, or because their own taxpayers' money make up for some of the humanitarian disasters, large and small, inflicted by Israel.

On November 8, two days before the attack on the holiest of holies - soldiers in a military jeep - they could have read about IDF soldiers killing 13-year old Ahmad Abu Daqqa, who was playing soccer with his friends in the village of Abassan, east of Khan Yunis. The soldiers were 1.5 kilometers from the kids, inside the Gaza Strip area, busy with "exposing" (a whitewashed word for destroying) agricultural land. So why shouldn't the count of aggression start with a child? On November 10, after the attack on the jeep, the IDF killed another four civilians, aged 16 to 19.

Wallowing in ignorance
Leaders of the West could have known that, before the IDF’s exercise last week in the Jordan Valley, dozens of Bedouin families were told to evacuate their homes. How extraordinary that IDF training always occurs where Bedouin live, not Israeli settlers, and that it constitutes a reason to expel them. Another reason. Another expulsion. The leaders of the West could also have known, based on the full-color, chrome-paper reports their countries finance, that since the beginning of 2012, Israel has destroyed 569 Palestinian buildings and structures, including wells and 178...
residences. In all, 1,014 people were affected by those demolitions.

We haven't heard masses of Tel Aviv and southern residents warning the stewards of the state about the ramifications of this destruction on the civilian population. The Israelis cheerfully wallow in their ignorance. This information and other similar facts are available and accessible to anyone who's really interested. But Israelis choose not to know. This willed ignorance is a foundation stone in the building of Israel's sense of victimization. But ignorance is ignorance: The fact that Israelis don't want to know what they are doing as an occupying power doesn't negate their deeds or Palestinian resistance.

In 1993, the Palestinians gave Israel a gift, a golden opportunity to cut the threads tying 1948 to the present, to abandon the country's characteristics of colonial dispossession, and together plan a different future for the two peoples in the region. The Palestinian generation that accepted the Oslo Accords (full of traps laid by smart Israeli lawyers) is the generation that got to know a multifaceted, even normal, Israeli society because the 1967 occupation allowed it (for the purpose of supplying cheap labor) almost full freedom of movement. The Palestinians agreed to a settlement based on their minimum demands. One of the pillars of these minimum demands was treating the Gaza Strip and West Bank as a single territorial entity.

But once the implementation of Oslo started, Israel systematically did everything it could to make the Gaza Strip into a separate, disconnected entity, as part of Israel's insistence on maintaining the threads of 1948 and extending them. Since the rise of Hamas, it has done everything to back up the impression Hamas prefers - that the Gaza Strip is a separate political entity where there is no occupation. If that is so, why not look at things as follows: As a separate political entity, any incursion into Gazan territory is an infringement of its sovereignty, and Israel does this all the time. Does the government of the state of Gaza not have the right to respond, to deter, or at least the masculine right - a twin of the IDF's masculine right - to scare the Israelis just as Israel scares the Palestinians?

But Gaza is not a state. Gaza is under Israeli occupation, despite all the verbal acrobatics of both Hamas and Israel. The Palestinians who live there are part of a people whose DNA contains resistance to oppression.

In the West Bank, Palestinian activists try to develop a type of resistance different from the masculine, armed resistance. But the IDF puts down all popular resistance with zeal and resolve. We haven't heard of residents of Tel Aviv and the south complaining about the balance of deterrence the IDF is building against the civilian Palestinian population.

And so Israel again provides reasons for more young Palestinians, for
whom Israel is an abnormal society of army and settlers, to conclude that the only rational resistance is spilled blood and counter-terrorizing. And so every Israeli link of oppression and all Israeli disregard of the oppression's existence drags us further down the slope of masculine competition.

Canada: Bleak future for youth under capitalism

Jessica Cassell 19 November 2012

A bleak future awaits today's youth as they are being forced to bear the brunt of the capitalist crisis despite having had nothing to do with its creation. Youth are facing challenges today that are unprecedented in history and they are living less stable and secure lives than previous generations. Indeed, youth today will likely never be able to afford the standard of living that their parents and grandparents were able to achieve; owning a home or vehicle is out of the question for a growing percentage of youth entering their adult lives. While record amounts of wealth is being accumulated in private hands, and billions of public dollars are being handed out for bailouts and tax cuts to the banks and corporations who are responsible for the crisis, our generation is expected to live with increasing barriers to accessing post-secondary education and with fewer opportunities for secure employment.

Tuition fees have more than doubled across Canada since the early 1990s; in Ontario, fees have risen by over 300%. Studies released by the Canadian Federation of Students show that average student debt has climbed to a crippling $40,000 - a number that prevents many working class and youth in low to middle income brackets from achieving post-secondary education. Those that do must struggle with the debt load for an average of 14 years after graduating.

A post-secondary education is associated with a better standard of living and higher earning. So, by imposing increasing barriers to accessing higher education, our government is condemning many youth to lives of poverty and struggle. Higher education provides youth with the knowledge and skills to be productive members of society and has become a necessity for achieving a decent standard of living. As such, it should be a universal right. It has, instead, become a privilege only attainable by those who can afford it.
This is especially unacceptable upon consideration of a study called “The Big Banks’ Big Secret”, in which the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives reported that total banking executive bonuses amounted to $9.3-billion in 2011. (This was also after the Canadian banks received $114-billion in public bailouts during the 2008-2010 recession, never to be repaid to the public.) It would only cost $8-billion per year to completely eliminate tuition fees - a small fraction of what is spent on banks or the military.

After burying themselves in debt with hopes of securing a good career, youth are also robbed of opportunities that were once enjoyed by previous generations’ youth. A recent report by the Community Foundations of Canada (CFC) entitled, “#GenerationFlux: Understanding the Seismic Shifts that are Shaking Canada’s Youth”, found that in Canada, one-third of 25 to 29-year-olds with a college diploma or university degree move into low-skilled occupations after graduation, which demonstrates that the labour market offers little hope of a financially secure future for youth today, despite earning a post-secondary education.

Youth are being hit hard by the crisis of capitalism through their increasingly dismal rate of unemployment. The CFC report on youth highlights some unnerving statistics of youth unemployment, which is currently double that of the overall national average — 14.8% versus 7.2% as of June, 2012. During the economic downturn of 2007-08, approximately 229,500 jobs disappeared among youth aged 15 to 24. This number accounts for 50% of job losses while youth makes up only 16% of the labour force. Today, there are still 250,000 fewer jobs for youth than there were during the pre-recession peak. The CFC report also found that available summer jobs in 2012 reached a record low over the last 35 years, making it extremely difficult for youth to save money for tuition, make debt payments, or afford housing and costs of living. When youth are able to find employment, it is more likely part-time, precarious labour with lower pay and fewer or no benefits compared to older generations of workers. Additionally, as older workers see their benefits and pensions being eroded, they are more likely to retire later, or retire as intended and take on part-time jobs that would have otherwise gone to younger workers – again, creating less room for newer generations to enter the workforce. Another report prepared by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives cites longitudinal studies that show that youth who experience long spells of unemployment or underemployment in precarious low-paid jobs, struggle to “catch up” with older generations and face persistently lower earnings. That means that the impacts of youth unemployment will follow them through adulthood. Globally, this situation is even more troubling; in a recent study called, “Global Employment Trends for Youth 2012”, the International Labour Organization reported that 75-million young people worldwide are unemployed with youth unemployment reaching over 50%
in countries such as Greece and Spain. The movements of these youth to resist their declining living standards have been met with brutal state repression. The criminalisation of poverty and dissent has become the norm.

While we’re told there is no money to fund things like free post-secondary education, the federal penitentiary budget more than doubled from 2009/10 to 2011/12. The Harper government’s, “Safe Streets and Communities Act”, which includes mandatory sentencing for drug possession and adult sentencing for juvenile offenders, will see a disgusting increase in the criminalization of youth in Canada, particularly marginalised youth living in poverty. It costs $147,467 per year to jail one federal prisoner - more than enough to send that one individual to college or university, fund their wages, and provide them with housing for a year. Yet, citizens are continuously made to accept cuts to the programs and services that are proven to keep people out of jail. It would seem that our so-called “representatives” and policy-makers are drunk on the job, but there are explicit benefits for the ruling class to keep our generation in debt and unemployment: The reaping of interest on student debt is a lucrative business. The unemployment and competition among workers it perpetuates serves to keep wages low and means there are more youth willing to work precarious, part-time jobs without benefits so that the bosses can secure higher profits.

It must be noted that this time around we are not hearing the classic promises of the capitalist soothsayers that “things will get better soon”. Rather, bourgeois economists such as Don Drummond, the former chief economist of TD Bank, are forecasting long-term economic turmoil and prescribing extensive austerity measures as the only solution.

The situation can seem hopeless on the surface but instead of despairing, youth must look to their past successes and to their potential as a generation to organise ourselves and reclaim their future. Youth in Canada and around the world have shown their fighting capacity and have historically been the first to move and spark social change. The Occupy movement demonstrated the increasing radicalisation of youth who are outraged at the growing inequality in society and their willingness to take to the streets to have their voices heard. The courageous student movement in Quebec defeated the Charest government and proved that if we organize ourselves, we can fight an austerity government. In order for these movements to have significant impacts on a national and global scale, youth must draw the broader working class into the struggle and put forth socialist demands.

The erosion of collective bargaining rights and the attacks on workers' wages and benefits that we have been seeing in the past years are
inevitable outcomes of the capitalist system as it must squeeze every drop out of the workers to sustain itself when it is in crisis; this is a mere glimpse of what can be expected in the future. A democratically planned economy in the interest of society must replace the current system of private profit and greed. There is no future for today’s youth and generations to come under capitalism; this is a call to all youth to unite in the fight for socialism!

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Greek Democracy is in Tatters“

Tariq Ali and Kostas Pliakos 19 November 2012

You have said that Europe is falling apart financially and that we should go back to the drachma. Do you insist on this view? This is a difficult dilemma; could the country survive without any similar moves in other European countries?

If Greece is to break free from the shackles of the Troika it will have no other option but to revert to its own currency. It won’t be worse than what is happening now. In fact it will be better because it will presage a return to reality and a break from total dependence on a currency over which the peripheral EU states have no control. A number of eastern European states who have preserved their own currency till now are better off than Greece, Spain, Ireland and Italy. The crisis is caused by the banking system supported by the core EU states. There are no signs of any structural reforms to rectify and rehaul the system. So the smaller countries suffer. Isn’t it better to swim out of the sewer into a less polluted stream.

Last year, before the elections, when you came to Greece, you spoke favorably of Syriza as a movement of change and resistance to “Merkelian doctrine.” Can such a thing be achieved within euro and this authoritative EU? How must Syriza get people prepared given the momentum it now has?

I support SYRIZA. It is the most important breakthrough for the Left in Europe. One may disagree on certain tactics, but, in general, the strategic political thrust has been to united all the progressive forces in the country against a corrupt, extreme-Centre. I think the time has now come to come forward with a political and economic plan to convince the country that the EU’s authoritarianism is strangulating Greece with the help of local collaborators. The scenes in parliament a few days ago were a disgrace.
The leaders of the extreme-Centre trying to force MPs to vote on a document that none of them had time to read! And this is democracy. I can’t see this government lasting too long. And in these conditions the ‘Democratic Left’ abstained. Not even strong enough to vote against the punishments being inflicted on the Greek people. They will pay a price for backing the extreme Centre and capitulating to the threats of Merkel, Hollande and co.

SYRIZA has some of the best Greek economists on their side. They have visited Argentina and other South American republics which have shown that change is possible. Now we need a manifesto that spells all this out for Greece. There are alternatives. It requires courage to argue for and implement them.

You urge people and the political leaders to socialize the means of production. This leads straight to a huge conflict. Do you believe that the left (meaning both people and their leaders) is psychologically ready today for such a conflict?

Exactly the same arguments were used by the Right in Venezuela, Bolivia, Argentina. The Greek Left has suffered a great deal historically and not all the legacies were positive. The anti-dictatorship left, with the exception of the Communists, coalesced in PASOK. Many courageous intellectuals, exhausted by their past, now settled to a more comfortable existence and gradually began to defend capitalism. The fall of the Soviet Union accelerated this evolution and made them all neo-liberals. Psychology is not unimportant but this is a time when a sharply-defined radical politics must transcend fear. If socialization of the utilities that help to make life bearable for the majority is necessary (and I think it is) then it should be argued for against the depredations and corruptions of privatization.

What must be the Left’s role today?

To unite against the enemy. To refrain from fighting each other. To build the broadest possible united front against the collaborators who put the interests of bankers before those of their own people. That is the first and most important task. Sectarianism is always useless but in these times is a crime and not just in Greece, though sectarianism with Greek characteristics is never a pleasant sight.

I am sure you are aware of the Lagarde list case and the “adventures” of the journalist who revealed it. What conclusions can be drawn from all this about Greece’s political system and freedom of the media?

Greek democracy is in tatters. Sometimes collaborators can be even worse than those on whose behalf they are acting because the fear the reaction
from below in their own country. Samaris and Venizelos are desperate men who cannot admit that they have failed. Though everybody, including the German mother and the French weakling, can see it very clearly.

In only a month’s time Greece saw protesters being tortured, a journalist being arrested because he said the truth, three journalist being fired from public TV because they criticized the government, several immigrants being beaten by the modern Freicorps, two homosexuals being beaten as well in the center of Athens, a kiss between gays in a British TV series being cut in public television, Christians and Neo-Nazis insulting and bullying actors and spectators of a theatrical play. Mr Ali: Neo-Nazis, according to polls, have reached 14%. Does this scare you? Is the political system partly responsible for the rise of extremism and nazism?

I follow all this from afar. Political, cultural, social and economic backwardness are always intertwined, becoming more and more extreme as their failures become more obvious.

How must we respond to the rise of neo-Nazism?

By arguing for a radical alternative to the present system, by doing everything possible to unite the Left and beyond it a united front of all anti-fascist forces. Golden Dawn is actually a pock-marked sunset. It is their links with the special police and the Ministry of Interior that is even more unsettling, reminding us of the murder of Lambrakis. The same typers that carried out that act and were the shock-troops of the dictatorship are assembling again, this time under the benign gaze of the extreme Centre.

I believe you agree –and if you don’t, I am ready to hear your arguments – that today’s politicians have handed over their powers to the globalised capital. How can they take back these powers –that is if they can at all and if they are interested in? What is the role of politicians in a globalized economy?

Mainstream politicians everywhere are the indentured servants of the financial system. They have to be defeated as in South America. And building regional alliances in the years ahead is important. Why not a Balkan Confederation that strengthens each country and speaks in a common voice against the EU bureaucracy.

Do you fear future capitalism in Europe will come to resemble China’s capitalism?

It’s very entertaining reading the critiques of China in the financial press where different factions of the leadership are discussed in terms of who
will be more friendly to the West, with democracy used as a mask. If the Chinese Communist Party were clever they would divide into two parties:

Both could have the same initials and possible for one it could be Capitalist rather than Communist. They could organise elections every 4 years and gave each of the regions electoral votes, open up the press a tiny bit and run the system happily ever after. The problem here is that the Chinese masses have a history of insurgency and even a small space might enable them to further the breach. This is the danger that haunts the men in Beijing. Do not imagine that they are indifferent to Greece. They look at it with anxious eyes wondering if their equivalents in Europe can effectively seal the system from democratic rebellions.

European and North American capitalism is transforming democracy.?In Greece, Ireland, Italy, Spain, actually existing democracy is little more than the dictatorship of capital. Only the Left can enhance and strengthen democracy in the real sense of the word. It’s not a priority for the EU. In every clash between democracy and capitalism, they choose the latter.

Kostas Pliakos is senior editor of HOT DOC magazine, where this interview originally appeared.

Millions Join Largest European Strike Ever

Millions Join Largest European Strike Ever
Jérôme E. Roos 15 November 2012

Europe’s Mediterranean rim trembled on Wednesday as violent clashes broke out following the largest coordinated multinational strike in Europe ever. In the hope to stave off decades of austerity, precarity and unemployment, European labor unions united for the first time since the start of the European debt crisis to organize strikes and protests in a total of 23 EU member states, with millions of workers walking off their jobs and marching on parliament buildings across the continent. Bloody street battles ensued across Spain, Portugal and Italy.
In Italy, over 300,000 protested in over 100 cities as workers observed a 4-hour stoppage in solidarity with Greek, Spanish and Portuguese workers. In Milan and Rome, scenes of street “guerriglia” were witnessed as thousands of students clashed with riot police, bringing traffic to a standstill and leading to dozens of injuries. In Sardinia, industry minister Corrado Passera and Fabrizio Barca, minister of territorial cohesion, had to be evacuated by helicopter after angry protesters besieged a meeting and started burning cars all around them.

In Naples and Brescia, thousands of students occupied railway tracks; in Genoa, the entrance to the ferry port was blocked; in Florence, Venice, Trieste and Palermo, banks were smeared with eggs and banners unfurled from monuments; in Padua clashes broke out between students and police; in Bologna 10,000 students took to the streets and attempted to march straight through a line of riot police; and in Pisa protesters occupied the leaning tower, unfurling a banner that read “Rise Up! We are not paying for your Euro crisis!”

Meanwhile, France witnessed protests and strikes in over 100 cities, and Belgian workers marched on the European Commission as railways and air travel ground to a near-complete halt in a nationwide solidarity strike. Modest action was also seen in Greece — which was completely paralyzed during last week’s 48-hour strike — where tens of thousands converged upon parliament carrying Spanish, Portuguese and Italian flags to express their solidarity with fellow Southern European workers.

But the most spectacular action was concentrated in the Iberian Peninsula, where violent street battles broke out after both countries were effectively paralyzed by massive general strikes. In Portugal, actions took place in over 30 cities and tens of thousands besieged the parliament building in the evening. Riot police, after being pelted with rocks for hours, violently cracked down on the demonstration, leaving numerous protesters injured. Some locals claimed they had not seen such violence since the days of the dictatorship.

In Spain, over 80 percent of the workforce participated in the country’s second general strike of the year, bringing the country to an effective standstill and putting further pressure on the embattled conservative government of Mariano Rajoy. Hundreds of thousands marched through the streets of Madrid, where barricades of burning trash bins blocked the streets, while in Barcelona protesters set police cars on fire and smeared banks with paint and graffiti. Police responded with brutal force, injuring over 70 and arresting at least 140. A 13-year-old boy in Tarragona was wounded after a police officer struck him in the head with a baton.

And so Southern Europe continues to tremble on its very foundations. As
smoke rises from the streets of Madrid, Lisbon, Rome and Athens, one thing is becoming ever more clear: the question is no longer if but when the social explosion will hit. The outrage is building up, and with unemployment rising, austerity deepening, and a generation of Europeans increasingly disillusioned by state intransigence and outraged by police violence, such an outburst of popular rebellion seems ever more inevitable. All it will take is a spark.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=iS1ggBDZ9hs

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Israel Escalates Gaza Attacks With Assassination

Phyllis Bennis 15 November 2012

Yesterday’s Egyptian-brokered ceasefire between Gaza and Israel collapsed today when Israel launched a major escalation. In airstrikes almost certainly involving U.S.-made F-16 warplanes and/or U.S.-made Apache helicopters, Israel’s air force assassinated Ahmad Jaabari, the longtime military leader of Hamas. As the Israeli airstrikes continued today, seven more Palestinians were killed and at least 30 were injured, ten of them critically.

Jaabari had been chief negotiator with Israel in the deal that led to the release of captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit in exchange for the release of more than 1,000 Palestinian political prisoners held illegally in Israeli jails. He had negotiated the ceasefire that had mostly held over much of the last year or more. The attack, code-named “Operation Pillar of Defense” [sic], also killed someone else in Jaabari’s car, and quickly expanded with additional airstrikes against Palestinian security and police stations in Gaza, making it impossible for Palestinian police to try to control the rocket-fire.

So why the escalation? Israeli military and political leaders have long made clear that regular military attacks to “cleanse” Palestinian territories (the term was used by Israeli soldiers to describe their role in the 2008-09 Israeli assault on Gaza) is part of their long-term strategic plan. Earlier this year, on the third anniversary of the Gaza assault, Israeli army Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Benny Gantz told Army Radio that Israel will need to attack Gaza again soon, to restore what he called its power of “deterrence.” He said the assault must be “swift and painful,” concluding,
“we will act when the conditions are right.” Perhaps this was his chosen moment.

It is an interesting historical parallel that this escalation – which almost certainly portends a longer-term and even more lethal Israeli assault – takes place almost exactly four years after Operation Cast Lead, the last major Israeli war on Gaza that left 1,400 Gazans dead in 2008-09. Then, as now, the attack came shortly after U.S. elections, ending just before President Obama’s January 2009 inauguration.

But the timing for this escalation is almost certainly shaped more by Israel’s domestic politics than by the U.S. election cycle. The most likely timeline is grounded in Netanyahu’s political calendar – he faces reelection in January, and having thoroughly antagonized many Israelis by his deliberate dissing of President Obama, needs to shore up the far right contingent of his base. With regional pressures escalating, particularly regarding the expanding Syrian crisis, Netanyahu needs to reassure his far-right supporters (an increasing cohort) that even if he doesn’t send bombers to attack Damascus, he still can attack, bomb, assassinate Arabs with impunity.

There is a U.S. connection, of course – however much domestic politics motivated Tel Aviv’s attack, Israel’s backers in Congress (lame-duck and newly-elected) will still demand public U.S. support for the Israeli offensive. Netanyahu will get that backing – there is no reason to think the Obama White House is prepared yet to challenge that assumption. But it’s unlikely that even Netanyahu believes it will somehow recalibrate his tense relationship with Israel by forcing Washington’s hand to defend Israel’s so-called “right of self-defense.” They will do that – but Obama will still be pretty pissed off at Netanyahu.

As is always the case, history is shaped by when you start the clock. In the last several days U.S. media accounts have reported increasing violence on the Gaza-Israel border, most of them beginning with a Palestinian attack on Israeli soldiers on Thursday, November 8th. What happened before that Palestinian attack?

For starters, the soldiers, part of an Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) squad that included four tanks and a bulldozer, were inside the Gaza Strip. According to the IDF spokeswoman, Palestinians fired at “soldiers while they were performing routine activity adjacent to the security fence.”

Really. What kind of activities inside the supposedly not-occupied Gaza Strip, by a group of armed soldiers, tanks and a bulldozer (almost certainly an armored Caterpillar D-9 bulldozer manufactured in the U.S. and paid for with U.S. taxpayer military aid to Israel), could possibly be defined as anything close to “routine”? Unlike the illegal Palestinian
rockets fired against civilian targets inside Israel, using force to resist an illegal military force in the context of a belligerent military occupation is lawful under international law.

Later that day, an 11-year-old child was killed. Israel was “investigating the boy’s death.” Not many U.S. media outlets reported that within the next 72 hours the Gaza-based Palestinian Center for Human Rights documented five more Palestinians killed, including three children, and 52 other civilians, including 6 women and 12 children, wounded in Israeli airstrikes. Four of the deaths and 38 injuries resulted from a single Israeli attack on a football playground in a neighborhood east of Gaza city. Twelve Israelis, four of them soldiers, were injured by Palestinian rockets fired into Israel.

The cross-border clashes continued, until Egypt was able to negotiate a ceasefire on Wednesday. Today, that fragile ceasefire was violently breached as Israel sent warplanes to assassinate a Hamas leader and destroy key parts of Gaza’s barely-functional infrastructure.

This is primarily about Netanyahu shoring up the right-wing of his base. And once again it is Palestinians, this time Gazans, who will pay the price. The question that remains is whether the U.S.-assured impunity that Israel’s leadership has so long counted on will continue, or whether there will be enough pressure on the Obama administration and Congress so that this time, the U.S. will finally be forced to allow the international community to hold Israel accountable for this latest round of violations of international law.

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Bo Xilai and the crisis in the CCP

Power struggle exposes China’s regime to further risks
Vincent Kolo (Chinaworker.info) 6 November 2012

Bo Xilai’s dramatic fall from grace in the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party has revealed deep divisions within the ruling elite. And the semi-public airing of the power struggle exposes China’s regime to further risks.

The expulsion of fallen ‘princeling’ Bo Xilai from the ruling ‘Communist’ Party (CCP), decided at the Politburo’s 28 September meeting, marks a new phase in China’s high-level power struggle, the most serious for at
least 20 years. Divisions over how harshly to deal with Bo are responsible for delaying the CCP’s five-yearly party congress, which is now due to start on 8 November, a month later than originally expected.

This delay underlines the seriousness of internal divisions over positions in the new leadership line-up to be unveiled at the congress. The dates of the last three congresses (1997, 2002 and 2007) were announced in late August, a month earlier than in this case. A traditional pre-congress conclave of CCP leaders in August, held at the beach resort of Beidaihe, was thought to have reached a deal over the hotly contested leadership line-up. The delay suggests that any such deal broke down amid renewed factional wrangling.

Bo Xilai’s fate has been used as a bargaining chip between his supporters and opponents inside the party leadership. Bo’s opponents – who include the current leadership of president Hu Jintao and premier Wen Jiabao – seem to have gained the upper hand, but the question is, at what price? What concessions have Hu’s ‘tuanpai’ (communist youth league) faction been forced to make over the carve-up of seats on the party’s all-powerful Politburo Standing Committee (PSC)?

The current splits within the one-party state reflect explosive tensions in society, with the most extreme wealth gap in Asia, an epidemic of corruption, and hundreds of ‘mass incidents’ daily. The main fault line of the current struggle is between the ‘princelings’ – super-wealthy second and third generation CCP luminaries like Bo – and their opponents – mainly represented by the tuanpai faction, which wants to limit the princelings’ power and break-up their ‘vested interests’. These include powerful state-owned industrial groups, which are seen as blocking faster liberalisation of the economy. Some commentators compare the ferocity of the current internal struggle to the failed coup attempt by Lin Biao against Mao Zedong in 1971, and the mysterious plane crash that killed Lin while attempting to escape to the Soviet Union.

Bo’s expulsion is a first step towards a closely scripted show trial with the aim of ‘killing him off’ – politically, if not literally. He now faces the prospect of a lengthy prison term, and possibly even the death penalty. While this could unleash an outcry across China from Bo’s many supporters, some of his ‘liberal’ opponents would favour such a drastic sentence, to rule out any possibility of a political comeback. It is unlikely that Bo’s trial will be open to the public, to preclude any act of public defiance or attempt to incriminate his enemies. In this sense, the proceedings are likely to be less democratic than when the Maoist ‘Gang of Four’ were tried in 1981, and Jiang Qing (Madame Mao) delivered a two-hour televised tongue-lashing of her accusers.
Bo Xilai and the ‘new left’

PRIOR TO HIS dismissal as party chief for Chongqing, Bo was the major figurehead for China’s resurgent ‘new left’, a loose umbrella group that spans Maoist-inspired youth to nationalists and CCP old-timers. They are critical of Beijing’s neoliberal, pro-globalisation policies. Despite being a multi-millionaire himself, Bo achieved national recognition with his flamboyant campaigns aimed at self-promotion, such as his neo-Maoist ‘red culture’ campaign that tapped into the growing popular backlash against the effects of capitalist restoration.

A ruthless crackdown on Chongqing’s notorious triads (criminal gangs), masterminded by Bo’s recently jailed former sidekick and police chief Wang Lijun, drew criticisms from human rights advocates and targeted many others, not just the triads. Such high profile campaigning and the popularity it conferred upon Bo did not endear him to the current leadership of Hu and Wen. Bo was seen as a threat to Beijing’s attempts to rein in wayward provinces, as well as a symbol of princeling arrogance, corruption and high-handedness, which unless checked pose a threat to CCP rule.

In the days since his expulsion, state-controlled media have denigrated Bo in unusually harsh terms for a fallen official, presenting a litany of crimes, including abuse of power, bribery and even “improper sexual relationships”. Significantly, these alleged offences go back almost two decades to Bo’s time as vice-mayor of Dalian. He has been pilloried as a “dictator” who ruled Chongqing with an “iron hand” and an “extremely filthy man”, according to the Guangming Daily, a newspaper under the control of the Central Committee. This overtly liberal mouthpiece could not hold back in attacking Bo’s allegedly leftist stand, which it described as a “stale political model that brought China unparalleled disaster”.

These attacks represent a high-risk strategy by the CCP leadership. “They are going after him with both barrels”, commented Patrick Chovanec, an economist based at Tsinghua University in Beijing. Clearly, the aim is to destroy not just Bo but also to strike a blow against the increasingly vocal neo-Maoist left who adopted him as their standard-bearer. But the anti-Bo propaganda campaign is also likely to fan greater scepticism towards the regime as a whole.

People will inevitably ask why, if Bo ‘violated party discipline’ over a 20-year period, it took the regime until now to stop him? And, in what respect were his actions more or less dictatorial than other CCP officials? As liberal historian, Yuan Weishi, said: “Why has he been engaged in evil for so long and what on earth nurtures that behaviour?” Bo has been blamed for poor judgment in his choice of police chief Wang, whose flight to the US consulate in Chengdu triggered Bo’s downfall. But, as activist
lawyer Liu Xiaoyuan commented, in a microblog post: “Bo Xilai failed in his oversight of Wang Lijun, so who failed to oversee Bo?”

The regime is moving into unchartered territory with these attacks. They could trigger protests from Bo’s supporters but also from opponents who doubt the regime’s sincerity or ability to deal with corruption and power ‘abuses’. The deadlock over Bo’s fate, and the delay of the party congress, underline the seriousness of this move and the risks it can incur. In addition to enjoying the protection of fellow princelings, Bo built up considerable support outside the CCP and also in the armed forces, to a degree that arguably no other leading CCP figure can match.

“Bo’s case is unprecedented [as] he apparently has much greater clout than Chen Liangyu [former Shanghai party boss, jailed for corruption] and Chen Xitong [former Beijing party boss, jailed for corruption]”, noted Yuan Weishi, referring to the two most senior cases of official corruption over the past two decades.

The murder trial of Gu Kalai

THIS REPRESENTS A complete turnaround since the trial in August of Gu Kalai, Bo’s wife, who received a suspended death sentence after confessing to the murder of British businessman Neil Heywood. Gu’s one-day, stage-managed trial omitted any mention of Bo. Now, we read in Xinhua that Bo bore a “major responsibility” for the murder of Heywood! Similarly, Gu’s trial played down the issue of corruption, despite it being widely known that Heywood was a money-launderer for the Bo family, and was killed over a dispute with Gu after a multi-million dollar business deal went sour.

By not naming Bo, Gu’s trial implied he would be spared criminal proceedings, to be dealt with more leniently through the CCP’s own disciplinary channels (shuanggui). This was seen as part of a wider deal among the party tops in the run-up to the party congress. Clearly, things have changed. The shift began with the trial of Wang Lijun in mid-September, which sent the former Chongqing police chief to jail for 15 years – a lenient sentence considering that one of the four indictments was for attempted defection to the US. The official accounts of Wang’s mostly secret trial implicated Bo in the attempted cover-up of Heywood’s murder. Bo was not named, however, with the report referring, instead, to “the Chongqing party committee’s main responsible person at the time”.

We are now told that Bo, “received huge bribes personally and through his family”, (Xinhua, 28 September). Yet, at her trial just two months earlier, no such charge was levelled against Gu Kalai or Bo’s son, Bo Guagua, who is said to be in hiding in the US. Omitting such charges, despite a clear connection to the murder of Heywood, shows the extent to which
Gu’s trial was manipulated by the CCP’s leading group for its own interests, which have since changed. The impending trial of Bo Xilai is unlikely to show greater ‘impartiality’ or respect for the ‘rule of law’.

Even the official account of how Heywood was murdered has been cast into doubt, in a blog post (26 September) by Wang Xuemei, one of China’s foremost forensic experts. She has challenged Gu’s scripted confession that she poisoned Heywood with cyanide because this produces unmistakeable symptoms, such as discoloration of the corpse, which would inevitably have been noticed by police forensic experts at the scene. Wang’s post, which was quickly deleted by censors, raised the theory that Heywood may have been suffocated.

Why would the prosecution need to ‘modify’ the method by which Heywood’s life was taken? Possibly to give support to the scenario whereby Gu acted by herself, allegedly in a state of mental instability, rather than simply (and more logically) ordering ‘professionals’ from the security forces under Bo’s control to deal with Heywood.

Similar factual ‘modification’ can be expected at Bo’s trial. Already, in the media’s campaign against him, the allegations of corruption have been conveniently downsized with the figure of 20 million yuan in bribes being cited. This is a conspicuously low figure, especially if this is meant to represent his entire career ‘takings’ over two decades. “As far as I understand, it was far beyond 20 million yuan”, noted Li Zhuang, a lawyer led by Bo. “Much more than 200 million, I would say”.

An honest accounting of the Bo family’s plunder would, however, pose serious problems for the CCP regime. The decision to downplay the sums of money involved and to introduce the issue of “improper sexual relations with multiple women” (not a crime in China), represent diversionary manoeuvres on the part of the state and its propaganda machinery. Despite this, many people will rightly conclude that, rather than a ‘bad egg’, Bo was no better or worse when it came to lining his own pocket than other senior officials.

The level of corruption in the case of Bo and his family, while possibly running to billions of yuan, is in no way exceptional in China today. Reports in overseas media based on information from CCP insiders allege that, as party boss of Chongqing from 2007 to this year, Bo collected one billion yuan in bribes just for dispensing promotions. Should such, more realistic, sums surface at his trial and in official accounts, this would inevitably fuel demands for a wider investigation. Most of the underlings who paid Bo for promotion are still sitting on their expensive official seats. Very few have been purged in Chongqing following the demise of their benefactor.
Power struggle to continue
THE DRAMA SURROUNDING Bo cannot be understood purely in terms of corruption or criminality. As always in China, top-level corruption cases are driven by the struggle between party factions for positions, influence and control. The CCP’s internal factions are not based on any cohesive political agenda or ideology, but rather on clannish loyalties and power politics. Despite this often confusing lack of clear political distinctions, however, the current struggle reflects a sharp divergence between those, especially in Wen’s ‘reform wing’ – also said to include president-in-waiting Xi Jinping – which wants to speed up deregulation and privatisation of the economy and reduce the dominant role of state-owned companies, and those like Bo who favour more state intervention and the defence of national as against foreign capital.

Bo’s principal backing inside the party hierarchy came from the faction, led by the 86-year old ex-president, Jiang Zemin, which is known as the ‘Shanghai gang’ or ‘princeling faction’. This group had hoped to shield Bo from a public crucifixion, not primarily out of political solidarity (most princelings oppose Bo’s Maoist-tinted populism) but from a sense of collective self-preservation. A public airing of Bo’s misdeeds threatens the standing of the princelings as a privileged social stratum. It could also pose a wider systemic threat to the one-party state itself.

In the opinion of Steve Tsang, professor of contemporary Chinese studies at the University of Nottingham, the latest twist of events means that the Jiang faction has “agreed to let him [Bo] be thrown to the wolves in exchange for whatever deal they have got in the leadership change”. It seems to have sacrificed Bo for a bigger presence on the new PSC. It has even been rumoured that Jiang, officially long retired, attended the 28 September Politburo meeting that expelled Bo.

Rather than the victory for Hu, Wen, and the ‘reformist’ tuanpai camp, that some observers are proclaiming, this is more likely a trade-off involving concessions to Jiang, who has shown he still wields considerable influence, in return for Bo’s scalp. If, as expected, the number of seats on the ruling PSC is cut from nine to seven in order to concentrate more power in the hands of Xi Jinping, this will also have sharpened the power struggle – a brutal version of musical chairs.

Anti-Japan protests
IT IS ALSO possible that Hu’s faction, supported by Xi, has changed its position only recently in favour of a ‘lasting solution’ to the Bo problem, even if this means surrendering a larger role in the new leadership to Jiang’s princeling faction.
What may have tipped the balance are the recent anti-Japan protests in more than a hundred cities across China. These protests were the largest for many years, demanding the return of the disputed Diaoyu islands from Japan in the face of high-profile posturing by right-wing Japanese nationalists. They also gave further evidence of the splits within the CCP.

While the central government sought to maintain tight control and use these demonstrations to strengthen its hand in dealings with the Japanese and US governments, the protests produced some nasty surprises for Beijing. The appearance of Mao placards and slogans in support of Bo Xilai, in particular, left the central government feeling that the protests had been hijacked by Bo’s supporters and factional allies within the security forces and local governments. This “alarmed many people in the party”, according to Zhang Ming, a political scientist at Renmin University, Beijing.

In turning their guns on Bo, the CCP leadership wants to block any future political comeback. It also wants to deal a blow against his supporters in the ‘new left’ and prevent them from posing a challenge to the regime and its increasingly neoliberal agenda.

Internationally, we have heard reassuring sounds from capitalist commentators that the decision to put Bo Xilai on trial means that Beijing is ‘back on track’ with its congress and leadership makeover. There has been of late extreme nervousness on global stock markets about governmental paralysis and gridlock in China, not unlike that in the US and European Union. This has the capitalists in a panic as they see China’s economy sink towards a possible hard landing. They crave a return to more hands-on measures from Beijing, including a bigger economic stimulus.

But, whatever fate awaits Bo, this does not mean the end of the power struggle within the regime, which itself is only a reflection of fundamental social contradictions in Chinese society. These have been brought about by rampant capitalist development melded to one-party dictatorship. The struggle is set to continue and can acquire new explosive momentum from the very course of action the regime has embarked upon.

“Airing all this dirty laundry is really risky for the party. They are playing with fire”, warned Chovanec. What is needed is a mass working-class political force, completely independent of all CCP factions, to fight for democratic rights and socialism.

http://www.socialistworld.net/doc/6024
Does jobs growth come from higher profits or wages?

More at The Real News

Research shows that a decrease in wages leads to lower demand and a decrease in economic growth, while higher profits lead to very little increased investment if demand is low
Özlem Onaran interviewed by Paul Jay 5 November 2012

PAUL JAY, SENIOR EDITOR, TRNN: Welcome to The Real News Network. I'm Paul Jay in Baltimore. Perhaps the number one thing being debated in this U.S. presidential election is the question of where will growth come from. How will jobs be added to the economy? One side says government needs to get out of the way, there needs to be cuts in spending. And implicit in that are policies that have to do with lower wages, not higher wages.

Now, the other side of the argument does tend a little bit towards government stimulus. You hear that from the Democratic Party. But you still don't hear the word wages or what to do about real increase of demand. Neither party seems to be offering that up as a solution.

But our following guest thinks that's in fact the only solution. So now joining us from the PERI institute in Amherst, Massachusetts, is Özlem Onaran. She's a professor of economics at the University of Greenwich in the United Kingdom. She regularly publishes research studies on globalization, income distribution, and business investment in publications such as The Cambridge Journal of Economics. She recently coauthored a major study for the International Labour Organization on the relative importance of decent wages versus high profits as an engine of economic growth in several countries throughout the world. Thanks very much for joining us, Özlem.

PROF. ÖZLEM ONARAN, UNIVERSITY OF GREENWICH: Thank you for having me.

JAY: So what did your research find? I mean, for some people it sounds counterintuitive, because they say that, well, lower wages makes American companies—or European companies, for that matter, or Canadian—more competitive in a global market. And so, you know, when push comes to shove, lower wages actually leads to growth 'cause it leads to more exports. What's wrong with that?

ONARAN: What you have just formulated is the mainstream neoclassical
idea that basically views that wages are only a cost item for businesses. They ignore the crucial fact that wages actually have a dual role. They're not just costs, but they're also a very crucial source of demand and it's... contribution. And once you let this dual role, interesting things start happening. When you decrease wages, from a neoclassical perspective, stimulus to growth basically comes via the expected positive effects of higher profits on investment.

These effects might be true. There might be a direct positive effect of higher profits, lower wages on investments. But there are other important effects as well, and most predominantly, you have for sure a negative effect on consumption. Why? When you redistribute income from wages towards profits so you decrease the share of labor in national income, consumption will decrease, because propensity to consume out of wage income (or you can generalize that also as low income) is for sure higher than this out-of-profit income or the income of the rich households. In absolute amounts, the rich might be consuming a lot, but as a proportion to their income, they do consume a lot less than wage income earners and low-income households. That means when you redistribute from labor to capital, when you cut wages, consumption will decrease.

There is very robust evidence of that in several studies I and my colleagues have done. And a recent study for the International Labour Organization shows that also. It's a very robust... consumption decreases. Investment in some cases may increase, but the increase in private investment is never enough to offset those negative effects on consumption.

And if you have that, there will also be another positive demand boost of lowering wages. That will be via the exports channels. So exports will increase, imports will decrease. Then overall what do you have here? You have a negative effect on consumption, a possible but far from certain direct partial effect, positive effect, on private investments, and an unambiguous positive effect on net exports. If you sum it up, the total effect can be negative or positive. So it depends completely on the differences between the marginal propensity to consume out of wages versus profits, it depends on the positive sensitivity of investments to profits versus sales prospects, and it depends, obviously, on the sensitivity to exports to labor cost.

If this sum was positive, we would call such an economy a profit-led economy. It’s the only neoclassical idea. They think all economies are profit-led, which means when you redistribute from labor to capital, growth has to increase and jobs will be created and there will be trickle-down effects. But the sum can as well be negative. And I can show you in a minute that for the majority of the large advanced capitalist
countries this is the case.

**JAY:** Let's dig into some of the numbers, because, you know, what we're hearing in the elections is essentially that if you—first of all, to criticize profits is sacrilegious, it's certainly un-American, and that the reason for that is—as I guess you were getting to, is that people who make more profits take their profits, reinvest in new factories and new plants and stores, and that creates more jobs. So what are the numbers that disprove that?

**ONARAN:** Let's first start by a simple figure, no particular technical sophistication. That's the figure that shows you what has happened to labor income as a ratio to GDP in the European Union fifteen old countries, fifteen old EU member states. From 1960s to 2011, this is the data we have in the graph. So the blue line is the share of labor, wage share. As you can see in that graph, up until the late '70s there is an improvement in labor's share in income, and then there is a very dramatic turn around the late '70s to early '80s, and there was a similar trend in labor's share ever since.

Now, the red line in the same graph is showing you what's happening to growth along with these trends, these developments in labor share. Indeed, if you look at average growth rates in the '60s and '70s in Europe and compare it with the average growth rates in the post-'80s, growth rates have been much lower, along with this race to the bottom in labor's share, along with that very strong [incompr.] pro-capital redistribution of income. So this is a puzzle from a neoclassical perspective.

From a post-Keynesian perspective, the answer to that is most probably European Union is a wage-led economy. And this is what we try to pin down in our empirical work for the International Labour office. We literally tried to estimate the effects of changes in income distribution between labor share and profit share on consumption, on private investment, and on exports and imports.

What did we find? We did that for the major advanced capitalist countries and developing countries that formed G20, and here is a summary of our results—and you can find the details of the work in the web page of the ILO in our working paper, in our project report for them.

So let's [incompr.] the euro area first. When you increase profit share by one percentage point, growth will decline, growth of GDP will decline by some 0.13 percentage point. In Britain the effect is also negative. In the United States the effect is quite stronger, at one percentage point pro-capital redistribution of income is damping growth by some 0.8 percent.
So, basically the assumed trade-off between wages and growth or wages and job creation is not empirically validated. It's not empirically validated for Europe, it's not empirically validated for the large economies in Europe, like Germany, France, Italy, or United Kingdom, and similarly, this is the case in the U.S. and Japan. In the developing world, Turkey and Korea also fall into that group of wage-led economies. And then, in isolation [incompr.] only [incompr.] pro-capital redistribution strategy in one single country.

There are several countries who can grow out of that. One example is Canada, for example. Now, why is Canada different from the U.S.? Because Canada is a relatively small, thus much more open economy, much more export-dependant. Thus the effect of a pro-capital redistribution of income, a fall in labor costs, will boost exports, and thereby will have much more important effect on growth in Canada, since it's much more open, much more dependant on exports.

Let me mention one other important background. If it weren't for exports and imports, if you only looked at domestic, private demand, the consumption effect in all these countries is a lot more dominant, thus the negative dampening effect on consumption due to a pro-capital redistribution is a lot more dominant compared to the small positive stimulus to private investments. Thus, if we were closed economies, basically we would never be able to grow out of a pro-capital redistribution strategy. But this is not the case. We are open economies.

However, openness has more to it. It's not just Canada cutting wages and increasing profit share. U.S. is in the same race to the bottom in terms of labor share. Europe is implementing the same story. It's what they have been doing in the last three decades. And with this crisis, basically, antilabor, pro-capital redistribution policies is the twin policy along with austerity policies.

**JAY:** And the legislation that has to do with unions and union organizing, which would be a force for increasing wages, is not even on the table, in terms of making legislation that more facilitates organizing. If anything, it's going the other way with the attacks in various states in the U.S. on public-sector workers, public-sector rights to collectively bargain. Some of the union leader I've been talking to think that the already incredibly low numbers of unionized workers in the United States, something like 6 or 7 percent, I believe, in the private sector—a little more in the public, but it could be half that within four to five years. So we're headed in quite the opposite direction of what you think is really the only way to end the crisis.
ONARAN: Yes. The scary thing is it's not only one country doing it. We're all doing it simultaneously. And look what happens. Then [incompr.] the wages redistributes towards capital simultaneously. In our study, in this table I'm showing at the moment, in the second column, you're showing what happens when profit share increases not just in one country but simultaneously in all of these major economies that make up more than 85 percent of world GDP. Obviously, the tremendous effect on growth, and thereby jobs, are a lot stronger. For example, in the euro area, a simultaneous race to the bottom in the global economy will dampen growth by some 0.25 percentage point. In the U.K., again, 0.2 percentage point. In the U.S., the effect on growth is approaching to even 1 percent as [incompr.] 1 percent race to the bottom in the wage share.

And, interestingly, Canada, for example, who could grow out of a pro-capital policy, because in isolation it looks like it's very profit-led, will not be able to grow when the U.S., Mexico, Europe, Australia, all its trade partners are simultaneously beating wages down as part of their international competitiveness strategy. Similarly, there are some other important major developing countries, like Mexico, Argentina, India, who seem to be profit-led in isolation, who could grow out of pro-capital redistribution policies, will never be able to do so when all their trade partners, both in the north and the global south, are implementing the same strategies. So, basically, the punchline is the following. If you have a global race to the bottom in the wage share, decreasing the share of labor in income by 1 percentage point, global GDP decreases by 0.4 percent.

Reverse this argument. If they could have a pro-labor shift in income distributions that could increase the share of labor in national income by 1 percentage point, we would be able to increase global GDP. Why? Because planet Earth is not profit-led. Planet Earth is wage-led. But simply because we are not trading with Mars—not just yet. I'm fond of science fiction, but the truth of planet Earth is that we are in a wage-led context.

Now, to formulate that positively, we could think of a scenario, a wage-led recovery scenario out of this crisis. For example, correcting the loss in labor's income share, reversing that back to its peak levels in the late '70s or early '80s in some major wage-led economies, and making corrections also in some other developing countries like China to maybe a lesser extent at the beginning, we could grow by some 3 percent at the global level out of that strategy. That will be something that would first reverse one of the major causes of this crisis, which is inequality. It would stabilize those patterns. And it will also create more jobs.

JAY: It seems to me, then, given that this point of view is not likely to be adopted by any of the people who are collecting these profits at the
moment—certainly not the majority of them, 'cause they all seem to think, après moi le deluge, I'll collect the profits today, and the world can go to hell tomorrow—I guess it's up to ordinary people to kind of get organized and fight for higher wages, 'cause I don't see where higher wages are coming otherwise.

**ONARAN:** It can only come true empowering labor unions, and, obviously, particularly the unions in the north. If they could manage to improve their [incompr.] reverse the fall in labor's income share, they would be able to create a very large area of maneuver for the southern labor movements to be able to increase their own wages and go for a high-growth egalitarian development strategy.

**JAY:** Well, thank you very much for joining us today.

**ONARAN:** Thank you very much.

Özlem Onaran is Professor of Economics at the University of Greenwich in the U.K. She regularly publishes research studies on globalization, income distribution, and business investment in publications such as the Cambridge Journal of Economics and Labour. She recently co-authored a major study for the International Labour Organization on the relative importance of decent wages versus high profits as an engine of economic growth in several countries throughout the world.

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**Britain: Coalition in crisis - Drive them out!**

Socialist Appeal (Britain) 1 November 2012

Splits and divisions are haunting the Coalition. Such a situation could not have come at a worse time for Cameron and Osborne, as they sharpen their knives for further cuts.

The whole Establishment stinks. The cynical police cover-up over the Hillsborough disaster goes to the very top of the state. The chief constable of West Yorkshire police, Sir Norman Bettison, “boasted” about having helped “concoct” the evidence. It reveals how the powers-that-be operate against working people.

Hillsborough has now been followed by the South Yorkshire police fabrications over the Orgreave mass picketing during the 1984-5 miners’ strike, where 95 miners were falsely charged with serious crimes of riot
and unlawful assembly. The police chiefs were clearly acting under orders from Thatcher and the state security forces to demonise the “enemy within.”

**Cover-up**

Now we have a further cover-up at the highest levels of the BBC over the Jimmy Savile affair, which is likely to become the biggest ever crisis faced by the Corporation. Labour MP Tom Watson says there is evidence of a powerful paedophile ring linked to parliament and beyond. Papers have even raised links to the Royal family. The whole system is rotten and coming apart at the seams as scandal after scandal appears.

The Murdoch scandal exposed the collusion between the press barons, the police chiefs and the government. Clearly, this is still continuing, despite claims to the contrary. New allegations of phone hacking have been laid at the door of the Daily Mirror and the People.

In the meantime, judges have recently ruled that Prince Charles’ correspondence with government ministers cannot be disclosed for fear of “compromising” the heir to the throne. This unelected parasite has more “influence” than those who vote.

For the ruling class, democracy is a device and nothing more. It is they who take the real decisions behind closed doors in their posh clubs and penthouses.

The Coalition is in disarray with Cameron’s back-peddling over energy pricing, and the forced resignation of Andrew Mitchell, the Tory chief whip, over allegedly calling police officers “plebs”. They are stumbling from one blunder to the next.

“Most of my time is spent on day-to-day crisis management,” admitted Oliver Dowden, Cameron’s deputy chief of staff.

“This dog of a coalition government has let itself be given a bad name and now anyone can beat it”, said arch-Thatcherite Lord Tebbit, who stuck in the boot. We would agree. There has never been a better time to get rid of this millionaire government.

However, the October 20 demonstration, organised by the TUC, was a half-hearted affair compared to last year. Far more is needed than simply another protest march. Workers are looking for action, not words.

That is why a motion was passed at this year’s TUC to consider the practicalities of organizing a general strike. Most unions came behind this due to the growing pressure from below to act. However, the TUC
leadership is dragging its feet.

**Alternative**
At the same time, the Labour leaders are not offering any real alternative to the Coalition’s austerity. All they are offering is austerity “lite”. It was no accident that Ed Balls was heckled at the TUC for supporting a wage freeze. It was no accident that Ed Miliband was booed at the TUC demonstration when he said a Labour government would have to take “hard decisions”, namely, carry through the Tory cuts, but in a different way. But cuts are cuts. It is the choice between death by hanging or by firing squad.

This is where attempting to patch up capitalism gets you. The idea that you can have “responsible” capitalism is a sham.

**“One-nation”**
Ed Miliband has now become the champion of Disraeli’s “One Nation “Toryism. As if the office cleaner has the same interests as the millionaire landowner, or the nurse the same interests as the City banker. The nature of capitalism is a class-ridden society.

The rich have never been richer, while the gulf between rich and poor has never been greater.

While Miliband quoted Disraeli, George Osborne sickeningly misquoted Marx at the Tory party conference, in urging workers to unite to “sell” their rights at work, for instance, against discrimination on grounds of sex or race, or unfair dismissal. They want to make it easy for employers to sack workers by doing away with so-called restrictive “red tape”.

With Britain’s economy shrinking this year, we will see more attacks on workers’ living standards. With the recession continuing, the Coalition has missed its austerity target. The scene is now being set for a new round of austerity cuts.

And yet there is no end to this. The austerity programme is serving to drag the economy down further by slashing purchasing power. The shrinking economy in turn drives up the deficit which demands even more cuts. It is a vicious downward spiral.

There is a crazy logic to this. Capitalism is based on the drive for profits. Capitalism in crisis can no longer afford the reforms of the past. Living standards must be driven down, while workers must work harder and longer for less. This is today’s reality for millions.

**Spending**
There are those who talk of increasing spending, such as the Keynesian economists. But spending must either come from taxing the working class or taxing the capitalists. If you tax the workers you will simply cut into demand, but if you tax the monopolies more they will cut back on investment. Either way, the system still suffers.

Today, the world economy is slowing down. What we have today in a crisis of capitalism brought on by over-production.

This is over-production not due to need but through producing commodities that cannot be sold at a profit. This is the basic contradiction of capitalism. It is this that produces mass unemployment, poverty wages and falling living standards.

There are huge productive resources in society but they cannot be fully used under capitalism. Farmers are paid to leave their land idle. Industry runs at 70% of capacity at the present time. Millions are unemployed or in part-time work. Some have been forced to have two or three part-time jobs to make ends meet. Such is life at the beginning of the 21st century.

We have the scientific know-how to send sophisticated computers to Mars, but scandalously society is incapable of giving everyone a job. That is the insanity of capitalism and the domination of the market.

**Plan**

If we are to provide jobs for all, give everyone a roof over their head, provide a decent wage for everyone, then we have to take the economy out of the hands of big business. If we were able to democratically plan the economy in the interests of the majority, then these basic things would be available to all.

A socialist plan of production, based upon the nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy, the major banks and monopolies, and run under workers’ control and management, is the only way forward.

On the basis of capitalist crisis, there is no future, except permanent cuts and austerity. Mervyn King, the governor of the Bank of England, has again warned that the crisis may force younger generations to "live under its shadow for a long time to come.

The time has come to put an end to this nightmare. This means that workers will need to take back their organisations – the trade unions and the Labour Party – and to clear out the place-seekers and careerists.

It means putting socialism back on the agenda, not in words, but in action. Only then can we put an end to this “race to the bottom” and offer a real
alternative to the chaos of capitalism.

www.marxist.com

Superstorm Sandy

Ted Glick 1 November 2012

Much of New Jersey, New York City and elsewhere definitely got hit very hard by Superstorm Hurricane Sandy yesterday: several feet of sand covering roads close to the ocean in Point Pleasant and probably elsewhere—50 or so homes burned down in Queens—extensive flooding of the lower Manhattan NYC subways—7 million or more customers without power—blizzard conditions in the Appalachians—and much more, without question.

I live in NJ, about 12 miles west of Manhattan. We didn’t get much rain but we did get very high winds, probably 80 mph or so, and as my wife and I huddled together on the couch last night, we held our breath more than once as the strong winds howled outside. Was a tree or a huge branch going to be uprooted or broken off onto our house or the electrical wires?

Around 7 pm we heard a loud noise and my wife saw a flash outside, like lightning. I went outside to check and was alarmed to see a tree, or a huge part of a tree, on the ground next door while downed electrical wires burned brightly. The smell was not of wood burning but of something else that sure didn’t seem like something we should be ingesting into our lungs. Fortunately, the very strong winds were blowing most of the smoke in a different direction than towards our house.

After a call to 911, and after the arrival of police and fire trucks, we watched as they parked outside our house. About an hour and a half later a worker from the local electrical utility finally came and was able to turn off the power to the wires that were still burning.

Over the rest of the evening, I kept going outside to take in what was happening. Wind gusts were extremely strong, and the branches in the three trees in front of my house were whipping around in a way I’ve never seen. But what was completely new and just as troubling was what was happening in the eastern sky, a sky lit up as if it was the very early beginnings of the dawn, 20-30 minutes before the sun actually rises over the horizon, and this was between 9 and 11 p.m.
As I stood on my front porch for 15-20 or more minutes, I came to understand why this was the case. I must have seen at least 10 flashes of light over that time. At first I thought they were lightning, but they weren’t. There was never any thunder the whole evening.

These flashes had to be from downed electric wires or transformers. Several of them were very big, and when they lit up the sky it turned a vaguely light blue. I hope that whoever was in the vicinity of these explosions and likely fires wasn’t hurt.

The last time a big tree came down on my block was almost exactly a year ago, during the freakish Halloween snowstorm of 2011. A huge tree a few houses away came down as the heavy snow piled up on the still leaf-full branches, leading to dozens of them snapping off and this one downed tree, falling onto a roof and across electrical wires and leading to a loss of power for two days.

A few days ago, as Sandy churned north from the Caribbean, I wrote a piece asking rhetorically if this “frankenstorm” was “God’s latest warning.” His response to the infuriating climate silence we have experienced with the Democratic and Republican Presidential candidates and the debates. I can easily tap back into that outrage if I think about what that silence is meaning and will mean for huge numbers of people and other life forms worldwide for many years to come. And I can still hope that, finally, maybe this huge, unprecedented, 1,000-miles-in-diameter monster storm will break that silence and generate the kind of organized, massive political movement demanding action on the climate crisis that we so desperately need.

Today, though, I’m just feeling thankful that my wife and I made it through the worst of Superstorm Sandy while concerned about those whose Sandy experience was much more impactful. I’m looking forward to getting back to my normal, day-to-day routine—until, regrettably but certainly, the next extreme weather event hits us, one brought to by the coal, gas and oil industry’s dominance of our two-party political system.

Ted Glick is the National Campaign Coordinator of the Chesapeake Climate Action Network. Past writings and other information can be found at http://tedglick.com, and he can be followed on Twitter at http://twitter.com/jtglick.
On October 12-13, 2012, elections took place in the Czech Republic. The elections were for regional assemblies and one-third of the Senate. Their political impact could have far-reaching results for the whole of society. They signalled a resounding “no” to cost cutting and complete submission to the demands of the world financial sector for a quick restart of neoliberal capitalism.

**The regional elections can be characterised as follows:**

- They reflected the marked dissatisfaction of a large part of the population with the current government: ODS (Civic Democrats), TOP 09, LIDEM (a “fragment” of party Veci verejně /Public Affairs);
- The CSSD (Social Democrats) also experienced a share of responsibility being attributed to them, though the party is in opposition to the government, it rules with coalition parties in some regions;
- The KSCM (the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia) gained in strength as the representative of the radical left;
- Non-parliamentary parties, including established ones, played a slightly larger role, but only in some regions (in one they came first);
- Despite public apathy, turnout was comparable to previous elections (2008: 40.3%, 2012: 36.9%, but parliamentary elections of 2010: 62.6%);
- The first round of the elections to one-third of the Senate were held concurrently to the regional elections. The right (particularly the ODS) suffered a defeat and as it was already clear will not hold on to its previous position.
- So-called independent candidates achieved only the most marginal of success;
- The expected rise of extremist (right-wing populist) parties or other newly formed parties largely focused on nationalism and right-wing Euroscepticism etc. did not take place. This does not mean, however, that there were not marked local differences. A right-wing extremist party with a total gain of 1.57% in crisis spots that recently saw social and ethnic clashes gains, for instance, 7.55% in Northern Bohemia in Sluknov and 13.5% in Varnsdorf.
- The extent of corruption and unethical behaviour on the part of the political elite, both in government and in the “opposition” CSSD, contributed to the negative atmosphere. This was mainly reflected in the “punishing” of coalition parties and part of the CSSD, which is also regarded as being deeply entwined with such practices. Recently there have been several revelations, including criminal proceedings over abuse of state assets and money from EU funds, among senior state officials, politicians and persons closely connected with all the parliamentary parties, with the exception of the Communist Party of Bohemia and
Moravia.

• It is true that in the middle of a parliamentary term the results of the opposition are always markedly better than those of the coalition (in the CR). However, the fall of the bigger parties has been greater in percentage but also in number of mandates (the ODS lost 78, the CSSD lost 75). By contrast, the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia gained 68 mandates. TOP 09, which was not fully constituted in the last elections, gained 37 seats, though in the context of its overall result it ranked among the losers. The KDU-CSL (Christian Democrats) remained at practically the same level (+ 5 seats). Prague has a particular position: while it is regarded as a region, elections take place there along with municipal ones (which were not held this year).

**Outcome for the left**

In almost all the regions, the CSSD and the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM) can form majority coalitions. In the previous election period they were in open coalitions in two regions, and the results show that citizens assessed them positively. In some other regions there were minority CSSD governments with the tacit support of the KSCM, or other coalitions were formed and the KSCM was in opposition. It has been shown that these coalitions did not bring the CSSD better results in this year's polls. A key question now facing the CSSD is as to whether it is willing to enter open coalitions with the KSCM, or whether it will look for ways to avoid this, even though it is aware of the danger that voters will not forgive it for joint local government with the right-wing governing coalition.

Election to regional councils in Czech Republic held in October 2012
13 regions -- 7,472,000 voters (in Prague the election was in 2010 -- 943,500 voters).

**Party Result in % Number of vote cast**

2008 2012 2008 2012
CSSD 35.85 23.58 1,044,719 621,961
KSCM 15.03 20.43 438,024 538,953
ODS 23.57 12.28 687,005 324,081
KDU-CSL 6.65 5.82 193,911 153,510
TOP09 x 8.83 175,089
Poll in % 40.30 36.88
CSSD -- Czech Social Democratic Party
KSCM -- Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia
ODS -- Civic Democratic Party (liberal conservative, anti-communist Euro-sceptic)
KDU-CSL -- The Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party (Christian democratic)
TOP 09 -- A conservative and democratic party (more conservative).
The current ruling coalition: ODS + TOP 09 + LIDEM did not participate in this election.
Voting for the KSCM ticket (which included party members and non-members) can be characterised as follows:

It is a rejection of liberal capitalism and its concept of cuts; burdening the citizens, employees, the middle class and pensioners with the costs of the crisis of the system; and affecting the owners of capital as little as possible. It is also an expression of disgruntlement with the policies of the CSSD, understood as an effort to do away with the most palpable impacts on the middle class but rarely putting forward demands for more fundamental changes. The third reason could consist in the fact that in the last parliamentary elections new parties with very unclear programs but very attractive slogans scored considerable successes. They subsequently let down their voters, who this time cast their votes far more carefully and did not go in for major experimentation (for example a party Veci verejné/Public Affairs had obtained 10.88% in parliamentary elections and only 0.25% now). Therefore the KSCM ticket, and the party's critical profile, attracted their interest.

Other radical left organisations did not stand in the elections, if we do not count the KSC (Communist Party of Czechoslovakia). Its roots are based in the Communist Party (before 1989) and therefore it can be viewed as representative of communist orthodoxy. The party's results (it stood in only four regions) did not influence the overall outcome (total 0.55%, the best 2.21% in one region).

Neither did the ballot papers see a particularly impressive showing on the part of representatives of left-wing NGOs, citizens’ associations, etc. Such groups very much underestimated the preparatory period and did not put forward their own proposals, did not hold negotiations with the KSCM and did not particularly assert themselves either in formulating programme documents or on joining KSCM tickets. The performance of the Greens was also negligible (1.75%). Only in a coalition Greens have some mandate in one region.

The KSCM's good results were the consequence of the party's long-term pragmatic and considerate, practical policy. From time to time, some functionaries make “principled” speeches or visibly display their loyalty to “ideas” and pull no punches in their sharp criticism of capitalism. However, at the regional and municipal levels in particular, a policy of taking an effective approach is followed, slowing the asocial steps of the government and contributing to shaping a positive picture of the KSCM among the public. Program issues were not at the forefront in this year's elections, with the presentation of all parties’ manifestos transformed into
short slogans. The KSCM, whose electorate is over 10 times bigger than its membership, must be aware that many voters are not willing to go beyond capitalism and are in essence scared of fundamental changes to the system. The main aim of the bulk of left-wing voters is a kind of modification of the welfare state. This is reflected in the practical political work of KSCM representatives.

From the left-wing perspective, these elections are also testimony to the failure of radical left alternatives outside the KSCM. They failed to present alternative radical left variants of social development. Neither, and that is due to the passivity of such organisations, did they put forward concepts of European left-wing unity and a common approach. The KSCM is very wary of European integration and in essence opposed to the EU in its current form, which is the reason why a fundamental European “tone” could not have been expected of it. In the case of non-Communist radical left-wing groups, the anti-communism of some among them is quite pronounced, for instance in the rejection of the party system as such. However, in reality such ideas have a negligible chance of resonating in society; if they are visible externally, it is in the form of electoral abstinence.

International political aspect
My last remark touches on the international political aspect of these “local” elections. It has been confirmed that there is in Czech society a stable (and now somewhat rising) block of left-oriented citizens who believe that traditional social democracy is not capable of fulfilling their ideas as to how society ought to be run. Therefore they have given significant support to a radical left organisation. In its way, this is a unique situation among the post-communist countries.

In a long-term perspective, the KSCM is the only such relevant power in Central and Eastern Europe. This should be taken into consideration in the shaping of left-wing European strategy. The Central and Eastern European space urgently requires a common radical left-wing policy, and it is clear today that, without the active integration of this left in the Czech Republic, this is not possible. Therefore it is absolutely necessary that in the short term even non-traditional ways be found to restart active and strategic cooperation. The complicated situation of the EU, and the political contingencies unfolding from it, demand that the European left finds new types of cooperation and more effective coordination.

Second round of the Senate election: Left cements its dominant position
The second round of the Senate election was held on October 19-20 and confirmed the strengthening of the left. This time, the winner was the CSSD (Social Democrats), it means a moderate left. KSCM (Communists)
defended one senatorial seat, but lost in direct duels in the 2nd round with SD 9:1. The losses of the right continued as expected. The ODS defended only four electoral districts and lost 9 seats.

After this election the Senate (total 81 seats) is constituted as follows: CSSD – 46 seats, KSCM – 2 seats, ODS – 15 seats, TOP 09 – 4 seats, Greens – 1 seat, Pirates (in coalition with Christian Democrats and Greens) – 1 seat. The turnout was only 18.6%, the lowest lay by less than 10%. The highest turnout was in Prague 8, where the direct “confrontation” between KSCM (vice-chair J. Dolejs) and ODS (its candidate was supported by the Czech president and party leaders overtly) placed 30%. The result was 62.5% and 37.5% respectively. Prague still remains a fortress of the Right.

http://links.org.au/node/3072

[Jiri Málek is a member of the Society for European Dialogue (SPED) in Prague, Czech Republic.]

Without women there is no food sovereignty

Esther Vivas 30 October 2012

Systems of food production and consumption have always been socially organized, but their organization has varied historically. In the last few decades, under the impact of neoliberal politics, the logic of capitalism has been imposed upon the ways in which food is produced and consumed (Bello, 2009).2

This article analyzes the impact of agro-industrial policies on women and the key role that peasant women in the Global North and South play in the production and distribution of food. It analyzes how the dominant agricultural model can incorporate a feminist perspective and how the social movements that work towards food sovereignty can incorporate a feminist perspective.
Campesinas and invisible women
In the countries of the Global South women are the primary producers of food, the ones in charge of working the earth, maintaining seed stores, harvesting fruit, obtaining water and safeguarding the harvest. Between 60 to 80% of food production in the Global South is done by women (50% worldwide) (FAO, 1996). Women are the primary producers of basic grains such as rice, wheat, and corn which feed the most impoverished populations in the South. Despite their key role in agriculture and food however, women; together with their children; are the ones most affected by hunger.

For centuries, peasant women have been responsible for domestic chores, the care and feeding of their families, the cultivation, exchange and commercialization of household gardens; charged with reproduction, production and community—all the while occupying an often invisible domestic and social sphere. The main economic transactions in agriculture have traditionally been undertaken by men in markets, with the purchase and sale of animals, and the commercialization of large quantities of grains in the private and public sphere.

This division of roles, assigning women as the caretakers of the house as well as the health and education of their families, and granting men the “technical” management of land and machinery, maintains the assigned gender roles that have persisted in our societies through the centuries and into the present (Oceransky Losana, 2006).

The figures speak for themselves. According to data from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO, 1996), in many African countries women represent 70% of the field labor; are responsible for supplying 90% of the domestic water supply and are responsible for between 60 and 80% of the production of food consumed and sold by the family. They account for 100% of the processing of foods, 80% of the activities of food storage and transportation, and 90% of the labor involved in preparing the earth before planting. These numbers demonstrate the crucial role that African women have in the production of small-scale agriculture and the maintenance of their families’ subsistence.

In many regions of the Global South however—in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia—there is a notable “feminization” of salaried agricultural work, especially in non-traditional export-oriented sectors (Fraser, 2009). Between 1994 and 2000, according to White and Leavy (2003), women made up 83% of new employees in the non-traditional agro-export sector. In this way, for the first time, many women have paid jobs with economic gains that give them more power in decision making and the possibility of participating in organizations.
outside of the family (Fraser, 2009). However, this dynamic shift has been accompanied by a marked gender division in job duties: on plantations, women perform the unskilled work such as gathering and boxing while men bring in the harvest and plant.

The incorporation of women into salaried labor means a double burden of work for women who continue to care for their families while at the same time working to obtain income—principally in precarious jobs. Poorer labor conditions than those of their male counterparts, along with inferior pay for the same jobs, forces women to work more hours in order to receive the same income. In India, for example, the average salary for day labor in the agricultural sector is 30% less for women than men (World Bank, 2007). In Spain, women make 30% less, and this difference can be as high as 40% (Oceransky Losana, 2006).

**Impact of neoliberal policies**

The application of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) in the 80s and 90s in the Global South on the part of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, further aggravated already difficult conditions for much of the population in those countries and hit women especially hard.

The shock measures imposed by the SAPs consisted of forcing Southern governments to withdraw all subsidies for staples like bread, rice, milk and sugar. Drastic reductions in public education, health, housing and infrastructure spending were imposed. The forced devaluation of national currency (to cheapen exports) diminished the purchasing capacity of local populations. Increased interest rates to attract foreign capital generated a speculative spiral. These SAPs added to the extreme poverty of many in the Global South (Vivas, 2008).

Structural Adjustment Policies and privatization had major repercussions for women in particular. As Juana Ferrer of the International Gender Commission of Via Campesina illustrates: “In the processes of privatization of public services, the most affected people have been women. Women have been affected above all in the fields of health and education where they have historically carried [the most] responsibility for their families. … In the measure [to which] we do not have access to resources and public services it becomes more difficult to lead a worthwhile life for women” (La Via Campesina, 2006: 30).

The collapse of the countryside the Global South and the intensification of migration to cities has led to a process of “de-peasantization” (Bello, 2009). In many countries this process has not taken the form of a classic rural to urban movement, in which ex-peasants go to the cities to work in factories as part of the industrialization process. Rather, migration has
been characterized by a process of “urbanization disconnected from industrialization” in which ex-peasants, pushed into the cities, are then fed back to the periphery (favelas, slums), many living off the informal economy and comprising the “informal proletariat” (Davis, 2006).

Women are an essential component in these national and international migratory flows. Migration leads to the dismantling and abandonment of families, land, and processes of production, while increasing the burdens of family and community on the women who stay behind. In Europe, the United States and Canada women who do migrate take work that European and North American women have not performed for years, thus reproducing an invisible spiral of oppression, as the Global North externalizes its care, social and economic costs to communities of migrant women origin.

The inability to resolve the current health care crisis in Western countries has resulted in the incorporation of large numbers of women into the labor market. Additionally, the aging population of Western countries and the non-responsiveness of the state to their needs has served as an alibi for the importation of millions of “caretakers” from the Global South. As is noted by Ezquerra (2010) “[This] diaspora fills the function of making the incompatibility between the rise of the capitalist system and the maintenance of life in the Centre invisible, and deepens the crisis of care and other crises in the South. … The ‘international chain of care’ becomes a dramatic vicious cycle that ensures survival of the patriarchal capitalist system” (Ezquerra, 2010:39).

**Access to land**

Access to land is not a guaranteed right for many women. In numerous Southern countries laws forbid this right, and in those countries where legal access exists there are often traditions and practices that prevent women from property ownership. As Fraser (2009) explains, “In Cambodia, for example, although it is not illegal for women to own land, the cultural norm dictates that they do not possess land; although they are responsible for farm production and agriculture, women have no control over the sale of land or how it is transmitted to children” (Fraser, 2009:34).

In India, Chukki Nanjundaswamy of the peasant organization Karnataka State Farmers Association3 notes that the situation of women with regards to land and health care access is very difficult: “Socially Indian peasant women have almost no rights and are considered an ‘addition’ to males. Rural women are the most untouchable of the untouchables within the social caste system” (La Via Campesina, 2006: 16).

Access to land for women in Africa today is even more precarious due to
increased deaths from AIDS. On the one hand, women are more likely to be infected, but when one of their male relatives who holds title to the land dies, women have great difficulty accessing control. In many communities, women have no right to inherit, and therefore lose their land and other assets when they are widowed (Jayne et al., 2006).

Land is a very important asset—it allows for the production of food, serves as an investment for the future; and as collateral it implies access to credit, etc. The difficulties women have securing access to land is one more example of how the capitalist and patriarchal agricultural system hits them especially hard. Furthermore, when women do hold title to land, it is mostly lower value land or extension properties.

Women also face more difficulty in obtaining loans, services, and supplies. Globally, it is estimated that women receive only 1% of total agricultural loans, and even so, it is not clear who in the family exercises control over those loans (Fraser, 2009).

These practices do not only exist in the Global South. In Europe, for example, many women farmers work under complete legal uncertainty. Most of them work on family farms where administrative rights are the exclusive property of the owner of the farm—and women are not entitled to aid, planting, lactic share, etc.

As Elizabeth Vilalba Seivane, secretary of Labrego Galego in Galicia explains, the problems of women in the field—in the South and the North—have much in common despite some obvious differences, “European women are more focused on fighting for our administrative rights on the farm, while elsewhere profound changes are demanded that have to do with land reform or access to land and other basic resources” (La Via Campesina, 2006: 26).

In the US, Debra Eschmeyer of the National Family Farm Coalition explains practices that show this inequality: “For example, when a women farmer goes alone to seek a loan from a bank it is far more complicated [than] if a male farmer seeks a loan” (La Via Campesina, 2006: 14).

**Agribusiness vs. food sovereignty**

Today, the current agro-industrial model has proven unable to satisfy the dietary needs of individuals, in addition to being destructive to the environment. We are facing a food and agricultural system with a high concentration of companies along the entire chain. It is monopolized by a handful of multinational agribusinesses and backed by governments and international institutions that have become accomplices, if not co-beneficiaries, in an unsustainable food production system. This model is an imperialist tool aimed at political, economic and social control over
the Global South by the North’s major economic powers like the United States and the European Union (Toussaint, 2008; Vivas, 2009).

As Desmarais (2007) notes, the food system can be understood as a broad horizontal chain that has been taking more and more away from production and consumption in favor of the appropriation of various stages of production by agribusiness, leading to the loss of peasant autonomy.

The food crisis that erupted during 2007 and 2008, caused a strong increase in the price of staple foods, highlighting the high volatility of agriculture and the food system. It also introduced the figure of over one billion hungry people in the world—one person in six, according to data from the FAO (2009).

The problem is not a lack of food, but rather the inability to access it. In fact, grain production worldwide has tripled since the 60’s, while the global population has only doubled (GRAIN, 2008). We can see that there is enough food to feed the entire global population. However, for the millions of people in developing countries who spend between 50% and 60% of their income on food (up to 80% in the poorest countries), rising prices make it impossible to access.

There are fundamental reasons that explain the deep food crisis. Neoliberal policies applied indiscriminately over the past thirty years on a global scale forced vulnerable markets to open up to the global economy. Payments of debt by the South led to the privatization of formerly public goods and services (water, agricultural protections). Add to this a model of agriculture and food production in the service of capitalist logic, and you have the main contributing factors to the situation that has dismantled a once-successful model of peasant agriculture that had guaranteed people’s food security for decades (Holt-Giménez and Patel, 2010). This has had a very negative impact on people, particularly women, and the environment.

Food Sovereignty is a powerful alternative to this destructive agricultural model. This paradigm promotes “the right of peoples to define their own agricultural policies and … to protect and regulate domestic agricultural production and the domestic market” (VVAA, 2003: 1). Food sovereignty seeks to regain the right to decide what, how and where to produce what we eat. It promotes the idea that the land, water, and seeds are in peasants’ hands, and that we deserve to control our food systems.

There is an inherent feminist perspective incorporated in food sovereignty. As pointed out by Yoon Guem Soon, a Korean peasant woman and representative of Via Campesina in Asia: “Feminism is a process for
getting a decent place for women in society, to combat violence against women and to claim and reclaim our land and save it from the hands of multinationals and large companies. Feminism is the way for rural women to take an active and worthy role within society” (La Via Campesina, 2006:12).

**La Via Campesina**

Via Campesina is the world’s foremost international movement of small farmers. It promotes the right of all peoples to food sovereignty. Via Campesina was established in 1993 at the dawn of the anti-globalization movement, and gradually became one of the major organizations in the critique of neoliberal globalization. Its ascent is an expression of peasant resistance to the collapse of the rural world caused by neoliberal policies, and the intensification of those policies as embodied in the World Trade Organization (Antentas and Vivas, 2009a).

Since its founding, Via Campesina has promoted a “female peasant” identity that is politicized, linked to land, food production and the defense of food sovereignty—built in opposition to the current agribusiness model (Desmarais, 2007). Via Campesina embodies a new kind of “peasant internationalism” (Bello, 2009), that can be viewed as a “peasant component” of the new international resistance presented by the anti-globalization movement (Antentas and Vivas, 2009).

In 1996, coinciding with the World Food Summit at the FAO in Rome, Via Campesina highlighted food sovereignty as a political alternative to a profoundly unfair and predatory food system. This does not imply a romantic return to the past, but rather recovers knowledge and traditional practices and combines them with new technologies and new knowledge (Desmarais, 2007). As noted by McMichael (2006), there is a “mystification of the small” in a way that rethinks the global food system to encourage democratic forms of food production and distribution.

**A feminist perspective**

Over time, Via Campesina has incorporated a feminist perspective, working to achieve gender equality within their organizations, and building alliances with feminist groups, including the international World March of Women, among others.

At the heart of La Via Campesina, the struggle of women is situated at two levels: defending their rights as women within organizations and society in general, and the struggle as peasant women together with their colleagues against the neoliberal model of agriculture (EHNE and La Via Campesina 2009).

Feminist work in Via Campesina has taken important steps forward since
its inception. In the First International Conference in Mons (Belgium) in 1993, all the elected coordinators were men. In the final declaration the situation of rural women hardly received any mention. Although it identified the need to integrate women’s needs in the work of Via Campesina, the conference failed to establish mechanisms to ensure participation of women in successive meetings. Thus, at the 2nd International Conference in Tlaxcala (Mexico) in 1996, the percentage of women attending was 20% of the total: the same as at the 1st International Conference. To address this issue, a special women’s committee was created (later known as the Women’s Committee of La Via Campesina) and methods that permitted better representation and participation were enacted.

This move facilitated the incorporation of feminist analysis in Via Campesina. Thus, when Via Campesina publicly presented the concept of food sovereignty at the World Food Summit of FAO in Rome in 1996, women contributed their own demands. These included the need to produce food locally, and they added the dimension of “human health” to “sustainable agricultural practices,” demanding a drastic reduction in harmful chemical inputs and advocating the active promotion of organic agriculture. Women also insisted that food sovereignty could not be accomplished without greater female participation in the definition of rural policies (Desmarais, 2007).

For Francisca Rodriguez of the peasant association ANAMURI in Chile: “Acknowledging the reality and demands of rural women has been a challenge in all peasant movements. … The history of this acknowledgement has gone through various stages of struggle for recognition from within, to break with the chauvinist organizations … over the past twenty years, rural women’s organizations have gained [an] identity … we have reconstructed as women in a half-labored rural locale,” (Mugarik Gabe, 2006:254).

The work of the Women’s Commission helped promote exchanges between women from different countries, including women-specific meetings to coincide with international summits. Between 1996 and 2000, the Commission’s work focused mainly on Latin America—through training, exchange and discussion—and rural women increased their participation in all levels and activities of La Via Campesina.

As Annette Desmarais noted, “In most countries, agricultural and rural organizations are dominated by men. The women of La Via Campesina refuse to accept these subordinate positions. While acknowledging the long and difficult road ahead, women accept the challenge with enthusiasm, and vow to carry out a major role in shaping the Via Campesina as a movement committed to gender equality” (Desmarais,
In October 2000, just before the 3rd International Conference of La Via Campesina in Bangalore (India), the 1st International Assembly of Women Farmers was organized. This allowed for greater participation of women in the organization. The Assembly adopted three major goals: 1) to ensure the participation of 50% of women at all levels of decisions and activities of La Via Campesina, 2) to maintain and strengthen the Women’s Commission, and 3) to ensure that documents, training events and speeches of Via Campesina did not have sexist content or sexist language (Desmarais, 2007).

Members at the conference agreed to change the institutional structure to ensure gender equity. As Paul Nicholson of La Via Campesina notes: “[In Bangalore] it was determined that equality of man and woman in spaces and positions of representation in our organization opened a whole internal process of reflection on the role of women in the struggle for women peasants’ rights. … The gender perspective is being addressed now in a serious way, not only in the context of parity in responsibilities, but also a profound debate about the roots and tentacles of patriarchy and violence against women in the rural world.” (Food Sovereignty, Biodiversity and Cultures 2010: 8).

This strategy forced the member organizations of Via Campesina at national and regional levels to rethink their work in a gender perspective and to incorporate new measures to strengthen the role of women (Desmarais, 2007). Josie Riffaud of the Confédération Paysanne in France, states that: “the decision was critical of [lack of gender] parity in the Via Campesina, as allowed in my organization, the Confédération Paysanne. We also apply this measure.” (La Via Campesina, 2006: 15).

As part of the 4th International Conference in Sao Paulo, Brazil, in June 2004; the 2nd International Assembly of Women Farmers brought together more than a hundred women from 47 countries on all continents. The main lines of action that emerged from the meeting were to take action against physical and sexual violence against women; both domestically and internationally; demand equal rights and invest in education. As its final statement states: “We demand our right to a dignified life, respect for our sexual and reproductive rights; and the immediate implementation of measures to eradicate all forms of physical, sexual, verbal and psychological violence. … We urge states to implement measures to ensure our economic autonomy, access to land, health, education and equal social status.” (2nd International Assembly of Women Farmers, 2004).

In October 2006, the World Congress of Women of La Via Campesina
was highlighted in Santiago de Compostela, Spain. Participants included women from agricultural organizations in Asia, North America, Europe, Africa and Latin America; with the objective of analyzing and discussing the meaning of equality in the field from a feminist perspective, and a plan of action to achieve it. As one of the presentations—Sergia Galván’s Women’s Health Collective of the Dominican Republic—pointed out, the women of La Via Campesina had three challenges ahead: 1) to advance the theoretical discussion to incorporate the feminist peasant perspective in mainstream feminist analysis, 2) continue work on autonomy as a vital reference for the consolidation of the movement of rural women, and 3) to overcome the feeling of guilt in the struggle for higher positions of power over men (La Via Campesina, 2006).

The World Congress of Women of La Via Campesina emphasized the need to further strengthen the articulation of women of La Via Campesina, and created mechanisms for a greater exchange of information and specific plans for struggle. Among the concrete proposals were the articulation of a global campaign to combat violence perpetrated against women, to extend the discussion to all organizations that are part of Via Campesina, and to work to recognize the rights of rural women in demanding equality in access to land, credit, markets and administrative rights (La Via Campesina, 2006).

At the 5th International Conference in Maputo, Mozambique, in October 2008, La Via Campesina hosted the 3rd International Assembly of Women. The assembly approved the launch of a campaign targeting all forms of violence faced by women in society (physical, economic, social, sexist, cultural, and access to power) which are also present in rural communities and their organizations.

Work that aims at achieving greater gender equality is not easy. Despite the formal equality, women face obstacles when traveling or attending meetings and gatherings. As Annette Desmarais (2007:282) noted, “There are many reasons why women do not participate at this level. Perhaps the most important is the persistence of ideologies and cultural practices that perpetuate unequal gender relations and unfairness. For example, the division of labor by gender means that rural women have less access to the most precious resource, time, to participate as leaders in agricultural organizations. Being involved in reproductive, productive and community work makes it much less likely [for women] to have time for training sessions and learning as leaders.”

It is a struggle against the tide, and despite some concrete victories, we face a long fight in our organizations; and, more generally, socially.

Weaving Alliances
La Via Campesina has established alliances with various organizations and social movements at the international, regional, and national levels. One of the most significant alliances has been with the World March of Women, a leading feminist global network that has called for joint actions and meetings, and has collaborated in activities: the International Forum for Food Sovereignty held in Mali in 2007, among others.

The original meeting between the two networks was under the anti-globalization movement, and its purpose was to agree on counter-summits and activities within the World Social Forum. The incorporation of a feminist perspective within Via Campesina generated more solidarity, and this has built over time. At the Forum for Food Sovereignty in 2007 in Sélingué, Mali a meeting was convened by leading international social movements such as Via Campesina, the World March of Women, the World Forum of Fisher Peoples, and others to advance strategies within a wide range of social movements (farmers, fishers, consumers) to promote food sovereignty.

Women were a major catalyst in this meeting, as organizers and participants. The Nyéléni Forum in Sélingué was named in honor of the legend of a Malian peasant woman who struggled to assert herself as a woman in a hostile environment. Delegates from Africa, America, Europe, Asia and Oceania attended the meeting and identified the capitalist and patriarchal system as primarily responsible for the violations of women’s rights, while reaffirming their commitment to transform it.

The World March of Women has taken up food sovereignty as an inalienable human right, especially for women. Miriam Nobre, coordinator of the international secretary of the World March of Women, participated in October 2006 at the World Congress of Women of La Via Campesina in the global feminist movement. The 7th International Meeting of the World March of Women in Vigo, Spain in October 2008, held a forum and exhibition for food sovereignty, showing the links between the feminist struggle and those of peasant women.

The success of this collaboration is embodied in the dual membership of women who are active members in the World March of Women, and La Via Campesina. These experiences encourage closer ties and collaboration between both networks, and strengthens the feminist struggle of rural women that is part of the broader struggle against capitalism and patriarchy.

**Conclusion**
The current global food system has failed to ensure the food security of communities. Currently more than a billion people worldwide suffer from hunger. The global food system has had a profoundly negative
environmental impact; promoting an intensive agro-industrial model that has contributed to climate change and collapsing agro-biodiversity. This system has been particularly detrimental to women.

Developing alternatives to this agricultural model requires incorporating a gender perspective. The food sovereignty alternative to the dominant agro-industrial model has to have a feminist position to break with patriarchal and capitalist logic.

La Via Campesina, the largest international movement for food sovereignty, is moving in this direction: creating alliances with other social movements—especially feminist organizations and networks such as the World March of Women—to promote networking and solidarity among women in North and South, urban and rural areas, and between them and their companions. As Via Campesina says: “Globalize the struggle. Globalize hope.”

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1. Esther Vivas is a member of the Center for the Study of Social Movements at the University Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona.
2. For a more detailed analysis of the historical evolution of the global food system see McMichael (2000).
3. All women farmers mentioned in this article are part of member organizations of La Via Campesina.
4. According to the index of food prices by FAO, recorded between 2005 and 2006, an increase of 12% the following year, in 2007, an increase of 24% between January and July 2008, a rise about 50%. Cereals and other staple foods were those that suffered the largest increases (Vivas, 2009).

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Freedom Of Speech Suspended “Until Further Notice”

Leonidas Oikonomakis 30 October 2012

You may have heard the story. A couple of days ago an arrest warrant was issued by a Greek prosecutor for Kostas Vaxevanis, a Greek investigative journalist. His crime? HOTDoc, the magazine he edits, published a list of 1,991 Greeks who made $1.95 billion in deposits in the Geneva branch of HSBC bank in Switzerland.

It’s a list that was stolen by former HSBC employee Herve Falciani in 2007, and that former French Finance Minister Christine Lagarde
submitted to former Greek Finance Minister Georgios Papakonstantinou. While other countries (including France, Germany, and the UK) made use of their respective lists to investigate potential tax evasion, though, the Greek list just “disappeared” somewhere between the offices of Georgios Papakonstantinou and his successor, Evangelos Venizelos — now President of PASOK — for two whole years. Yet, it took the Greek government only a few hours to arrest the journalist who discovered and published it.

The case put into question not only the independence of the judiciary in Greece, but also the state of freedom of expression and freedom of the press in the country. And what makes things worse is that Vaxevanis’ case was by no means an isolated one.

Around a month earlier, an MP of the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party called for the intervention of the Minister of Justice into the case of a 27-year-old who had created a Facebook group satirizing a well-known monk, paraphrasing his name from Elder Paisios, to Elder Pastitsios (referring to “Pastitsio”, a Greek famous dish with pasta and minced meat). Again the Greek state showed excellent reflexes! Within a few hours, the 27-year-old was arrested on charges of blasphemy (!) and insulting religion, while the police entered his house and seized his computer and Facebook account.

The Greek state’s reflexes improved even more, though, in the case of the dismissal of journalists Kostas Arvanitis and Marilena Katsimi from the Greek state broadcaster NET/ERT for criticizing Public Order Minister Nikos Dendias over the torture report of the 15 anti-fascist activists that the Guardian (and not the Greek media) published, which led the Minister to accuse the British newspaper of “spreading lies”, also threatening it with legal action. Apparently, professional forensic examination of the 15 anti-fascists showed that torture had indeed taken place, and the journalists made the following comments on their Morning-magazino today:

Ms. Katsimi: … and here are the forensic findings for the 15 arrestees, published in the Guardian and for which case Mr. Dendias wanted to sue the Guardian.

Mr. Arvanitis: Didn’t he sue it?
Ms. Katsimi: He didn’t because the findings show that it is indeed a felony.
Mr. Arvanitis: And now, is he going to resign?
Ms. Katsimi: I do not think that he would resign. But it was strange what Mr. Dendias said — as if he knew the findings, which is not normally done… on the one hand is good that he didn’t know the findings, but on
the other hand, how can you say such a thing?
Mr. Arvanitis: And now what? Would he apologize?
Ms. Katsimi: I don’t know…
Mr. Arvanitis: Wow… that’s difficult for Mr. Dendias. And he is from the same place as you, from Corfu.
Ms. Katsimi: And he is a serious man, I have to say.”

In a matter of minutes, Aimilios Liatsos, the General Director of the State Broadcaster, announced to the journalists that they would be “cut off” from the news magazine “until further notice”, with the following statement:

“The General Directorate of ERT fully respects the rules of the free press and it proves in daily practice the broadcast of all views. However, it can not accept the violation of the minimum standards of journalistic ethics.

“The presenters of the daily magazine ‘Morning Information’ on NET, Mr. Kostas Arvanitis and Mrs. Marilena Katsimi, made unacceptable insinuations against the Minister of Citizen Protection, Mr. Nikos Dendias, and this without giving him the right to express his own opinion, while with their comments they appeared to prejudge the outcome of the judicial decision.”

Of course the incident was met with outrage by the Greek public, which characterized it as “junta-style censorship”.

As if this was not enough, the journalist union POESY announced today that another journalist of the state broadcaster ET3 was also fired on October 26, 2012, because she noticed a “strong military presence” outside Agios Dimitrios Church in Thessaloniki during the festivities for the city’s liberation — and she dared to say it on air! Later on, on the same day, a young man was arrested because on his Facebook page he had uploaded photographs showing Greek policemen together with members of Golden Dawn, during the national holiday. The official accusation: violation of private data law, and spreading false rumors that may harm the country’s image abroad.

All these incidents are indicative of a government (and a political system in general) in panic; one that does not hesitate to censor freedom of speech in order to protect the hegemonic political, cultural, and economic elites it is serving. While it is now soon to announce further austerity measures of 13.5 billion euros, which will again disproportionately hit the middle and lower classes of the country, it has been protecting for two years the 1.991 “possible” tax evaders, all the while pampering the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party by responding immediately to every ridiculous little prompt of theirs. At the same time, it is secretly torturing anti-fascists in the
Golden Dawn headq… excuse me, police stations — and is ready to silence within hours anyone who may express an opinion critical to the government’s.

Welcome to the Greece of the Memorandum.

Here, freedom of speech has been suspended, until the next loan-installment is released.

Good night

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Our Words Are Our Weapons

**Against the Destruction of the World by Greed**
Rebecca Solnit 29 October 2012

In ancient China, the arrival of a new dynasty was accompanied by “the rectification of names,” a ceremony in which the sloppiness and erosion of meaning that had taken place under the previous dynasty were cleared up and language and its subjects correlated again. It was like a debt jubilee, only for meaning rather than money.

This was part of what made Barack Obama’s first presidential campaign so electrifying: he seemed like a man who spoke our language and called many if not all things by their true names. Whatever caused that season of clarity, once elected, Obama promptly sank into the stale, muffled, parallel-universe language wielded by most politicians, and has remained there ever since. Meanwhile, the far right has gotten as far as it has by mislabeling just about everything in our world -- a phenomenon which went supernova in this year of “legitimate rape,” “the apology tour,” and “job creators.” Meanwhile, their fantasy version of economics keeps getting more fantastic. (Maybe there should be a rectification of numbers, too.)

Let’s rectify some names ourselves. We often speak as though the source of so many of our problems is complex and even mysterious. I’m not sure it is. You can blame it all on greed: the refusal to do anything about climate change, the attempts by the .01% to destroy our democracy, the constant robbing of the poor, the resultant starving children, the war against most of what is beautiful on this Earth.
Calling lies "lies" and theft "theft" and violence "violence," loudly, clearly, and consistently, until truth becomes more than a bump in the road, is a powerful aspect of political activism. Much of the work around human rights begins with accurately and aggressively reframing the status quo as an outrage, whether it’s misogyny or racism or poisoning the environment. What protects an outrage are disguises, circumlocutions, and euphemisms -- “enhanced interrogation techniques” for torture, “collateral damage” for killing civilians, “the war on terror” for the war against you and me and our Bill of Rights.

Change the language and you’ve begun to change the reality or at least to open the status quo to question. Here is Confucius on the rectification of names:

“If language is not correct, then what is said is not what is meant; if what is said is not what is meant, then what must be done remains undone; if this remains undone, morals and art will deteriorate; if justice goes astray, the people will stand about in helpless confusion. Hence there must be no arbitrariness in what is said. This matters above everything.”

So let’s start calling manifestations of greed by their true name. By greed, I mean the attempt of those who have plenty to get more, not the attempts of the rest of us to survive or lead a decent life. Look at the Waltons of Wal-Mart fame: the four main heirs are among the dozen richest people on the planet, each holding about $24 billion. Their wealth is equivalent to that of the bottom 40% of Americans. The corporation Sam Walton founded now employs 2.2 million workers, two-thirds of them in the U.S., and the great majority are poorly paid, intimidated, often underemployed people who routinely depend on government benefits to survive. You could call that Walton Family welfare -- a taxpayers’ subsidy to their system. Strikes launched against Wal-Mart this summer and fall protested working conditions of astonishing barbarity -- warehouses that reach 120 degrees, a woman eight months pregnant forced to work at a brutal pace, commonplace exposure to pollutants, and the intimidation of those who attempted to organize or unionize.

You would think that $24,000,000,000 apiece would be enough, but the Walton family sits atop a machine intent upon brutalizing tens of millions of people -- the suppliers of Wal-Mart notorious for their abysmal working conditions, as well as the employees of the stores -- only to add to piles of wealth already obscenely vast. Of course, what we call corporations are, in fact, perpetual motion machines, set up to endlessly extract wealth (and leave slagheaps of poverty behind) no matter what.

They are generally organized in such a way that the brutality that leads to wealth extraction is committed by subcontractors at a distance or
described in euphemisms, so that the stockholders, board members, and senior executives never really have to know what’s being done in their names. And yet it is their job to know -- just as it is each of our jobs to know what systems feed us and exploit or defend us, and the job of writers, historians, and journalists to rectify the names for all these things.

**Groton to Moloch**

The most terrifying passage in whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg’s gripping book *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers* is not about his time in Vietnam, or his life as a fugitive after he released the Pentagon Papers. It’s about a 1969 dinnertime conversation with a co-worker in a swanky house in Pacific Palisades, California. It took place right after Ellsberg and five of his colleagues had written a letter to the New York Times arguing for immediate withdrawal from the unwinnable, brutal war in Vietnam, and Ellsberg’s host said, “If I were willing to give up all this... if I were willing to renege on... my commitment to send my son to Groton... I would have signed the letter.”

In other words, his unnamed co-worker had weighed trying to prevent the violent deaths of hundreds of thousands of people against the upper-middle-class perk of having his kid in a fancy prep school, and chosen the latter. The man who opted for Groton was, at least, someone who worked for what he had and who could imagine having painfully less. This is not true of the ultra-rich shaping the future of our planet.

They could send tens of thousands to Groton, buy more Renoirs and ranches, and still not exploit the poor or destroy the environment, but they’re as insatiable as they are ruthless. They are often celebrated in their aesthetic side effects: imposing mansions, cultural patronage, jewels, yachts. But in many, maybe most, cases they got rich through something a lot uglier, and that ugliness is still ongoing. Rectifying the names would mean revealing the ugliness of the sources of their fortunes and the grotesque scale on which they contrive to amass them, rather than the gaudiness of the trinkets they buy with them. It would mean seeing and naming the destruction that is the corollary of most of this wealth creation.

**A Storm Surge of Selfishness**

Where this matters most is climate change. Why have we done almost nothing over the past 25 years about what was then a terrifying threat and is now a present catastrophe? Because it was bad for quarterly returns and fossil-fuel portfolios. When posterity indicts our era, this will be the feeble answer for why we did so little -- that the rich and powerful with ties to the carbon-emitting industries have done everything in their power to prevent action on, or even recognition of, the problem. In this country in particular, they spent a fortune sowing doubt about the science of climate change and punishing politicians who brought the subject up. In this way
have we gone through four “debates” and nearly a full election cycle with climate change unmentioned and unmentionable.

These three decades of refusing to respond have wasted crucial time. It’s as though you were prevented from putting out a fire until it was raging: now the tundra is thawing and Greenland’s ice shield is melting and nearly every natural system is disrupted, from the acidifying oceans to the erratic seasons to droughts, floods, heat waves, and wildfires, and the failure of crops. We can still respond, but the climate is changed; the damage we all spoke of, only a few years ago, as being in the future is here, now.

You can look at the chief executive officers of the oil corporations -- Chevron’s John Watson, for example, who received almost $25 million ($1.57 million in salary and the rest in “compensation”) in 2011 -- or their major shareholders. They can want for nothing. They’re so rich they could quit the game at any moment. When it comes to climate change, some of the wealthiest people in the world have weighed the fate of the Earth and every living thing on it for untold generations to come, the seasons and the harvests, this whole exquisite planet we evolved on, and they have come down on the side of more profit for themselves, the least needy people the world has ever seen.

Take those billionaire energy tycoons Charles and David Koch, who are all over American politics these days. They are spending tens of millions of dollars to defeat Obama, partly because he offends their conservative sensibilities, but also because he is less likely to be a completely devoted servant of their profit margins. He might, if we shout loud enough, rectify a few names. Under pressure, he might even listen to the public or environmental groups, while Romney poses no such problem (and under a Romney administration they will probably make more back in tax cuts than they are gambling on his election).

Two years ago, the Koch brothers spent $1 million on California’s Proposition 23, an initiative written and put on the ballot by out-of-state oil companies to overturn our 2006 Global Warming Solutions Act. It lost by a landslide, but the Koch brothers have also invested a small fortune in spreading climate-change denial and sponsoring the Tea Party (which they can count on to oppose climate change regulation as big government or interference with free enterprise). This year they’re backing a California initiative to silence unions. They want nothing to stand in the way of corporate power and the exploitation of fossil fuels. Think of it as another kind of war, and consider the early casualties.

As the Irish Times put it in an editorial this summer:
“Across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, hundreds of millions are struggling to adapt to their changing climate. In the last three years, we have seen 10 million people displaced by floods in Pakistan, 13 million face hunger in east Africa, and over 10 million in the Sahel region of Africa face starvation. Even those figures only scrape the surface. According to the Global Humanitarian Forum, headed up by former U.N. secretary general Kofi Annan, climate change is responsible for 300,000 deaths a year and affects 300 million people annually. By 2030, the annual death toll related to climate change is expected to rise to 500,000 and the economic cost to rocket to $600 billion.”

This coming year may see a dramatic increase in hunger due to rising food prices from crop failures, including this summer’s in the U.S. Midwest after a scorching drought in which the Mississippi River nearly ran dry and crops withered.

We need to talk about climate change as a war against nature, against the poor (especially the poor of Africa), and against the rest of us. There are casualties, there are deaths, and there is destruction, and it’s all mounting. Rectify the name, call it war. While we’re at it, take back the term “pro-life” to talk about those who are trying to save the lives of all the creatures suffering from the collapse of the complex systems on which plant and animal as well as human lives depend. The other side: “pro-death.”

The complex array of effects from climate change and their global distribution, as well as their scale and the science behind them makes it harder to talk about than almost anything else on Earth, but we should talk about it all the more because of that. And yes, the rest of us should do more, but what is the great obstacle those who have already tried to do so much invariably come up against? The oil corporations, the coal companies, the energy industry, its staggering financial clout, its swarms of lobbyists, and the politicians in its clutches. Those who benefit most from the status quo, I learned in studying disasters, are always the least willing to change.

The Doublespeak on Taxes
I’m a Californian so I faced the current version of American greed early. Proposition 13, the initiative that froze property taxes and made it nearly impossible to raise taxes in our state, went into effect in 1978, two years before California’s former governor Ronald Reagan won the presidency, in part by catering to greed. Prop 13, as it came to be known, went into effect when California was still an affluent state with the best educational system in the world, including some of the top universities around, nearly free to in-staters all the way through graduate school. Tax cuts have trashed the state and that education system, and they are now doing the
same to our country. The public sphere is to society what the biosphere is to life on earth: the space we live in together, and the attacks on them have parallels.

What are taxes? They are that portion of your income that you contribute to the common good. Most of us are unhappy with how they’re allocated -- though few outside the left talk about the fact that more than half of federal discretionary expenditures go to our gargantuan military, more money than is spent on the next 14 militaries combined. Ever since Reagan, the right has complained unceasingly about fantasy expenditures -- from that president’s “welfare queens” to Mitt Romney’s attack on Big Bird and PBS (which consumes .001% of federal expenditures).

As part of its religion of greed, the right invented a series of myths about where those taxes went, how paying them was the ultimate form of oppression, and what boons tax cuts were to bring us. They then delivered the biggest tax cuts of all to those who already had a superfluity of money and weren’t going to pump the extra they got back into the economy. What they really were saying was that they wanted to hang onto every nickel, no matter how the public sphere was devastated, and that they really served the ultra-rich, over and over again, not the suckers who voted them into office.

Despite decades of cutting to the bone, they continue to promote tax cuts as if they had yet to happen. Their constant refrain is that we are too poor to feed the poor or educate the young or heal the sick, but the poverty isn’t monetary: it’s moral and emotional. Let’s rectify some more language: even at this moment, the United States remains the richest nation the world has ever seen, and California -- with the richest agricultural regions on the planet and a colossal high-tech boom still ongoing in Silicon Valley -- is loaded, too. Whatever its problems, the U.S. is still swimming in abundance, even if that abundance is divided up ever more unequally.

Really, there’s more than enough to feed every child well, to treat every sick person, to educate everyone well without saddling them with hideous debt, to support the arts, to protect the environment -- to produce, in short, a glorious society. The obstacle is greed. We could still make the sorts of changes climate change requires of us and become a very different nation without overwhelming pain. We would then lead somewhat different lives -- richer, not poorer, for most of us (in meaning, community, power, and hope). Because this culture of greed impoverishes all of us, it is, to call it by its true name, destruction.

Occupy the Names
One of the great accomplishments of Occupy Wall Street was this rectification of names. Those who came together under that rubric named
the greed, inequality, and injustice in our system; they made the brutality of debt and the subjugation of the debtors visible; they called out Wall Street’s crimes; they labeled the wealthiest among us the “1%,” those who have made a profession out of pumping great sums of our wealth upwards (quite a different kind of tax). It was a label that made instant sense across much of the political spectrum. It was a good beginning. But there’s so much more to do.

Naming is only part of the work, but it’s a crucial first step. A doctor initially diagnoses, then treats; an activist or citizen must begin by describing what is wrong before acting. To do that well is to call things by their true names. Merely calling out these names is a beam of light powerful enough to send the destroyers it shines upon scurrying for cover like roaches. After that, you still need to name your vision, your plan, your hope, your dream of something better.

Names matter; language matters; truth matters. In this era when the mainstream media serve obfuscation and evasion more than anything else (except distraction), alternative media, social media, demonstrations in the streets, and conversations between friends are the refuges of truth, the places where we can begin to rectify the names. So start talking.

www.zcommunications.org

Rebecca Solnit is the author of thirteen books, a TomDispatch regular, and from kindergarten to graduate school a product of the California public education system in its heyday. She would like the Republican Party to be called the Pro-Rape Party until further notice.

This article first appeared on TomDispatch.com, a weblog of the Nation Institute, which offers a steady flow of alternate sources, news, and opinion from Tom Engelhardt, long time editor in publishing, co-founder of the American Empire Project, author of The End of Victory Culture, as of a novel, The Last Days of Publishing. His latest book is The American Way of War: How Bush's Wars Became Obama's (Haymarket Books).

Can Africa throw capitalism a lifeline?

**Opulence for robber capitalist elite but no boom for working masses**

Peluola Adewale, Democratic Socialist Movement (CWI in Nigeria) 27 October 2012

"It is my firm belief that Africa represents the next global economic
frontier, and I am not alone in that assessment."

So said Johnnie Carson, assistant secretary of state for African Affairs, to the US House foreign sub-committee on African Affairs on 17 April 2012.

Carson is not alone in expressing growing optimism about Africa. As he also noted, the World Bank’s projection of economic growth rates for Africa during the next two years is between 5% and 6%. This exceeds the figures expected for Latin America, Central Asia or Europe.

The IMF’s forecast for five years, beginning in 2011, has seven African countries - Ethiopia, Mozambique, Tanzania, Congo, Ghana, Zambia and Nigeria - among the world’s ten fastest growing economies.

An analysis by the Economist last year reveals that six sub-Saharan African countries - Angola, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Chad, Mozambique and Rwanda - were among the world’s ten fastest growing economies over the ten years to 2010.

Indeed, Africa has begun to draw positive remarks from capitalist commentators especially since the dawn of the global economic crisis.

The worst capitalist crisis since the 1930s Great Depression, triggered in the United States and Europe, has apparently forced capitalist strategists to search elsewhere for a success story, and they have invented one in Africa.

Leading capitalist media have suspended their characteristic bad press about the continent and now trumpet what are seen as ‘positives’.

A striking example of this can be found in the Economist where Africa metamorphosed from being the "Hopeless Continent", as in a May 2000 edition, to the "Hopeful Continent", which was the cover story in a December 2011 edition.

However, most of these countries’ high growth rate figures reflected a pick-up in raw material exports and price increases tied to the growth in global demand, especially from China.

For instance, the price of crude oil rose from less than $20 a barrel in 1999 to $147 in 2008. Generally these statistics do not reflect any generalised growth in the economy or in living standards.

Besides, any sustained slowdown in the West and China will see a sharp decline in the demand for Africa’s exports.
Poverty
To most working people, who have only seen their living conditions getting worse year in year out, the impressive figures of economic growth being thrown around seem magical.

In fact, the huge increases in food and fuel prices mean a continued assault on living standards. Africa today reveals a continent blighted with mass poverty and restricted access to the basic needs of life.

For example, in Ethiopia, a country on the ‘golden list’, 90% of the population was classified as "multidimensional poor" by a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report in 2010.

The situation in Nigeria, Africa’s biggest oil producer is also aptly described by the UNDP. Its representative in the country, Daouda Toure, correctly noted that "for almost a decade now, Nigeria has been recording consistently a high economic growth rate that has not produced commensurate employment opportunities and reduction in poverty among its citizens."

He continued: "Available statistics suggest that the incidence of poverty in Nigeria had indeed worsened between 2004 and 2010" (The Nation, Lagos, 29 August 2012).

South Africa, the continent’s biggest economy, is the second most unequal country in the world. This is despite "black economic empowerment" driven by the ANC government in post-apartheid South Africa.

In Angola, two-thirds of the population live on less than €1 ($1.25) a day and only 25% of children are enrolled in primary schools (Guardian, London, 18 November 2011).

This is the country which was the world’s fastest growing economy, beating China into second position, in the decade to 2010.

Presently, it acts as a safe haven for Portuguese capitalism, a poster boy of the eurozone crisis.

In a classic case of reverse economic migration between Europe and Africa, Angola has not only attracted about 150,000 Portuguese escaping joblessness but has also heavily invested its petrol dollars in Portugal.

Angola’s state oil company Sonangol is the biggest single shareholder in one the Portugal’s biggest banks, Millennium BCP.

As of June 2010 the value of Angolan investments in listed Portuguese
companies was estimated at more than €2 billion, according to the Financial Times.

Yet there is barely electricity and clean water in the country, even in the capital Luanda.

All this is symptomatic of the situation in Africa where economic growth is reflected in the opulence of the thieving capitalist elite and not in infrastructural development or the living standards of ordinary people.

But the capitalist strategists are not concerned about the fate of working people. In so far as there are natural resources to be exploited for super-profit, Africa is a bed of roses.

As the Guardian (London) reports: "There is growing confidence in Africa as an investment destination with the highest returns in the world" (28 March 2012).

Hence, the global investment bank Goldman Sachs said in a March 2012 report: "Africa is something investors have to think about, for long-term growth (either participating in it or missing it)."

This drive to super-exploit Africa explains why the continent, which is rich in natural resources and fertile lands for agriculture, is dominated by multinationals and run on the basis of capitalist neoliberal policies to benefit the imperialist west.

The lack of, or primitive state of, necessary infrastructure has meant that Africa is still largely dependent on exports of primary commodities and only accounts for an abysmal 2% of world output.

The so-called 'investors' are mainly interested in commodity and extractive industries which, although driving growth, create few jobs.

This failure to develop manufacturing explains why Africa, a classic example of jobless growth, cannot emulate the role of China as an engine of global capitalism despite its huge population and growing urbanisation. On the contrary, capitalism will continue to leave the continent prostrate.

**Corruption**

Africa’s woe is compounded by the characteristic corruption of its leaders. It is instructive however to state that corruption is not limited to Africa or developing countries.

Most of the resources that are left in Africa, after losing some to unfair trade and debt repayment, are stolen by pro-western corrupt leaders and
then stashed away in private foreign accounts in Europe and North America.

Neoliberal capitalism, which entails privatisation and deregulation, has given more leverage to Africa’s political leaders to loot their treasuries since they are not committed to use the resources to provide infrastructure and the basic necessities of life.

But in the face of this situation the continent’s workers, youth and poor are not passive. Africa has a rich history of repeated mass struggles against colonialism, and apartheid.

More recently there have been struggles against corrupt, rotten regimes and for a better life, as exemplified by the mass uprisings in the Arab world, especially in North Africa, which claimed at least three long-serving dictators.

January 2012 saw the biggest general strike and mass protest in the history of Nigeria against the increase in fuel prices.

Miners in South Africa, in their struggle for better pay and conditions, have almost brought the mining industry to its knees.

Mining accounts for a huge part of the country’s wealth and is also a symbol of colossal social inequality between workers and bosses.

The struggle of miners, in which DSM (CWI, South Africa) is playing a leading role (see pages 6&7), has helped put on the front burner the demand for the nationalisation of the mining industry, and also for a working and poor people’s political alternative to the ANC.

The continued mass protests of workers and youth in Europe, especially in Greece and Spain, against cuts and capitalist neoliberal attacks on jobs, wages, education and health care will continue to raise consciousness among the working people of Africa.

New struggles in Africa will mean that there is no safe haven for capitalism in a world of crisis and will serve as inspiration to intensify the search for socialist alternative. 
http://www.socialistworld.net/doc/6011

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http://www.socialistworld.net/doc/6011
Government parties win municipal elections: But growing contradictions for President Dilma Rousseff, as Party of Socialism and Freedom makes gains

André Ferrari, Liberty, Socialism and Revolution (CWI in Brazil) and member of PSOL National Board 26 October 2012

On 7 October, 138.5 million voters went to the polls in Brazil to elect councillors and mayors in 5,568 municipalities. Of the 83 municipalities with more than 200 voters, where a second round is held if no candidate gets more than 50% of valid votes, new elections will take place in 50 of them (including 17 state capitals) on 28 October.

The results, so far, point to an advantage for the parties that make up the base of support for the government of President Dilma Rousseff, from the Worker’s Party (PT).

The Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB), of the current vice-president of the republic, Michel Temer, had a majority of mayors elected. It won 1,018 mayoral positions (previously it had 1,201). It was followed by the PSDB (Brazilian Social Democracy Party), the main party of the traditional right wing opposition to Dilma’s government. The PSDB elected 692 mayors (down from 787). The Worker’s Party (PT) came third, with 627 mayors (up from 558).

While the PMDB and PSDB got a lower number of mayors, the PT grew slightly. However, it was the PSB (Brazilian Socialist Party) that managed to make a leap, rising from 310 to 433 mayors in the first round of the elections.

Until now, the small growth of the PT has not been in the major cities or state capitals. The party only won one state capital (Goiânia, in the state of Goiás) on the first round. However, it is contesting the second round in six more capitals. These include important cities like Salvador (Bahia), Fortaleza (Ceará) and the most important, São Paulo (state of São Paulo). The results of the second round in these crucial cities will complete the picture of the elections.

The Party of Socialism and Freedom, PSOL, also within certain limits experienced a certain growth. It elected its first mayor in the small city of
Itaocara (state of Rio de Janeiro) and goes into the second round, with real chances of winning, in two state capitals: Belém (state of Pará) and Macapá (state of Amapá). Moreover, it went from having 25 elected councillors to 49. Twenty two of them are in state capitals.

**The importance of the São Paulo contest**
The second round in São Paulo, the biggest city in the county, will be decisive for the plans of PT and will define how big the PT’s growth has been. In São Paulo, the ex-president Lula, who still acts as the main political strategist of Worker’s Party nationally, imposed a new candidate for mayor; the ex-minister of education, Fernando Haddad. In the same way that he appointed Dilma Rousseff, Lula made every effort to transfer his prestige to the new candidate in São Paulo. With a lot of difficulties, he managed to guarantee that his candidate went to the second round.

The main obstacle for PT in São Paulo was the emergence of a right wing populist candidate, Celso Russomano. He comes from a party controlled by the biggest pentecostal church in the country, which also is part of the base of support of Dilma’s government. Russomano’s public image was built around consumer rights’ issues. In an era of “unlimited” incentives for consumption and credit, one of the main pillars of “Lulism” in the last period, this bastard son of “Lulism” almost took the PT’s political space in the capital, São Paulo.

Haddad has a strong chance of winning the second round. In part, this is because of the mass rejection of his opponent, José Serra from the PSDB. He has been the “eternal” candidate of the traditional right in the city. A new defeat for José Serra, who had already lost to Dilma and Lula in the presidential elections, will mean the end of his political career. It will also complicate the difficult process of reorganization of the traditional right in Brazil.

**The growth of the PSB and tensions in Dilma’s base**
An important aspect of these elections was the growth of PSB (Brazilian Socialist Party). The PSB elected 434 mayors and came sixth. It was a growth of 41% in the number of mayors and 51% in the number of votes.

In spite of its, name (a number of political parties in Brazil have “social” or “socialist” in their names), the PSB is a bourgeois party. It governs in important states like Pernambuco and Ceará (Both in the northeast region of the country). It wins part of its support from Dilma’s government. However, in some regions it supports the PSDB and the traditional right wing.

The PSB is ruled by iron fist by the current state governor of Pernambuco, Eduardo Campos. His main objective is to build himself as a reference
point for the presidential elections in 2014, preferably as vice-president candidate together with Dilma. To do this, the party will have to replace the PMDB which is still the biggest party in the country.

The strengthening of the PSB also took place in open conflict with PT in important cities. In Recife (capital of Pernambuco), the PSB’s candidate defeated the PT, which currently has the mayor, deepening the crises of the PT in the city. In Belo Horizonte (capital of Minas Gerais and the fourth biggest electorate), the PSB’s candidate, with the support of PSDB’s state governor, defeated the PT’s candidate who had the explicit support of Dilma Rousseff and Lula.

The impact of the trial of “the big monthly allowance”

The elections took place against the backdrop of one of the most spectacular trials held by the judicial power in Brazil. For weeks, the ministers of the Supreme Federal Tribunal, shown on live TV, have been judging those involved in the mega corruption scandal known as “big monthly allowance”. Seven years ago this provoked the downfall of Lulas’ strongman, his chief of staff, José Dirceu. It was a severe blow against the Lula government during its first term in office.

According to the Attorney General, there was a huge scheme of corruption involving the diversion of public funds to buy the votes of members of the parliament with the objective of getting neo-liberal reforms approved.

Dozens of personalities, including PT leaders, members of parliament, politically-appointed public servants, chiefs of public and private banks, etc., were accused of being part of a large criminal gang.

Besides the ex-minister, José Dirceu, among those already convicted are the ex-national president of the PT, José Genoíno, the ex-party treasurer, Delúbio Soares and the ex-speaker of the lower house of the Congress. Dozens of others have already been convicted in this unique episode of Brazilian history.

With the conviction of the accused in the “big monthly allowance” scheme, the neo-liberal reforms approved in the national congress (thanks to the “purchasing” of members of the parliament), like the pension reform implemented by Lula, are being questioned by the left, the trade union movement and others.

Notwithstanding the impressive dimension of this episode, it has had little political impact in the municipal elections. An important layer of the middle class only reaffirmed its anti-PT stance. Another layer sought alternatives to the left. The relative growth of the PSOL (Party of Socialism and Freedom) partly resulted from the growing opposition to
corruption.

However, the majority of the vote for parties linked to Dilma’s government reflected relative economic stability and hope by many voters that the possibilities of access to the consumption boom will continue.

Yet there was still a significant growth in abstentions and ‘blank’ and invalid votes. Even though voting is obligatory in Brazil, a significant layer of the electorate refused to vote for any candidate. In São Paulo, 28% of the voters (2,4 million) did not vote at all or voted blank/invalid. In the previous election (2008), the number was 22%. In Salvador (Bahia), the number grew from 19,7% in 2008 to 34% this year.

In cities marked by recent corruption scandals, the increase in abstention rate is even higher. That is the case in Campinas (state of São Paulo) where, since the last election, the invalid votes grew by 128%, blank votes by 82% and abstention by 33%. In total, 37% of the voters did not vote for any candidate.

Signs of weakening of the model of “Lulism”

Despite the government’s triumphalist rhetoric, the international economic crisis is already affecting Brazil. Growth this year will be even lower than last year, despite tax exemptions to employers and fiscal incentives to capitalists measures.

Brazilian economic dependence on the Asian market, especially China, is showing its two sides, as those economies start to slow down. The priority for Dilma’s government, as it was for Lula, is the export of primary products and the strengthening of the capitalists that are based on agribusiness, mining and financial capital. At the same time, the country risks de-industrialization and an economic backlash.

Another main pillar of Lulism, the expansion of domestic market through consumer credit, is also starting to show its limitations. Consumer credit cannot grow much more than it already has and the first signs of excessive indebtedness and debts default are starting to appear.

The response from Dilma when faced with the first crisis signals was to promote a neoliberal shock. On the one hand, Dilma guarantee tax exemptions and incentives to big private capital, on the other hand, she implements deep social cuts. The refusal of the government to meet the demands of the federal public servants provoked the biggest strike in that sector since the beginning of Lula’s government. This strike involved 300,000 workers throughout the country.

Dilma’s government is privatising airports, ports, railways and roads. A
new counter reform of the pension system is being drawn up and new measures to make labour rights guaranteed in law more flexible are also being prepared.

Organised workers have responded with industrial action. Beyond federal public servants, workers in public transport have struck in many cities. More than 300,000 building workers laid down tools in the big cities and also on infrastructure projects, some in the Amazonian region. Bank and mail workers, as well as some private industries, also took part in important industrial struggles.

In many of those struggles, as in the case of the federal universities a new trade union leadership have emerged in opposition to the pro-government union leadership. However, even trade union leaderships linked to the PT and the government were forced to lead strikes as a result of the pressures from the ranks. This has lead to growing tensions between the government and its base in the trade union bureaucracy.

**Cities in a state of undeclared civil war**
Brazilian cities, especially the big metropolitan areas, are in an undeclared state of civil war. A dramatic example is the city of São Paulo where 69 favelas have been set ablaze this year alone. Since 2008, 530 favelas have been burnt to the ground. The link between those fires and the attempt to evict families to free up land for real estate speculation is clear.

A similar process have been seen in Rio de Janeiro as part of the process of preparation for the 2016 Olympics and in several cities in the case of the football 2014 World Cup.

In various cities in the state of São Paulo there is a virtual war between the organised crime and the military police. The response from the military police to the attacks from criminal gangs have already provoked the death of many black youth in the periphery, whose only crime is to be poor and black.

The huge shortage of housing, public transport, public health and education in the cities can only be dealt with through an organised struggle of workers and the building of an anti-capitalist and socialist political alternative.

**The growth of PSOL**
On of the characteristics of the first round in these elections was the growth of the Party of Socialism and Freedom (PSOL). The simple fact that the party is going into the second round with a real chance of winning in two capitals (Belém and Macapá) is a reflection of the importance of the growth of PSOL. However, it may be in Rio de Janeiro, where PSOL
did not manage to guarantee entering the second round, that the strengthening of the party is more evident.

PSOL’s mayoral candidate in Rio de Janeiro, Marcelo Freixo, got an incredible 28% of the valid votes. It did not succeed in stopping the current mayor, Eduardo Paes, from the PMDB, from winning in the first round. Paes was the candidate of an alliance of 20 parties, including the PT.

Freixo’s campaign mobilised thousands of volunteers on a scale not seen for a long time – since the PT turned into a party of the capitalist establishment. The Party of Socialism and Freedom elected four councillors in Rio de Janeiro, doubling its group in the municipal chamber.

With the support of the PT going to the candidate of the PMDB, a big opportunity was opened on the left that PSOL managed to fill and capitalise on. This also happened in Belém, where PSOL’s candidate, Edmilson Rodrigues (who was a mayor for PT in the past) occupied the space of the old PT in this election. The PT’s candidate won only 3% of the votes.

In other state capitals, even without winning, PSOL got some important results. In the case of Florianópolis (state of Santa Catarina) it won 14.4%, in Fortaleza (Ceará) it won 11.8%, in Belo Horizonte (Minas Gerais) it took 4.2% and 3.6% in Natal (Rio Grande do Norte, with Robério Paulino, a member of LSR/CWI as candidate).

Among other cities, with over 200 voters, a distinguished result was obtained in Niterói, in Rio de Janeiro, where PSOL got 18.4% of the vote for mayor and elected three councillors (All three, as well as the mayoral candidate, where from the left wing of the party. Two of them were with the direct involvement of the LSR/CWI in the campaign).

The party leaped from 25 to 49 councillors. Twenty two of them were elected in state capitals. Besides PSOL, the PSTU (Unified Socialist Worker’s Party), after a long time, elected two councillors, in Belém and Natal.

The growth of PSOL in the elections reflects also a new phase in the struggles and mobilisations in the country. In Natal, an explosion of mobilisations by youth stopped an increase public transport in fares. PSOL’s campaign, with a decisive participation from LSR/CWI, played a crucial role in these struggles and helped in the construction of a programme that reflected the real aspirations of youth and workers.
In many cities, the polarization between the PT and the PSDB led to pressure on voters to opt for so-called “lesser evil”, which took votes from PSOL. Even so, the party got some impressive results and there is now the prospect for greater growth. Where there is a second round, PSOL has no reason to support any candidate, including those from the PT. It should organise a ‘third round”; one of struggle and resistance against any government that will be elected at state and local level.

**Debate and internal struggle in PSOL**
The potential for the growth for PSOL, however, can be under threat, depending on the programme and decisions that some of the leadership will take. In the run up to the elections there was an intense debate about electoral alliances. A fragile majority of the national leadership approved a policy of reaching out to parties involved in the coalition of Dilma’s government (including the PT itself, PCdoB, PSB, etc.) and small parties that mainly are “rent-a-party” for political machines for careerists. The only parties vetoed were those from the traditional right like the PSDB, DEM, etc.

In some of the cities where PSOL won the best result, like Rio de Janeiro, Niterói, Fortaleza, Florianópolis, Natal, etc., the party stood alone or as part of a Left Front with PSTU and PCB.

In Belém, the electoral alliance headed by PSOL, included the PSTU and the PCdoB (Communist Party of Brazil, which, in spite of the name, today is a party within the bourgeois establishment and totally integrated to the regime and system). The left of PSOL opposed the inclusion of PCdoB in the alliance. In addition, PSOL in Belém, ended up accepting financial contributions from private companies, thus going against the decisions of the party. The left of the party also took a firm stand against that.

In the second round, the possibility of victory exerts a strong pressure on the party to water down its political profile. A very negative fact is the linking up of PSOL in the second round with the PT, whose defeated candidate is supporting Edmilson Rodrigues from PSOL. This only serves to discredit PSOL and end up confusing workers and even harming the electoral results of the party.

However, the greatest risk is present in Macapá, state capital of the small Amazonian state of Amapá. In the second round, sections of the right approached PSOL, to try and use it in the dispute against their opponents within the local oligarchies. Unfortunately, until now, neither the local leadership nor the majority of the national leadership of the party has taken a clear stand against these kind of alliances. These are real threats. Previously, sections of the party in the 2010 elections, especially senator Randolfe Rodrigues, backed a right wing candidate on the second round in
the state.

This part of the PSOL in Amapá represents a right wing of the party and is supported by the fragile and unstable majority of the national leadership of PSOL. The biggest tendency in the leadership, called Socialist Popular Action (APS, of Castroite origin), recently went through a split with the left wing denouncing the policies implemented in Amapá. This rupture destabilised the balance of forces in the party and created a situation of great internal instability.

In the next period, PSOL will go through an intense internal debate and struggle and that will define the course of the party in the next period. The presidential elections in 2014 will be up for debate. The most right-wing sector of the party leadership is proposing that the party should not stand its own candidate and should instead support Marina Silva. She is an ex-minister in Lulas’ government who broke with PT and stood as presidential candidate for the Green Party (PV) in 2010. On that occasion, PSOLs’ presidential candidate, Plínio de Arruda Sampaio, correctly called Marina an “eco-capitalist” and denounced her position to try to conciliate with the PT and the PSDB.

A broad alliance of sections of PSOL which are against this policy of alliances with pro-capitalist parties could be victorious in the coming party congress. LSR defends this unity against a project of support for Marina and the electoralism practiced by the current majority. However, we think that, beyond that. It is necessary to build a coherent left pole in PSOL that can reclaim the original project upon which the party was founded and advance in the direction of building a big anti-capitalist and socialist mass party, that is democratic and based on the struggle of workers.

**LSR’s intervention**
The Brazilian section of CWI (the Liberty, Socialism and Revolution (LSR) current) was strengthened during the electoral process. We stood a mayoral candidate in one capital (Natal, Rio Grande do Norte) and played an important role in the campaign of several candidates for mayor and councillor in other cities. LSR members stood as council candidates in seven cities. Altogether, we stood candidates in four states, and helped candidates in several others.

Our main result was political and organisational. We have bigger, stronger and more organised branches in all cities were we stood candidates. One example is the work in Natal, which will serve as an important base for building the LSR in the whole north-eastern region of the country.

In Taboão da Serra, in the metropolitan region of São Paulo, our campaign
won the political support of one of the most important movements of struggle for urban housing in the country, the MTST (Roof-less Worker’s Movement). The MTST organises urban occupations involving thousands of families. Our candidate was the only one supported by the movement in the whole country.

In the state of Rio de Janeiro, the work did in Niterói, together with a current of PSOL called Socialist React, resulted in the election of two councillors, whose mandates, also with our participation, will be tools in the struggle of workers’ for their rights.

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Nobody Expects the Spanish Revolution

Julia S. Vidania - Socialist Appeal Edinburgh
23 October 2012

We have received the following report from a Spanish comrade living in Edinburgh, Julia S. Vidania, on her recent visit to her home city of Madrid. She gives a vivid account of the almost revolutionary tension in the city as the European austerity programme and the crisis of capitalism erodes the veneer of stability in society, exposing the deep fault-lines of the class struggle. We strongly recommend this well written account which is full of detail and insights.

Wandering the streets of Madrid has always been one of the greatest pleasures in my life. A city of such beauty with so much to offer, where the sound of a Spanish guitar is never too far away, closely followed by the smells of amazing food and the sound of a thousand lives coming from all around you. A city that never sleeps. It’s weird how far away it seems from here and how easy it is not to think beyond the downgrading banking rates and the alarming figures of unemployment. In Scotland it almost feels as if those things could never reach us in the safety of our home in the North. In Madrid it used to feel that way too.

From the minute I stepped off the plane I noticed it straight away. It was electrifying. It was on everyone’s mind: the crisis, at all levels: economic, political and social. All around me the conversations revolved around the cuts and the despairing situation of the same people who used to call themselves the middle class. It was surprising in itself to hear people talking about politics and economics and demanding solutions everywhere I went to in a country where talking politics was avoided for decades.
because it was not ‘politically correct’. No one seems now afraid of hurting anyone else’s feelings when it comes to defend the rights for which the Spaniards have fought and bled for generations. The vast majority of the population supports recent protests and strikes against the brutal package of austerity measures introduced by the right-wing PP government of Mariano Rajoy, and millions of people turn to the streets every month in massive demonstrations such as never remembered in living memory. From all around the country tens of thousands of workers travel to Madrid to crowd the city with banners and chants demanding the resignation of the newly elected government and the election of a new and representative government, that of the people. The numbers are so large that the media, exposed to the increasing criticism from the people, do not even bother on giving figures anymore. The working class has awakened in the city that never sleeps.

The Spanish state, as expected, has responded to this awakening with extreme violence and repression. Madrid seemed to me a city under siege, reminding me a bit too much of a police state. The police creep about the city in their cars with the lights on, moving slower than slowly, watching…and being watched. The feeling you get in every street corner is unsettling, the police car creeping up the street while dozens of people, young and not so young, watch following the car with their gaze as the city holds its breath. Policemen do not seem comfortable either, never abandoning the safety of their car and appearing as intimidating as they possibly can. If you were wondering, they are also armed.

However, the three main police trade unions (CEP, UFP and SPP) expressed their rejection of the austerity measures introduced by the government, which included salary cuts for public sector workers by 5% in 2010, the freezing of their salaries in 2011, 2012 and 2013 and the cancellation of bonuses in Christmas as well as a cut to their holidays. In a press release published in the SPP’s website on the 1st of October the trade unions emphatically accused the government of using the police for their own benefit and of “extending the violence and forcing police intervention”.

In addition, the two main associations of the Spanish army (AUME and Soldiers for Democracy) also publicly rejected the actions of the government and claimed that “they were running out of patience” and supporting “every social initiative that defends the civil rights which we must not lose”. This, added to the massive increasing figures of unemployment (23% and over 53% of young people), the brutal reform to the labour law, cut downs to salaries and public spending and the increase of the VAT to 21%, make the situation in Spain volatile at best. The anger is already boiling within the very structures of the state. And the feeling one gets wandering the streets of Madrid is that the state has raised itself up from society in order to repress the wave of anger streaming across the country, meanwhile trying to protect themselves by clinging to the very
structures that are already shaking. In Madrid, the ones who are not running out of patience are running out of money and the government of Rajoy is running out of time.

Unsurprisingly, the Spanish media is publicly displaying their lack of criticism and understanding, and even of information, which should be the main priority of the so-called information media. This is also very unsurprising given the fact that hundreds of journalists and other media workers have been replaced by the government for more suitable ones. In Valencia, a group of about a hundred workers from public TV stormed in the live broadcasting of the daily news to protest against the labour reform that has sacked 75% of the workers affecting to over 1,295 people. For up to 7 minutes, people around Valencia enjoyed a live taking over by the workers, joining to the demands of the rest of the population. The police did of course “enforce the order”, and the public ended up enjoying a documentary about marine environments instead, in another pathetic attempt at censorship that characterises our shaking government and that reminds so much of old censorships in the not-so-old fascism.

Unfortunately for the comrades reading, I did not have the pleasure of marching with the hundreds of thousands who took the streets of Madrid on September 15, when the main Spanish trade unions CCOO and UGT, along with other sector unions, called for a demonstration against the ironically called Popular Party. I would have probably been amongst the black wave of angry civil servants, out of the six colours that crowded the city each representing a body of the public sector (education green, healthcare white, public services black, trade union rights red, social services orange and abortion rights violet). Interestingly, workers dress in their colours on Fridays, reminding the city that the struggle goes on. And in response to the massive display of the police force I might have imitated many and might have carried my ID on the mouth.

I had the chance, though, to march myself in October 13, along with other thousands of people in a demonstration called by the movement M15. The protest, which was supposed to start at Neptuno Square in the city centre and finish in Sol Square, was intentionally moved to the tricky entrails of the city far away from Sol Square and many protesters received misguided information. Fortunately, the weather in Madrid was as nice as usual at this time of the year, and hundreds waited for the protest on the way to Sol by meanwhile starting another protest. I wandered the streets of Madrid once again under a banner for economic sovereignty and joined my voice to that of the thousands of workers, students, young and old who just like me have spare bills at the end of their salary, and spent the rest of the evening enjoying the carnivalesque sound of a good Spanish protest.

A week before that, another protest had been called by the union CCOO. I
hear that there is a similar demonstration called most every week and in the end of the day people need a rest, even when the city doesn’t. I ended up having an interesting conversation about how the M15 movement does not support trade unions. This is an old argument that some are trying to polish, about the legitimacy of the leadership of the trade unions and therefore the rejection of the whole trade unionising. • • But from what I can gather, there is an enormous bottom up pressure within the unions demanding actions, which already forced the trade unions to call for a general strike in March 29, and which has this time forced to join the general strikes already announced by Greece and Portugal on November the 14th. Furthermore, there are already talks amongst the union delegates to organise an indefinite general strike. The city is busy.

The government is afraid and the upper class is distressed. Politically, they have lost legitimacy before the eyes of the workers. Hundreds of thousands shout for the government’s resignation and a call for new elections, a reform in the justice system and the cancellation of the Spanish debt. The main opposition however, the so-called socialist PSOE, does not pose a huge threat to the governing PP. After nearly 8 years of PSOE’s government, which started with progressive reforms such as the legalisation of gay marriage and abortion, the effects of the housing bubble burst shook the country to the ground. The economic situation of the country was such that the government was forced to resign prematurely and new elections were called. The PSOE has not recovered from the blow it suffered in the elections, and the main left wing opposition in Spain, United Left, has been the beneficiary of such an electoral force. The party is strong in many parts of Spain, and already formed a coalition government in Andalucía. Meanwhile the bourgeoisie in other parts of Spain are toying with their national aspirations, and the political climate in Spain is making Prime Minister Rajoy’s nights very long. Instability is bad for business, and the economic panorama is not looking good. • • Of course it is all about maintaining private property, and so Rajoy has no choice but to play the game of capital. His government has to enforce the economic conditions of the capitalists in order survive and the sham of the democracy that used to protect them from the people has vanished. This is perhaps why the PSOE has been supporting reforms and being quite otherwise. You do not want to be responsible of the present situation in our lovely country. Socially, the tension is breath-taking. The scattered left is trying to hold on together through the unions and social campaigns. The situation is so extreme that Red Cross has launched a campaign to help the thousands of Spaniards living in poverty.

There is a need for a consistent, firm and revolutionary programme, able to unite the masses of workers against the capitalist system. The ground in which to grow the seeds of revolution must be social, the means political
and the results economic. As Marxists, we understand the need of strong links to the working class and the work the comrades back in Spain are doing is excellent. It is important to maintain a solid position against the ever tempting reformists on the left. We must penetrate the unions and the workplaces, proud Marxist workers and students able to handle the “whys?” and “hows?” of socialism. In Spain, things are moving fast and the radicalisation of the people is going apace. The fragile government will eventually have to confront a full wave of Mediterranean temper as will their counterparts in Portugal and Greece. People are turning to and radicalising the left and we must be prepared for what has yet to come. The inherent crisis of capitalism is never too far away from our doorstep. It is militant times ahead for us workers of the world.

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The Challenge to Asia’s Social Movements

Walden Bello (Speech at meeting of international social movements, Hotel Trang, Bangkok, August 31, 2012.)

This July was the hottest July in the United States ever since they started keeping records. In India, the monsoon rains are long delayed, resulting in the country’s second drought in four years. Triple digit temperatures in New Delhi and other cities have already provoked the worst power outages in the country’s history and the expected bad harvest is likely to slice at least five per cent from GDP growth. In Beijing, which usually suffers from a shortage of water, a storm on July 21 resulted in the worst flooding since records began to be kept in 1951, according to the Economist.

Meantime, in the Philippines, a protracted “rainstorm with no name”—as many people termed it-- that persisted for over a week plunged Metropolitan Manila into a watery disaster that is probably the worst in recent history.

The New Normal
It’s climate change, and the head of the Philippine government’s environment department captured the nature of nature’s wrath when he said that the “new normal” in our climate is unpredictable weather owing to the uncontrolled rise in the globe’s mean temperature due to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. If there is any doubt that the abnormal is now the norm, remember that this is shaping up to be the second straight year that non-stop rains have wreaked havoc in Southeast Asia. Last year, the
The monsoon season brought about the worst flooding in Thailand’s history, with waters rushing down from the north of the country engulfing even Bangkok, affecting over 14 million people, damaging nearly 7000 square miles of agricultural land, disrupting global supply chains of transnationals with subsidiaries in the country, and bringing about what the World Bank estimated to be the world’s fourth costliest disaster ever.

Perhaps the most frustrating thing about the unceasing rainstorms two weeks ago is that we Filipinos could do little to prevent them. We could have made them less calamitous by resettling informal settlers away from the floodways to Manila Bay and reforesting the hills and mountains that border the Metropolitan area. We could have passed the Reproductive Health Bill much earlier and propagated family planning to reduce the human impact on the upland, rural, and urban environments. We could have, in short, taken measures to adapt to changing climate patterns. But to prevent the fundamental shifts in regional and global climate was something we could not do. This is the dilemma of most countries in the South: we are victims and our weapons are few and limited.

The Global Stalemate
As many of you know, there is very little progress at all in the climate negotiations, and here the blame lies first and foremost with the governments of the North. The US Congress is populated by Republican Party climate skeptics who continue to believe, against all evidence, that climate change is a figment of the liberal imagination and have prevented the passage of what is already a weak climate bill. The European Union has committed to curbing greenhouse gas emissions, but this is to be accomplished largely through weak or unrealistic containment measures like carbon trading or technofixes like carbon sequestration and storage, not by moderating economic growth or reducing consumption, which remains the principal engine of greenhouse gas emissions. Currently, with their economies stalled and desperately needing to get restarted owing to the financial crisis, curbing greenhouse gas emissions has very low priority in the agenda of European leaders.

Unfortunately, the North-South dimension has added a deadly dynamic to this process, as the so-called emerging capitalist economies of the South, notably China, Brazil, and India, make their claims to their share of ecological space to grow even as the capitalist economies of the North continue to refuse to give up any of the vast ecological space they now occupy and exploit. China is now the world’s biggest contributor of greenhouse gases, but the basis of its refusal to entertain mandatory limits to its greenhouse gas emissions is that its accumulated emissions have, historically, been quite low, standing at some 9 per cent of the historical total.
The refusal of the North to curb high consumption and the effort by the big emerging economies to reproduce the Northern consumption model lies at the root of the deadlock in the climate change negotiations—one symbolized by the failure of the United Nations-sponsored talks in Copenhagen in 2009 and Durban in 2011 to agree on the contours of a successor agreement to the Kyoto Protocol.

What was agreed upon in Durban was that governments would submit their offers for GHG reductions by 2015, but these would be implemented only in 2020. But by then, it will already be too late, say many experts, since countries will already be locked into a high carbon development path. Scientists say that given the absence of mandatory emissions limits in the next few years, the world is on track to pass the 2 degree Celsius gain to which they would like to confine the rise in global mean temperature, and is already on a trajectory of a 4 to 5 degree temperature rise, which would be nothing short of calamitous in its consequences. Reflecting what many see as the maddeningly nonchalant attitude of Washington, Todd Stern, a US climate official, recently urged governments to give up the 2 degrees rise target and sought a “more flexible” international agreement based on voluntary targets. This can only provide the governments of countries on a high growth path an excuse to postpone making commitments, if not junk mandatory reductions altogether.

The Global Economic Crisis
Let me now turn to the global economic crisis that is unfolding alongside the environmental crisis.

2012 is year 5 of the Great Recession. In the United States and Europe, the heady years of globalization, when seemingly inexhaustible credit allowed the middle classes access to an unimaginable range of goods, are fast fading from the popular memory. With the economies of the US and Europe barely registering growth, the great engine of capitalism appears palpably to have downshifted. Indefinitely.

I will not dwell on the causes and dynamics of the economic crisis. Let me just say that it is very hard to see growth returning soon to the United States and Europe. Indeed, my sense is that by election day in the US, the unemployment rate will be back to 9 per cent or more, and the election of a Republican president dedicated to cut spending will guarantee a longer period of stagnation. As for Europe, the devastation of Germany’s export markets in Southern Europe by austerity programs promoted by the German government will make itself felt in a slowdown of growth in Germany itself.

It is perhaps only recently that we have come to realize that what we are
going is a crisis of globalization, that is, one that will spell the end of the so-called second era of globalization that began in the 1980’s.

What do I mean? In late 2008 and 2009, the recession in Europe and the US brought down growth rates in East Asia, but this was only for about a year. By 2010, East Asia and the big “newly emerging economies” known as the BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) appeared to have recovered. They were regarded as bright spots in the global economy, exhibiting resiliency and growth even as the North stagnated. Indeed, to economists like Nobel laureate Michael Spence, “With growth returning to pre-2008 levels, the breakout performance of China, India, and Brazil are important engines of expansion for today’s global economy.”[i] In a decade, the share of global GDP by the emerging economies would pass the 50 per cent mark, he predicted. Much of this growth would stem from “endogenous domestic-growth drivers in emerging economies, anchored by an expanding middle class.”[ii] Moreover, as trade among the BRICs increased, the future of emerging economies is one of reduced dependence on industrial-country demand.”[iii]

Recent trends, however, appear to show that the idea that the fate of the BRICs had become decoupled from that of the US and Europe was an illusion. 2012 seems to be the year the emerging economies will yield to the turbulent waves emanating from the sinking economies of the North. Economies are slowing down, with India’s growth 2011 falling by five per cent relative to 2010. Brazil’s growth was under three per cent—lower, as the Economist noted, than sickly Japan’s.[iv] China’s first quarter growth in this year plunged to 8.1 per cent, its slowest pace in three years. The main reason appears to be the continued great dependence of these economies on Northern markets and their inability to institutionalize domestic demand as the key engine of the economy.

Let me focus on China. Being the world’s second largest economy, China’s downshifting is particularly alarming. In 2008, in response to the crisis, China launched a $585 billion stimulus program to enable the domestic market to make up for the loss of export demand. Achieving some success at first, China, however, reverted back to export-led growth oriented towards the US and European markets. The reason for the retreat was explained by the respected Chinese technocrat Yu Yong Ding:

With China’s trade-to-GDP ratio and exports-to-GDP ratio already respectively exceeding 60 percent and 30 percent, the economy cannot continue to depend on external demand to sustain growth. Unfortunately, with a large export sector that employs scores of millions of workers, this dependence has become structural. That means reducing China's trade dependency and trade surplus is much more than a matter of adjusting macroeconomic policy.[v]
The retreat back to export-led growth, rather than merely a case of structural dependency, reflected a set of interests from the reform period that, as You put it, “have morphed into vested interests, which are fighting hard to protect what they have.”[vi] The export lobby, which brings together private entrepreneurs, state enterprise managers, foreign investors, and government technocrats, remains the strongest lobby in Beijing.

Indeed, according to Yu, only crisis beckoned in the future since China’s “growth pattern has now almost exhausted its potential.”[vii] The economy that most successfully rode the globalization wave, China “has reached a crucial juncture: without painful structural adjustments, the momentum of its economic growth could suddenly be lost. China’s rapid growth has been achieved at an extremely high cost. Only future generations will know the true price.”[viii]

To sum up, I do not see the North emerging anytime soon from stagnation in the near and medium term. Asia will soon dragged into this maelstrom, and the world is headed for a depression that could be worse than that of the 1930’s.

The Failure of Establishment Solutions
With the fatal intersection of the global ecological crisis and the global economic crisis, the establishment has run out of solutions.

With the eruption of the financial crisis in 2008, two approaches from the establishment have competed to address the crisis.

In the immediate aftermath of the crisis, the neoliberal University of Chicago Nobel laureate Robert Lucas said, “Every economist is a Keynesian in the foxhole.” By 2010, however, the neoliberals had left the foxhole. But their solution was no solution inasmuch it did not address the issue of ending unemployment and restarting growth. From the neoliberal view, a deepening of the crisis was, in fact, part of the natural order of things, whereby the “excesses” and distortions created by government intervention were wrung out of the system.

What the neoliberals managed to do was to change the narrative or the discourse, playing on the middle class’ traditional distrust of government, deficit spending, and taxes. Here they were supported by the propaganda machinery of Wall Street, which sought to move the public focus away from financial reform. Instead of unemployment and stagnation in the short and medium term, the real problem they pointed to was the debt and the deficit. Massive deficits financed by debt, they said, would ensure a future of debt slavery for future generations.
Whether in the United States or in Europe, this road offers nothing to the people but more unemployment and stagnation, and it is hard to see neoliberalism regaining its ideological legitimacy under these conditions.

Let me now turn to the Keynesians, who sought to step in the driver’s seat with the eruption of the crisis in 2009. Keynesians like Paul Krugman saw unemployment as the problem, and it was to be banished by massive deficit spending, low interest rates, and loose money policies. Criticism of Keynesianism, however, not only came from the right but also from progressive quarters, who saw its focus on growth by stimulating consumption as simply a short-term solution bereft of a transformative vision for restructuring the economy along lines of greater equity and democracy. In the view of its critics on the left, the problem of the new Keynesianism is its adherence to the framework of monopoly capitalism, which rests fundamentally on deriving profit from the exploitative extraction of surplus value from labor, is driven from crisis to crisis by inherent tendencies toward overproduction, and tended to push the environment to its limits in its search for profitability.

At both the national and the global arena, the new Keynesianism promoted a new class compromise accompanied by new methods to contain or minimize capitalism’s tendency toward crisis. Just as the old Keynesianism and the New Deal stabilized national capitalism, the historical function of the new Keynesianism is to iron out the contradictions of contemporary global capitalism and to re-legitimize it after the crisis and chaos left by neoliberalism. In the view of many progressives, the new Keynesianism old and new was, at root, about social management.

**Progressive Alternatives**

With the discrediting of neoliberalism and the limitations of Keynesianism, other quarters have seen the crisis as providing the opportunity to move from mere firefighting to proposing more fundamental economic restructuring.

Radical environmentalists have located the crisis in the much broader context of a growth-oriented, fossil-fuel addicted mode of production. To analysts like Richard Heinberg, the intersection of the financial collapse, economic stagnation, global warming, the steady depletion of fossil fuel reserves, and agriculture reaching its limits is a fatal one. It represents a far more profound crisis than a temporary setback on the road to growth. It portends not simply the end of a paradigm of global growth driven by the demand of the center economies. It means the “end of growth” as we knew it. It is, in short, the Malthusian trap, though Heinberg understandably avoids using the term.
The gyrations of the finance economy, he said, do not simply stem from the dynamics of capital accumulation but from an all-encompassing ecological disequilibrium:

Perhaps the meteoric rise of the finance economy in the past couple of decades resulted from semi-conscious strategy on the part of society’s managerial elites to leverage the last possible increments of growth from a physical, resourced based economy that was nearing its capacity. In any case, the implications of the current economic crisis cannot be captured by unemployment statistics and real estate prices. Attempts to restart growth will inevitably collide with natural limits that simply don’t respond to stimulus packages or bailouts. … Burgeoning environmental problems require rapidly increasing amounts of efforts to fix them. In addition to facing limits on the amount of debt that can be accumulated in order to keep those problems at bay, we also face limits to the amounts of energy and materials we can devote to these purposes. Until now the dynamism of growth has enabled us to stay ahead of accumulating environmental costs. As growth ends, the environmental bills for the last two centuries of manic expansion may come due just as our bank account empties. [ix]

The next few decades, Heinberg asserts, will be marked by a transition from expansion to contraction, a process “characterized by an overall contraction of society until we are living within Earth’s replenishable budget of renewable resources, while continually recycling most of the minerals and metals we continue to use.” [x] The future points in the direction of decentralized eco-communities marked by more manageable participatory decisionmaking, powered by low-energy systems, reliant on cooperatives for production and other economic functions, dependent on organic farming for food, and using non-debt-based currencies for exchange.

Alternatives from the South
It is not only radical environmentalists in the North that have taken up the challenge of promoting a vision of radical economic restructuring. One of the best known is Via Campesina’s paradigm of Food Sovereignty, which offers a comprehensive program of social and economic transformation.

Allow me to dwell at some length on Food Sovereignty, since it is one of the more daring efforts to provide a comprehensive alternative to neoliberalism. As I understand it, the key pillars of food sovereignty are the following:

First, the goal of agricultural policy should be food self sufficiency, wherein the country’s farmers produce most of the food consumed domestically—a condition not covered by the concept of “food security,”
Second, a people should have the right to determine their patterns of food production and consumption, taking into consideration “rural and productive diversity,” and not allow these to be subordinated to unregulated international trade.[xii]

Third, production and consumption of food should be guided by the welfare of farmers and consumers, not the needs of profit of transnational agribusiness.

Fourth, national food systems must produce “healthy, good quality and culturally appropriate food primarily for the domestic market,”[xiii] and avoid what Bove has called *malbouffe* or internationally standardized or “junk food.”[xiv]

Fifth, a new balance must be achieved between agriculture and industry, the countryside and the city, to reverse the subordination of agriculture and the countryside to industry and urban elites, which has resulted in a blighted countryside and massive urban slums of rural refugees.

Sixth, the concentration of land by landlords and transnational firms must be reversed and equity in land distribution must be promoted through land reform, though access to land should be possible beyond individual ownership, allowing more communal and collective forms of ownership and production that promote a sense of ecological stewardship.

Seventh, agricultural production should be carried out mainly by small farmers or cooperative or state enterprises, and the distribution and consumption of food should be governed by fair pricing schemes that take into consideration the rights and welfare of both farmers and consumers. Among other things, this means an end to dumping by transnational firms of subsidized agricultural commodities, which has artificially brought down prices, resulting in the destruction of small farmers. It would also mean, according to activist scholar Peter Rosset, “a return to protection of the national food production of nations…rebuiding national grain reserves…public sector budgets, floor prices, credit and other forms of support” that “stimulate the recovery of [countries’] food production capacity.”[xv]
Eighth, industrial agriculture based on genetic engineering and the original chemical-intensive Green Revolution should be discouraged because monopoly control over seeds advances the corporate agenda and because industrial agriculture is environmentally unsustainable.

Ninth, traditional peasant and indigenous agricultural technologies contain a great deal of wisdom and represent the evolution of a largely benign balance between the human community and the biosphere. Thus evolving agro-technology to meet social needs must have traditional practices as a starting point rather than considering them obsolete practices to be overthrown.

As Philip McMichael puts it, “food sovereignty in theory and practice represents a political, ecological, and cultural alternative to a ‘high modernist’ corporate agriculture premised on standardized inputs and outputs and serving a minority of the world’s population…[T]he principle of food sovereignty embodies neither a return to traditional agriculture, nor a return to a bucolic peasant culture—rather, it is a thoroughly modern response to the current neoliberal conjuncture, which has no sustainable solutions to its thoroughly modern problems.”[xvi]

I have highlighted Via Campesina’s Food Sovereignty paradigm, but all of us are parts of movements that are in search of alternatives to a global capitalism that has reached a dead end, either in its neoliberal guise or its Keynesian form. Let me just say that while our efforts may be different when it comes to detail, most of them share the same fundamental principles. Shared principles of alternative economics do exist, and they have already substantially emerged in the struggle against and critical reflection over the failure of centralized socialism and neoliberal capitalism. What are the principles that our efforts share?

First of all, they aim at enhancing ecological equilibrium, democracy, and equality while promoting the principle of subsidiarity or locating the locus of production and decisionmaking at the lowest level where it can be done with minimal economic cost.

Second, they seek to move beyond the economics of narrow efficiency, in which the key criterion is the reduction of unit cost, never mind the social and ecological destabilization this process brings about. Rather, they promote an “effective economics,” which strengthens social solidarity by subordinating the operations of the market to the values of equity, justice, and community by enlarging the sphere of democratic decision making. To use the language of the Karl Polanyi in his book The Great Transformation, our paradigms are about "re-embedding" the economy in society, instead of having society driven by the economy.[xvii]
Finally, our approaches maintain that a "one size fits all" model like neoliberalism or centralized bureaucratic socialism is dysfunctional and destabilizing. Instead, diversity should be expected and encouraged, as it is in nature.

**Conclusion**

Let me just conclude by saying that we stand today at that fatal intersection of the ecological crisis and the economic crisis, two crises that are global in nature. The two great ideologies of the establishment, neoliberalism and Keynesianism, are engaged in a titanic struggle with each other, but both fail to address the fundamentals of this dual crisis which lie in the inherent dynamics of capitalism, which is dependent on constant expansion and consumption. At the same time, global negotiations to address the climate crisis are stalled, showing up the flaws of the North-dominated multilateral system. At this conjuncture, international civil society, of which we are a part, is being challenged to step into the vacuum. We must step up to the plate, end the stalemate among the states, and come up with the alternatives to pull the planet from the debacle to which global capital has plunged it.

I thank you.

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

**REFERENCE**


[ii] Ibid., p. 188.


[vi] Ibid.

[vii] Ibid.

[viii] Ibid.


[x] Ibid., p. 284.


The Alliance from Hell

How the U.S. and Pakistan Became the Dysfunctional Nuclear Family of International Relations
Dilip Hiro 19 October 2012

The United States and Pakistan are by now a classic example of a dysfunctional nuclear family (with an emphasis on “nuclear”). While the two governments and their peoples become more suspicious and resentful of each other with every passing month, Washington and Islamabad are still locked in an awkward post-9/11 embrace that, at this juncture, neither can afford to let go of.

Washington is keeping Pakistan, with its collapsing economy and bloated military, afloat but also crippingly dependent on its handouts and U.S.-sanctioned International Monetary Fund loans. Meanwhile, CIA drones unilaterally strike its tribal borderlands. Islamabad returns the favor. It holds Washington hostage over its Afghan War from which the Pentagon won’t be able to exit in an orderly fashion without its help. By blocking U.S. and NATO supply routes into Afghanistan (after a U.S. cross-border air strike had killed 24 Pakistani soldiers) from November 2011 until last July, Islamabad managed to ratchet up the cost of the war while underscoring its indispensability to the Obama administration.

At the heart of this acerbic relationship, however, is Pakistan’s arsenal of 110 nuclear bombs which, if the country were to disintegrate, could fall into the hands of Islamist militants, possibly from inside its own security establishment. As Barack Obama confided to his aides, this remains his worst foreign-policy nightmare, despite the decision of the U.S. Army to train a commando unit to retrieve Pakistan’s nukes, should extremists seize some of them or materials to produce a “dirty bomb” themselves.
Two Publics, Differing Opinions

Pakistan’s military high command fears the Pentagon’s contingency plans to seize its nukes. Following the clandestine strike by U.S. SEALs that killed Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad in May 2011, it loaded elements of its nuclear arsenal onto trucks, which rumbled around the country to frustrate any possible American attempt to grab its most prized possessions. When Senator John Kerry arrived in Islamabad to calm frayed nerves following Bin Laden’s assassination, high Pakistani officials insisted on a written U.S. promise not to raid their nuclear arsenal. He snubbed the demand.

Since then mutual distrust between the two nominal allies -- a relationship encapsulated by some in the term “AmPak” -- has only intensified. Last month, for instance, Pakistan became the sole Muslim country to officially call on the Obama administration to ban the anti-Islamic 14-minute video clip Innocence of Muslims, which depicts the Prophet Muhammad as a womanizer, religious fraud, and pedophile.

While offering a bounty of $100,000 for the killing of Nakoula Basseley Nakoula, an Egyptian-American Christian producer of the movie, Pakistan’s Railways Minister Ghulam Ahmad Bilour called on al-Qaeda and the Pakistani Taliban to be “partners in this noble deed.” Prime Minister Raja Ashraf distanced his government from Bilour’s incitement to murder, a criminal offense under Pakistani law, but did not dismiss him from the cabinet. The U.S. State Department strongly condemned Bilour’s move.

Pakistan also stood out as the only Muslim state whose government declared a public holiday, “Love the Prophet Muhammad Day,” to encourage its people to demonstrate against the offending movie. The U.S. Embassy’s strategy of disarming criticism with TV and newspaper ads showing President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton condemning “the content and the message” of the film failed to discourage protesters. In fact, the demonstrations in major Pakistani cities turned so violent that 23 protesters were killed, the highest figure worldwide.

Taking advantage of the government’s stance, proscribed jihadist organizations made a defiant show of their continued existence. In Lahore, the capital of Punjab, the country’s largest province, activists from the banned Lashkar-e Taiba (Army of the Pure), whose leader Hafiz Saeed is the target of a $10 million bounty by Washington, led protesters toward the American consulate where perimeter defenses had been breached earlier in the week. In Islamabad, activists from the Sipah-e-Sahaba (Soldiers of the Prophet’s Companions), an outlawed Sunni faction, clashed with the police for hours in the course of a march to the heavily guarded diplomatic enclave.
These outlawed organizations continue to operate with impunity in an environment that has grown rabidly anti-American. A June 2012 survey by the Washington-based Pew Research Center (PRC) found that 74% of Pakistanis consider the United States an enemy. By contrast, only 12% believe that U.S. aid helps solve problems in their country in a situation in which 89% describe their nation’s economic situation as “bad.”

The American public’s view of Pakistan is equally bleak. February polls by Gallup and Fox News indicated that 81% of Americans had an unfavorable view of that country; just 15% held a contrary view, the lowest figure of the post-9/11 period (with only the remaining “axis of evil” states of Iran and North Korea faring worse).

**Clashing Views on the War on Terror**

Most Americans consider Pakistan an especially unreliable ally in Washington’s war on terror. That it provided safe haven to bin Laden for 10 years before his violent death in 2011 reinforced this perception. Bin Laden’s successor, Ayman Zawahiri, is widely believed to be hiding in Pakistan. So, too, are Mullah Muhammad Omar and other leaders of the Afghan Taliban.

It beggars belief that this array of Washington’s enemies can continue to function inside the country without the knowledge of its powerful Inter-Services Intelligence directorate (ISI) which reputedly has nearly 100,000 employees and informers. Even if serving ISI officers are not in cahoots with the Afghan Taliban, many retired ISI officers clearly are.

The rationale for this, top Pakistani officials say privately, is that the Afghan Taliban and the allied Haqqani Network are not attacking targets in Pakistan and so pose no threat to the state. In practice, these political-military entities are being sustained by Islamabad as future surrogates in a post-American Afghanistan. Their task is to ensure a pro-Islamabad government in Kabul, immune to offers of large-scale economic aid from India, the regional superpower. In short, it all boils down to Washington and Islamabad pursuing clashing aims in war-ravaged Afghanistan and in Pakistan as well.

The Pakistani government’s multifaceted stance toward Washington has wide public support. Popular hostility toward the U.S. stems from several interrelated factors. Above all, most Pakistanis view the war on terror from a radically different perspective than Americans. Since its primary targets have been the predominantly Muslim countries of Afghanistan and Iraq, they equate it with an American crusade against Islam.

While U.S. pundits and politicians invariably cite the $24 billion in
assistance and military aid Washington has given Islamabad in the
post-9/11 period, Pakistanis stress the heavy price they have paid for
participating in the Washington-led war. “No country and no people have
suffered more in the epic struggle against terrorism than Pakistan,” said
President Asif Ali Zardari at the United Nations General Assembly last
month.

His government argues that, as a result of joining the war on terror,
Pakistan has suffered a loss of $68 billion over the past decade. A widely
disseminated statistic at home, it includes estimated losses due to a decline
in foreign investments and adverse effects on trade, tourism, and
businesses. Islamabad attributes all this to the insecurity caused by the
terrorist acts of local jihadists in response to its participation in
Washington’s war. Then there are the roughly 4,000 Pakistani military
fatalities suffered during post-9/11 operations against terror groups and
other homegrown militants -- significantly higher than all allied troops
killed in Afghanistan. Some 35,000 civilians have also died or suffered
injuries in the process.

Drones Fuel Popular Rage
During a September address to the Asia Society in New York, Foreign
Minister Hina Rabbani Khar was asked for an explanation of the rampant
anti-American sentiment in her country. She replied with a single word:
“drones.” At any given time, CIA drones, buzzing like wasps and armed
with Hellfire missiles, circle round the clock over an area in Pakistan’s
tribal zone, their high-resolution cameras recording movements below.
This fills people on the ground with unending terror, being unable to guess
when and where the missiles will be fired.

A June Pew Research Center survey shows that 97% of Pakistanis familiar
with the drone attacks held a negative view of them. “Those who are
familiar with the drone campaign also overwhelmingly (94%) believe the
attacks kill too many innocent people,” states its report. “Nearly
three-quarters (74%) say they are not necessary to defend Pakistan from
extremist organizations.” (In stark contrast, a February Washington
Post-ABC News poll found that 83% of Americans -- and 73% of liberal
Democrats -- support Obama’s drone onslaught.)

A recent anti-drone “march” by a nine-mile long motorcade from
Islamabad to the border of the South Waziristan tribal agency was led by
Imran Khan, head of the Movement for Justice political party. Joined by
protesters from the U.S. and Britain, it was a dramatic reminder of the
depth of popular feeling against the drones. By refraining from forcibly
entering South Waziristan in defiance of an official ban, Khan stayed
within the law. And by so doing, he enhanced his already impressive 70%
approval rating and improved the chances of his party -- committed to
ending Islamabad’s participation in Washington’s war on terror -- to achieve a breakthrough in the upcoming parliamentary election.

Unlike in Yemen, where the government has authorized the Obama administration to stage drone attacks, Pakistani leaders, who implicitly accepted such strikes before the Pentagon’s gross violation of their country’s sovereignty in the bin Laden killing, no longer do so. “The use of unilateral strikes on Pakistan territory is illegal,” said Foreign Minister Khar. Her government, she explained, needed to rally popular backing for its campaign to quash armed militant groups, and the drones make that impossible. “As the drones fly over the territory of Pakistan, it becomes an American war and the whole logic of this being our fight, in our own interest, is immediately put aside and again it is a war imposed on us.”

Underlying the deployment of a drone, helicopter, or jet fighter to hit a target in a foreign country is an updated version of the Vietnam-era doctrine of “hot pursuit,” which ignores the basic concept of national sovereignty. Pakistani leaders fear that if they do not protest Washington’s continued use of drones for “targeted killings” of Pakistan-based individuals selected in the White House, their arch-rival India will follow suit. It will hit the camps in Pakistan allegedly training terrorists to destabilize Indian Kashmir. That is one of the ongoing nightmares of Pakistan’s senior generals.

The Nuclear Conundrum
Since India would be the prime target of any nuclear-armed extremists, the Indian government dreads the prospect of Pakistan’s nukes falling into such hands far more than President Obama. The alarm of both Delhi and Washington is well justified, particularly because Pakistan’s arsenal is growing faster than any on Earth -- and the latest versions of nukes it’s producing are smaller and so easier to hijack.

Over the past five years, Pakistani extremists have staged a series of attacks on sensitive military installations, including nuclear facilities. In November 2007, for example, they attacked Sargodha airbase where nuclear-capable F-16 jet aircraft are stationed. The following month a suicide bomber targeted a Pakistani Air Force base believed to hold nuclear weapons at Kamra, 37 miles northwest of Islamabad. In August 2008, a group of suicide bombers blew up the gates to a weapons complex at the Wah cantonment containing a nuclear warhead assembly plant, leaving 63 people dead. A further assault on Kamra took place in October 2009 and yet another last August, this time by eight suicide bombers belonging to the Pakistani Taliban.

Given Pakistan’s dependence on a continuing supply of U.S.-made advanced weaponry -- essential to withstand any onslaught by India in a
conventional war -- its government has had to continually reassure Washington that the security of its nuclear arsenal is foolproof. Its leaders have repeatedly assured their American counterparts that the hemispheres containing nuclear fuel and the triggers for activating the weapons are stored separately under tight guard. This has failed to allay the anxieties of successive American presidents. What disconcerts the U.S. is that, despite contributing hundreds of millions of dollars to underwrite programs to help Pakistan secure its nuclear arms, it does not know where many of these parts are stored.

This is not going to change. The military planners in Islamabad correctly surmise that Delhi and Washington would like to turn Pakistan into a non-nuclear power. At present, they see their nuclear arsenal as the only effective deterrent they have against an Indian aggression which, in their view, they experienced in 1965. “We developed all these nukes to use against India,” said an unnamed senior Pakistani military officer recently quoted in the London-based Sunday Times Magazine. “Now they turn out to be very useful in dealing with the U.S.”

In short, Pakistan’s military high command has come to view its nuclear arsenal as an effective deterrent not only against its traditional adversary, India, but also its nominal ally in Washington. If such thinking solidifies as the country’s military doctrine in the years following the Pentagon’s withdrawal from Afghanistan, then Pakistan may finally find itself removed from Washington’s list of non-NATO allies, ending the dysfunctional nuclear family of international politics. What that would mean in global terms is anyone’s guess.

Dilip Hiro, a TomDispatch regular, is the author of 33 books, the most recent being Apocalyptic Realm: Jihadists in South Asia (Yale University Press, New Haven and London). To listen to Timothy MacBain’s latest Tomcast audio interview in which Hiro discusses the embattled Pakistan-U.S. relationship, click here or download it to your iPod here.

This article first appeared on TomDispatch.com, a weblog of the Nation Institute, which offers a steady flow of alternate sources, news, and opinion from Tom Engelhardt, long time editor in publishing, co-founder of the American Empire Project, author of The End of Victory Culture, as of a novel, The Last Days of Publishing. His latest book is The American Way of War: How Bush's Wars Became Obama's (Haymarket Books).
The class struggle in South Africa is far sharper than in many countries. Socialist consciousness is far higher among the powerful, industrial working class.

On 16 August the premeditated slaughter of 34 striking Lonmin miners in Marikana by the South African police shocked the world. It revealed that, despite the ending of apartheid and the historic election of the African National Congress (ANC) government in 1994, a ruthless and brutal regime of capitalism still exists in South Africa.

The Marikana massacre has shaken the foundations of the whole of South African society. It has had an irreversible impact on the ANC ruling government party. A big question mark has also been placed over the role played by the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) and its largest affiliate the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM).

Among the working class in South Africa social discontent is growing. So are a rejection of the corrupt political and trade union leaders and demands for fundamental change. These are highlighted - not just by the unofficial miners’ strike - but by strikes of hundreds of thousands of other workers across all sectors of industry.

The demand of the striking miners for a R12,500 (£900) a month, minimum wage is now the rallying call for low-paid workers across the country.

The Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM, affiliated, as is the Socialist Party to the Committee for a Workers’ International, the world socialist organisation) is playing a decisive role in the mineworkers’ dispute, assisting and leading the unofficial Coordinating Strike Committees and posing a socialist alternative to the corruption, greed and betrayal of the present ANC and NUM leaderships.

Like many activists, most of the Lonmin workers have little confidence in South African President Zuma’s ‘official inquiry’ into the massacre. Many of those workers have already answered the lies poured out by the lying capitalist media in South Africa and across the globe.

The massacre
At a DSM meeting in Flagstaff, in the Eastern Cape, a DSM activist and one of the leaders of the Strike Coordinating Committee along with Weizmann Hamilton, a DSM organiser from Johannesburg, explained what really happened on 16 August, from out of the mouths of the
mineworkers who were present:

“The precipitating event in the Lonmin strike was management’s unilateral decision to grant unilateral increases to selected workers. In spite of the fact that this broke an existing two-year agreement signed by the NUM, set to expire in June 2013.

“The NUM’s failure to react meant it was once again colluding with management so workers took matters into their own hands forming an independent rank-and-file committee. On 9 August the Lonmin strike committee presented their demand for a R12,500 a month minimum wage. The NUM refused to support them, management refused to negotiate, so the miners shut the pit down.

“On Saturday morning NUM officials tried to force the miners back to work so the strike committee sent delegates to the NUM office (which is unbelievably next to the police station in the Lonmin mine ‘informal settlement’ (squatter camp). As they approached the office they were shot at, killing two members of the strike committee. With management reacting in the normal manner by sending in private security and the police to stop the strike by force resulting in the death of four more workers, two private security guards and two policemen.

“The striking mineworkers concluded that for their own safety it was best to move off the mine to a small mountain to continue their protest. The workers’ demand was simple: management should meet with them and respond to their demands. What happened next was premeditated murder and could have only happened with clearance at the highest level of government, police and the employers. It was a decision to crush the strike and drown it in the blood of the strikers.

“The police fenced off the mountain leaving just a five-metre gap in the barbed wire. 3,000 armed police, with helicopter back-up went on the attack from the air and on all sides. Starting from the back of the crowd, they shot and forced the strikers to run towards the five-metre gap. As they tried to get out they were shot down by the waiting police so they turned around and ran back hiding under trees and rocks.

“That’s where the majority of strikers were killed, with nowhere to run. Some were killed after raising their hands in the air while others were lying injured and then finished off. There were only survivors among the injured because police thought they were dead and threw their bodies on a heap. 34 strikers were killed, 79 injured and 234 arrested.”

To add insult to injury, the National Prosecuting Authority, revealing the cold callousness of the state, initially attempted to press murder charges
against the arrested miners for the death of their own comrades, under the
notorious Doctrine of Common Purpose used by the apartheid regime. 
Marikana is the brutal reality of capitalism in South Africa!

The ANC government presided over this massacre. A corrupt, degenerate
government of big business is now finished in the eyes of big numbers of 
the working class. As well as returning the country back to the dark days 
of apartheid repression the disgusting flaunting of wealth and privileges 
by ANC leaders is exposed in the media every day.

**Political ‘fat cats’**
The state-financed, R200-million upgrade of President Zuma’s massive 
private residential complex in his home village is dominating the national 
press. It reportedly has underground bunkers, a helipad, luxury furnishings 
and two soccer pitches for his security guards to have a kick about!

With the five-yearly ANC national conference due to take place in 
December, Zuma is attempting to stand for a second five-year term as 
president of the ANC which automatically means remaining as state 
president as well.

His main rival Kgalema Motlanthe, the deputy president of the ANC has 
no real ideological differences with Zuma - but like all the warring 
factions their main objectives are power and all the wealth and perks that 
go with it. Whatever faction gains power and whoever becomes president 
in December it will just mean a new corrupt management running a rotten 
ANC house of privilege and the South African working class will be 
picking up the tab!

It’s likely that expelled ANC Youth League leader Julius Malema’s 
political career is coming to a close following charges of money 
laundering. Malema opportunistically tried to gain favour among striking 
miners by supporting their strike and calling for the nationalisation of the 
morning industry.

The demand for nationalisation understandably got an echo from a layer 
of the working class in South Africa but the feeling among striking 
activists is that Malema is intervening for his own narrow political 
interests. With houses and mansions worth millions, sports cars and 
designer clothes, Malema has moved a long way from his younger days as 
an ANC militant.

Any serious attempt to portray Malema as a champion of working class 
interests would be treated with laughter by those activists in South Africa 
attempting to build a genuine socialist alternative. The term ‘fat cats’ 
could have been invented for the aspiring black bourgeois class of the
ANC who arrogantly flaunt their wealth and size, much to the hatred of the struggling working class.

Corruption is endemic at the top of South African society, from the ‘fat cat’ politicians and big corporation bosses to the media companies and trade union officials at all levels.

**NUM betrayal**
Is it any surprise then that the strike-breaking NUM is losing thousands of members when they collaborate with management and attack their own members? And thanks to his latest increase, NUM general secretary, Baleni, now earns R105,000 a month salary but yelled for the Lonmin bosses, the police and army to put an end to the strike where workers were demanding just R12,500 per month!

The NUM is now blaming the spread of the unofficial strikes on the Lonmin bosses because they gave in to the strikers’ demands! You really do have to pinch yourself sometimes when you consider the treacherous role of these trade union leaders.

Compare the capitulation of these cowardly leaders to the determination of the unofficial strike leaders who when told by the management of one shaft that their national agreement with the NUM didn’t run out till June 2013 so they wouldn’t negotiate were told – ‘ok then, we will stay out and see you next June’!

Even Cosatu has had to recognise the damage their biggest affiliate is doing to their reputation, so after weeks of saying and doing nothing to support the miners they have now slapped the wrists of the NUM leaders and are attempting to claw back some credibility as a trade union federation.

Nevertheless, in the eyes of the most militant and conscious workers, Cosatu has been exposed as ineffective at best and a collaborator of the bosses at worse. Recognising the weak and vacillating role of Cosatu, the unofficial coordinating strike committees look set to continue and expand their influence across all unions after this present dispute ends.

**Horrendous conditions**
The miners’ strike is not just about wages. It is also a protest about the horrendous conditions that the working class in South Africa are facing under capitalism. The ‘informal settlement’ or squatter camps, or ‘shack lands’ or whatever term you want to give them are a disgrace to a civilised society in the 21st century.

These ‘informal settlements’ exist in their thousands across South Africa,
not just alongside mine shafts but in the urban areas of Johannesburg, Durban, Cape Town and other cities. Tin sheds, where in Britain we wouldn’t put animals or gardening tools, let alone human beings! In many of the settlements there is no electricity, no running water, no sanitation, no roads just dirt tracks – nothing, no life, no existence - just misery.

Social conditions such as these provide the breeding ground for alcoholism, drug addiction, violence, prostitution, but also for revolution, especially among the young! That’s why DSM has branches in the mining squatter camps of Rustenburg, including Marikana, where several more young miners and sacked miners have now joined DSM.

The DSM has also recruited incredibly courageous female community activists in the township of Freedom Park, in Johannesburg. There the ‘Golf Club’ gang has just been arrested after a violent campaign of attacks in the community which left young women, not robbed, not beaten up, just brutally raped. The youngest gang member was 14.

DSM’s female members will also be to the forefront in fighting the horrific homophobic phenomenon sweeping South Africa, disgustingly known as ‘corrective rape’. This term, actually coined in South Africa where it has been prevalent, refers to the raping of lesbians to ‘cure’ them of their ‘disease’.

South Africa remains one of the most violent countries in the world. For the working class and poor ‘life is cheap’. In stark contrast, for example, in the predominantly white Johannesburg suburb of Sandton, tourists take photos of the large Nelson Mandela statue in the plush, European-style shopping complex. This is a social bubble, far removed from the real South Africa. Such a divide between rich and poor is a recipe for a massive social explosion - which is being glimpsed at the moment with strikes and protests across the country.

Socialist alternative
The DSM puts forward the socialist alternative to this. Its effective intervention in the mineworkers’ strike has raised its profile enormously over the past few months. Mametlwe Sebei, a DSM member and main spokesperson for the strike coordinating committee, has received massive coverage in the national media for his leadership of the strike movement in Rustenburg and his growing authority among the mineworkers.

Sebei proudly and openly appeals to mineworkers, trade unionists and the working class in general to join the DSM and assist the building of a socialist society. Dozens of trade unionists, youth and community campaigners have responded to Sebei’s appeal and joined the DSM, including several young workers at the national coordinating strike
committee meeting in Marikana. The demand for a new mass workers’ party is also enthusiastically greeted whenever it is raised and the DSM will be to the fore in establishing such an initiative.

The class struggle in South Africa is far sharper than in many countries across the world. Socialist consciousness and the receptiveness for a socialist alternative are far higher among this powerful, industrial working class.

The DSM is poised to take a huge step in building a socialist movement that can eradicate this brutal capitalist state and introduce a socialist society that can finally offer a future worth living for to the poor and oppressed of South Africa.

http://www.socialistworld.net/doc/6001

Obama vs. Romney: Choice? What Choice?

Socialist Appeal (United States) 17 October 2012

It is hard to believe that nearly four years have already passed since the election of Barack Obama. The streets were filled with honking cars, waving flags, and shouts of excitement. Tears of unbridled joy and relief streamed down the faces of many. After eight long years of Bush, change had come at last! Or had it? As the months—and the crisis—wore on, it became increasingly clear that in all essentials, Obama’s presidency was more like Bush 2.0 than a new dawn of peace and prosperity.

By the time our next issue goes to press, millions of Americans will have cast their votes to determine whether he will remain another term, or be replaced by Mitt Romney. Millions of others will have simply stayed home; alienated, disenfranchised, and disgusted by the big money farce that is American democracy at the beginning of the 21st century.

The “school of the Democrats” has been a harsh one. Things are materially worse now than they were under G.W. Bush. The old adage that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer is not empty propaganda,
but a cold, hard fact. U.S. median households are now 4.8% poorer than at
the start of the “recovery” in 2009. According to the Financial Times:
“Median incomes have now fallen to the pre-internet level of 1993. All of
the gains of the Clinton years have been lost. The decline in the past three
years follows a 3.2 per cent drop during the recession, which itself
followed a shrinkage during the 2000–2007 cycle.”

That is to say, not only have things not improved for the majority during
the “boom,” but they have actually slid backward. This is truly as “good
as it gets!” And things are even worse for those at the bottom end of the
income scale.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the 1.2 million households that
make up the top 1% saw their earnings increase 5.5% last year, while
earnings fell 1.7% for the 96 million households that make up the bottom
80%. Emmanuel Saez, a University of California at Berkeley economist
who studied Internal Revenue Service data, has reported that in 2010, the
1% received as much as 93 percent of total income growth. Consumer
spending, which accounts for some two-thirds of economic activity,
jumped to its highest level in four years in August. Nonetheless, it still
lags behind 2008 levels by more than 20 percent, and most of the
spending came from higher-income households.

After Obama was elected in 2008, people were asked what his victory
meant. “Jobs, baby!” was the enthusiastic reply of one person interviewed.
And yet, official unemployment has remained double what it was during
the Bush years for the entirety of Obama’s first term.

It has been a long, downward spiral for the majority of Americans. From
1979 to 2007, some $1.1 trillion in annual income shifted to the top
1%—more than the entire earnings of the bottom 40%. Little wonder the
economy is the top issue on Americans’ minds, even after 3 years of a
so-called recovery!

This is the stark reality in the world’s richest country. It is a case of
democracy and prosperity for the rich, while the rest of us struggle to
make ends meet and are offered no real political alternative.

“Heads I win, tails you lose,” fairly sums up the 2012 presidential
elections. No matter who sits in the Oval Office in January 2013, the real
winners and losers can be predicted in advance: Wall Street will win and
the working class will lose.

To some, this may seem overly cynical. “Surely there is a difference
between Obama and Romney! Better the ‘lesser evil’ than the ‘greater’
one!” But when Marxists explain that there is no fundamental difference
between the Democrats and Republicans we simply mean this: despite this or that cosmetic or stylistic difference, both of these parties are defenders of the capitalist system.

Capitalism is a system based on private ownership of the means of production. Through their ownership of the key levers of the economy, the capitalists exploit the labor of the workers. As they own nothing of real value other than their ability to work—they cannot live off of stocks, bonds, savings, rental properties, inheritances, etc.—the workers must sell their labor power to the capitalists for a wage. While at work, the workers create more value for the capitalists than they receive back in wages—this is where profits come from. Workers agree to this arrangement, not out of big-hearted generosity, but because if they do not, they will be unable to feed, house, and clothe themselves and their families. This is the reality of capitalist exploitation.

To be sure, under slavery, there were “good” slave owners who did not beat and rape their slaves, who merely exploited their labor. Compared to the sadistic slaveowners, this may have appeared as a “lesser evil.” But it was slavery nonetheless! Capitalism has had over two centuries to resolve its problems. But it cannot resolve them: they are built into the system. It’s high time humanity moved on to the next stage of human social development: socialism.

As socialists, we fight for a different kind of society; one in which the working class democratically organizes politics and the economy in the interests of the majority. The Democrats and Republicans enact and enforce laws that benefit the rich. In order to enact and enforce laws that benefit workers, we need a mass political party that represents and defends workers, and which can actually win state power. This is why the Workers International League never has and never will support a capitalist party or politician. This is why we fight for a labor party based on the trade unions, a party of, by, and for the working class. And this is why we argue that such a party must break with capitalism and fight for socialism.

Unfortunately, due to the role of the current labor leadership, there is no such alternative in 2012. This means that there is no real choice for the workers this election. This means that inevitably, one or another big business party will continue to call the shots. But this will not go on forever. Things can, must, and will change. People are learning, reflecting, and thinking.

Illusions in Obama’s message of “hope and change” have been mercilessly crushed by the reality of his administration. And yet, Americans are an optimistic, pragmatic people, who always feel that “something better is just around the corner.” As one political analyst put
it, if you are sitting in a lukewarm bath, even the prospect of a single drop of hot water seems like an improvement! But there is no hot water to come. The capitalist crisis is convulsing the entire planet. Europe is at the forefront, but no country can resist being pulled into the turbulence: not even Germany, China, or the U.S.

The prospect of hearing the words, “Mitt Romney, President of the United States” justifiably terrifies millions of union members. This is why they will hold their noses on November 6 and unenthusiastically vote for Obama. And yet, a Romney presidency is a distinct possibility. This is due to the inherent nature of the Democrats and the failure of the labor leadership to offer a real alternative. If you adopt a “lesser evil” approach to politics and do not break with the two parties of big business, the “greater evil” will eventually find its way back into power—and it will be even more to the right than it was the last time around. This is a losing strategy!

As we have explained before, a Romney victory would mean all-out war on workers and their unions. The capitalists’ knives would be out and cuts and austerity would be accelerated. Many activists would be temporarily in a state of demoralization and shock. But faced with this scenario, the workers would have no alternative but to fight back. The labor leadership would eventually be forced to mobilize the membership to resist these attacks. Mass rallies, demonstrations, marches on Washington, and a growing wave of strikes and student mobilizations would be on the order of the day. It would be a difficult period, but there would be many opportunities for the Marxists to explain our ideas to the radicalized workers and youth.

And what would an Obama victory mean? Obama promises to create 1 million new manufacturing jobs, but has not explained how he intends to do it. Even if he achieves this, it would be a mere drop in the bucket compared to the jobs that have been lost. More ominously, he has promised to cut the deficit by $4 trillion, which can only mean cuts and austerity. Even if he manages to modestly raise taxes on the rich, it will not roll back the losses of the last 30 years. A grand “compromise” on austerity would inevitably be worked out with the Republicans. The already Draconian recommendations of the Bowles-Simpson commission, which would slash Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and other social services, will seem like a tea party by comparison. Let’s be clear: cuts are cuts, no matter who implements them! Not only that, but austerity will not solve the crisis, and in fact will only aggravate it.

Nonetheless, Obama would likely enjoy a renewed honeymoon while the workers wait and see what he will do. The union leaders would do everything in their power not to mobilize the full force of labor against
Obama. They would instead continue to play the game of the capitalists and rely on lobbyists, lawyers, courts, and backroom deals. Without a lead and perspective for struggle on the streets and at the workplace, and with cuts raining down from this alleged “friend of labor,” there would inevitably be confusion and dejection among many rank-and-file activists.

Our task during such a period would be to patiently explain, to win the ones and two to our program, ideas, and perspectives, and train them in Marxist theory and methods. We would have to guard against moods of impatience and frustration, which are the bane of revolutionaries. Because as night follows day, every period of relative calm, no matter how prolonged, is followed by a storm. This must be our perspective!

Romney promises to “lead America back to greatness.” Obama promises to build a “strong and thriving middle class.” Ultimately, neither candidate has a solution to the crisis of capitalism. It has a logic of its own and is far bigger than the will or personality of this or that individual. The reality of the situation has been outlined above.

It is impossible to predict the election result in advance. Romney’s consistent gaffes and general unlikeability would seem to doom him to defeat in a contest devoid of any real content. For many voters it boils down to “who do I think is lying the least?” But a week is an eternity in politics. International events and the economy are wild cards largely out of Obama’s hands, and can crash the best-laid campaign plans. A 2000-style post-election fiasco also cannot be ruled out.

The candidates are virtually neck and neck headed into final weeks. Had Obama delivered even a fraction of what he promised, he would be a virtual shoo-in to win. On the other hand, given the state of the economy and the depths of disillusionment with Obama, Romney should have sealed the deal by now. And yet, only 54% of voters are satisfied with the choices being offered, the lowest level since 1992. By comparison, in 2008, 72% of voters said they were satisfied with the choice between Obama and McCain. Even these low numbers hide the reality, as the millions not counted as “voters” are not reflected in these polls.

A close race benefits the capitalists. Strategists from both campaigns have literally said that they expect (and want) the result to be determined by a “handful of voters in a handful of states.” Some democracy! In addition to allowing them to sell more advertising as people tune in to the debates and final weeks of the campaign, it increases the likelihood of deadlock after the polls close. Deadlock leads to frustration, and frustration leads to the acceptance of “compromise.” It is easier to sell austerity to the public in the name of “bipartisanship” than it is to carry it out unilaterally.
The presently existing third-party candidates will not make a dent in the two-party system. Even Jill Stein, the presidential candidate for the Green Party, acknowledges the need for a genuine labor party: “Imagine if labor had spent the over $15 billion they spent on the Democrats over the last 40 years instead building an independent labor party and movement. Today we would have scores of labor party organizers in every state supporting a broadly based party of the working class majority.”

The labor movement does have a choice: it must choose class-independence. Instead of calling for a vote for “labor-endorsed” or “not-a-Republican” candidates (both code for “Democrat”), the enormous resources of the unions must be harnessed to build a labor party. Once such a party is created, the choice will no longer be between Austerity Party A and Austerity Party B.

With a bold program to make the rich pay for the crisis, to create millions of jobs through a massive program of useful public works, for higher wages, universal health care and education, and safe, affordable housing for all, a mass labor party could fight for power and win. Not only that, but workers would be emboldened to fight for better wages and conditions at the workplace. For the first time in decades, the workers would be on the offensive, not the defensive. The only thing preventing this from happening is the subservience to the Democrats of the current labor leadership. But this cannot last forever. The pressure is building. These leaders will either be pushed to the left or pushed out altogether.

In these turbulent times, every election marks a point of inflection in the consciousness of the workers. Changes in mood are not linear and can fluctuate wildly from day to day. But the overall trend is clear: beneath the apparently calm surface of society, the workers are becoming increasingly radicalized. The Occupy movement, the struggles in Wisconsin, of the Chicago teachers, and of Walmart warehouse workers, although still not generalized, are an indication of this. At a certain stage, the workers will move as a class to take their destinies decisively into their own hands, and the entire situation will change.

More at The Real News
Heiner Flassbeck [Director of the Division on Globalization and Development Strategies of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development]: The drive to be more "competitive" is pushing the world economy into deep recession; the best that quantitative easing can do is create another bubble
Heiner Flassbeck interviewed by Paul Jay 16 October 2012

PAUL JAY, SENIOR EDITOR, TRNN: Welcome to The Real News Network. I'm Paul Jay in Baltimore.

In the United States, the strategy for recovery seems to be: get more competitive. What does that mean? It means more lowering wages. And if you get more lower wages, you can have more of an export economy. President Obama advocates that, candidate Romney advocates that. The problem is: what if every country's lowering wages—then what?

Now joining us to talk about the effects of all of this and the increasing global recession is Heiner Flassbeck. Heiner serves as the director of the division on globalization and development strategies since 2006 for the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. He was the vice minister from October '98 to '99 at the Federal Ministry of Finance in Bonn, in Germany, and he was responsible for international affairs in the IMF. He joins us now from Geneva. Thanks very much for joining us, Heiner.

HEINER FLASSBECK, DIRECTOR, DIVISION ON GLOBALIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES, UNCTAD: Hi. Good to be here.

JAY: So you just issued your annual report for 2012, and essentially it's a report about inequality. But it's not just that inequality's not fair. The point of your report is this supposed drive to competitiveness and lower wages is actually at the root cause of the problem of the global recession. It's not just that it's not—that it's unjust. So talk about why you think this is the case.

FLASSBECK: Well, we have the situation that we have falling wage share in most of the developed economies in the last 20 years. It was, so to say, the recipe to deal with all the shocks that we had, with the oil shocks. Everybody said all the time to make your labor markets more flexible. And more flexibility clearly means, if you have high unemployment, cutting wages, and cutting wages in relation to profits and cutting wages in relation to productivity. So this was the recipe of the Washington consensus and all international institutions. And this has led to a situation that—where we are in now, where, so to say, the world economy is stuck and does not have the economic policy instruments anymore to get back
into a recovery.

Let me explain that briefly. Take the United States. In the United States, which has also very low—everybody talks about high degree of inequality in the United States. But at the same time, unemployment has jumped. But it has jumped not due to high wages before, but it has jumped due to the financial crisis. But now you have high unemployment that puts pressure on wages, because the power is in the market, in the labor market, such that wage earners have nothing to negotiate for, and so they put pressure on wages. If wages fall, incomes fall for the average American household, and if incomes fall, consumption will fall. If consumption falls, investment falls, and the economy will not get out of recovery but deeper into recession.

So this is obviously a big problem with the market economies, because every good economist would say, well, if you have unemployment, then there should be pressure on wages, but if wages have never risen before and there's nevertheless unemployment, then you're in trouble somehow. And that is why the president and others will have big, big difficulties to get out of the slump. And that is why monetary policy does so desperate things as they're doing now.

**JAY:** Well, when President Obama was dealing with the crisis back in '08, '09, and now in his campaign, the sort of jewel in his crown is what he said was the saving of the American auto industry. But to a large extent that saving was based on lower wages. And starting workers get $13, $14 an hour—I'm hearing even as low as $9 an hour in sectors of the auto industry—where they used to make $25, $26, $27 an hour. And they're trumpeting this as the model for recovery.

**FLASSBECK:** Yeah. But if—the problem is only—the small problem, to be ironic, is that if you have an economy with an export share of 10 percent, by cutting wages you can get more competitive. But you really have a situation where the tail is wagging the dog and you get more losses inside the economy then you can gain outside.

And in addition, not everybody can improve its competitiveness in this world, because competitiveness is a relative concept and not an absolute concept. So everybody can increase productivity, but not everybody can increase competitiveness.

So there's a big misunderstanding all around the place. In Europe it's exactly the same. And you have examples now in Europe where countries have cut already their wages by 20 percent but nevertheless their economy is collapsing. Take the Southern European countries. There the export share is 25 percent. But if you kill 75 percent of your economy to save the
25, it's not a good bargain.

**JAY:** And the point you're making in the report is that, as you say, competitiveness is relative. So if all your competitors are doing the exact same thing you're doing, lowering wages, then it's—you're not really gaining an advantage. But what you are doing is sucking even more demand out of the global economy.

**FLASSBECK:** That's right. And there are only very few exceptions. If you took—take my own country, Germany. Germany was successful—so people say, up to now it was successful because it cut wages. But it's only under the historic, unique circumstances of the Monetary Union, where all the other countries did not retaliate, that it was a successful policy for some time. But now, unfortunately, Germany's clients are all bankrupt. And if you have policies that make your clients bankrupt, it's not a good idea.

**JAY:** Now, the other argument that's heard here is that the real root cause is not anything to do with demand in wages; it has to do with the deficit and debt. You say that's not true.

**FLASSBECK:** Yeah. [incompr.] government debt. We have to look a bit again at the overall economy, at the macro picture. And the macro picture is that you have—in many countries now you have private households saving because they are uncertain about their future, because they have no wage increases. So they're saving for precautionary reasons. The companies sector is making still quite a bit of profit, so they're saving also, and the government tries to save also.

So, what is happening in an economy where everybody tries to save and nobody's going to spend? Well, the answer's very simple: this economy is going to collapse in a very short time or you find someone for the global economy, you find the Venus or Mars we can trade with. That's the only way out. But if that is not feasible, then we're stuck.

And that is where we are. We're stuck. Monetary policy has run out of instruments and of weapons, so to say, to fight the slump. Fiscal policy is blocked politically, and in wages, in terms of wages, and the labor market was going in the wrong direction. So there's no surprise that we cannot get out of recovery. Unfortunately—and this is a big problem that we have—most of my colleague economists still stick to the idea of a self-regulating, self-stabilizing labor market. As long as they do, we will not understand what is really going on.

**JAY:** And what's wrong with that idea?
**FLASSBECK:** Well, as I said, it's wrong—if you have a jump in unemployment at the lowest level of wages that we ever had, then the idea is definitely wrong, because the idea is based on the theory that if wages rise, unemployment rises. But if wages are low and wages are falling and unemployment rises, then this idea is wrong. And then the power of the employers in the market is going in the wrong direction, namely, in wage cuts, which destabilizes the economy, that destabilize the economy downwards. So we're getting in a downward spiral that nobody can stop anymore, even monetary policy cannot stop.

Look at the discussion that they had in Jackson Hole, the central bankers of the world. And some people have understood it. Donald Kohn, a former vice chairman of the Fed, said there must be something deeper that is going on in the market. And he's right: something deeper. The something deeper is that we have a distribution of income between labor and capital that's going in the wrong direction for 20 years, and now it's at the point of reckoning, so to say, where we have to understand this or we go into a Japanese-like stagnation for the next 20 years.

**JAY:** So the answer from Ben Bernanke and the central bankers, the American, the Canadian, particularly the Europeans, the Japanese, they're all saying, okay, then we need one form of quantitative easing or another. The banks are simply going to inject—the central banks will inject more liquidity into the banking system, and that's supposed to give rise to growth.

**FLASSBECK:** No. That's—the only thing that that would do is, if they're lucky, then they will pump up another bubble. And a bubble may help because it gives the people the illusion that they're getting rich. But this would be the same game that we have 10 years before, and I think we should not repeat it.

But even this is very improbable at this moment of time, because we are now—Europe, the United States, and Japan—being in exactly the same situation, namely, close to stagnation, are going into recession, and we see that quantitative easing hasn't been helping, not all. Up to now it has not been helping, and even the very unorthodox measures of the Fed that I welcome very much, because the Fed does what it can. But it cannot do enough. That's absolutely clear. And if the fiscal cliff comes now at the—what is called the fiscal cliff—at the beginning of January in the United States, then you're really in trouble. And I think Ben Bernanke understands quite well that he cannot compensate for the fiscal cliff.

**JAY:** The theory you hear from supporters of austerity, especially in North America and Europe, is that the real markets are going to be in the developing world, and what has to happen is that the production has to get
more competitive in Europe and North America, not so much necessarily vis-à-vis each other, but vis-à-vis the developing world, so that they can take advantage of that growth, and that's where the savior of the system is going to come from.

FLASSBECK: Yeah, but then the global tail is wagging the global dog. Again, it's the developing countries altogether are much too small to be the engine of growth for, as I said, Japan, the United States, and Europe as a whole. This is something like 65 percent or so of the world economy. So you cannot expect countries like China or even India to move the world out of recession. It's absolutely impossible. It's—and this fight will lead to nothing if we cut wages, as I said. The first thing that we do, we kill our domestic market, and when we have killed our domestic market, even if we would get a little effect from exports, it would not help us or our economies.

We're doing this experiment. This experiment is running at this moment of time in Southern Europe, and it's badly failing. You see, since three years, the countries in Southern Europe are cutting wages. Greece has cut by 20 percent, Spain is cutting by 10 percent, Italy is on the path to cut. But where they have cut, this has never worked, because as I said, if you have 75 percent domestic market that is destroyed by the wage cut and this is the immediate effect of the wage cut, the people stop consuming. Then whenever you reach, after three, four years' time, the level of competitiveness in Europe vis-à-vis Germany, your system is destroyed and your political economy is destroyed, and your democracy maybe is destroyed.

JAY: I did a little experiment at the Toronto G-20. I went through the final declaration and I tried to find the word wages. I couldn't find the word once in the whole declaration, which was supposed to be this vision for the decade on how to get out of the crisis. This isn't even on the agenda of the policymakers, that wages should go up, except maybe they hint at it occasionally that the Chinese should have wages go up, but certainly not in their own countries. What are you finding when you talk to policymakers about this?

FLASSBECK: Well, it's difficult to talk to policymakers, no doubt because—and we have just experienced here in Geneva—it's very difficult to make them understand what's going on, because they're all grown up with the idea the labor market is a market, is a normal market. But if you explain to them that it's not a normal market, then they are shocked. And that is what all good economists, as I said, tell them all the time, that the labor market is a market, and if unemployment goes up, there has to be pressure on wages. It's clearly wrong this time, but it's very difficult to emancipate from this old idea that's been engraved, so to say, in the brains
of economists for 100 years that the labor market is instable, it's terribly instable. And this is what we have to understand. The government has to do something about it.

But if the government blocks its own instruments, fiscal policy and monetary policy, then there's only direct intervention into the labor markets, call it incomes policy or whatever, how the government can stabilize the economy. Otherwise, it would go into deeper recession, I would say, and stagnation, as I said.

JAY: Okay. In the next part of our interview, we'll talk more about why this is happening and what can be done about it. Please join us for part two of our interview with Heiner Flassbeck.

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Mr. Heiner Flassbeck has served since 2006 as Director of the Division on Globalization and Development Strategies of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). He is the principal author and the leader of the team preparing UNCTAD's Trade and Development Report. The Trade and Development Report is the flagship annual publication of UNCTAD covering both recent and longer term issues in the world economy, with particular emphasis on the implications for developing countries.

Worker Cooperatives

Creating Participatory Socialism in Capitalism and State Socialism
Peter Ranis 12 October 2012

Karl Marx in 1859, in A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, wrote of new modes of production developing within old forms. He wrote, “At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters.” This clearly is the breach into which working class cooperatives can enter today.

In a world where capitalism and state socialism seem the only apparent alternatives, the Occupy movements in the U.S. as well as the recuperated enterprise movements in Argentina have been joined of late in Cuba by a significant public push to form worker cooperatives. This demonstrates
forcefully, the demands among workers in all forms of political systems to aspire to worker self-management and democratic participation in their working lives.

The recent Occupy movements in the US to resist home foreclosures, renegotiate student debt and rein in Wall Street financial prerogatives needs to also embrace the occupation of factories and enterprises that threaten to downsize, go off-shore or declare fraudulent bankruptcies as they prepare to move to cheaper labor venues.

In Argentina over 200 worker cooperatives employing over 12,000 workers have formed with the assistance of municipal and provincial expropriations. In the US we have the case of the Chicago Windows and Doors factory as a model that has formed a cooperative and is in search for financing to allow its workers to move forward. In Cuba, the government of Raúl Castro has had to bring the cooperative worker alternative into the public dialogue by way of the new 2011 Economic and Social Policy Guidelines for the Party and the Revolution. There are already several hundred small worker cooperatives in the US and a number of state-dominated agricultural cooperatives in Cuba. But now there is a growing understanding among public intellectuals, students and workers themselves that greater worker management and control of the workplace will lead to increasing democratization and efficiency that promotes national development under both capitalist and socialist models.

Cooperatives, whether in Argentina, Spain, Italy, Canada, Great Britain or the US have the virtue of fulfilling four features that provide the working class with both justice and equity.

1) They are all encompassing ideologically, absorbing different sectors and individuals of the working class, be they radical, progressive, liberal or conservative in outlook.

2) They share the potentiality of creating working class autonomy and a sense of class consciousness based on learned experiences in the process of production.

3) They create a working class community setting beyond the factory or enterprise that promotes forms of both interest and involvement in politics, by way of their outreach programs into communities in cultural activities, creative arts, health care and continuing education.

4) Once established, cooperatives are available for wider struggles against repressive capitalist and state socialist policies.

In essence cooperatives represent democracy as a form of people’s power
rather than simply a capitalist state form of representative democracy or a state socialist form of centralized control structure. Today we have the “indignados” of Spain, the Wisconsin worker uprising, the Arab Spring and the US Occupy movements—all testimony to the potential of workers’ response to injustice and support for rebellion for democratic causes.

A prominent recent example points up the change in the political climate in the US. Many of us recall the case of the Chicago-based Republic Windows and Doors factory that was unceremoniously closed in December of 2008 without the requisite two-month notice as stipulated by the US Warn Act. After six heroic days of occupation by most of the 260 workers of the plant and significant support from local, state and national politicians, including President Barack Obama, the owners relented via a newly stipulated loan from Bank of America, which had just been bailed out by the federal government to the tune of $25 billion. Eventually a buyer was found from California called Serious Energy (formerly Serious Materials) which promised to rehire all the workers as they resumed production. Three years later only about a third of the workers had been rehired. By late February of 2012, the new owners again announced an immediate illegal shutdown. Again the workers occupied the plant asking for time to come up with a plan to find a new buyer or establish a worker-managed cooperative plant. This time because of the groundswell of community support arriving at the plant led by Occupy Chicago and Jobs with Justice, instead of taking six days, it took but eleven hours for the workers of Republic Windows to be given a three-month reprieve. The workers are now in the process of establishing New Era Windows Cooperative as the first large industrial cooperative in the US. One of the leaders of the workers, Armando Robles, spoke of plant occupations and worker cooperatives created in Argentina as their model. He also hoped that their struggle through occupation would become something repeated across the US and the world when workers face similar arbitrary closings. It should not be lost on workers in the US that the watchword for Argentine workers recuperating their factories was “Occupy, Resist, and Produce!”

What is missing in this scenario is the act of public expropriation that has been used by municipal and provincial governments in Argentina. In the US we have the same legal mechanism to achieve worker-owned and worker-managed factories and enterprises. It is eminent domain. Eminent domain has been used for decades for the building of highways, airports, hospitals, municipal offices, schools, libraries, public parks, sport stadiums and arenas for reasons of urban development and public benefit. It is appropriate during this critical global recession to defend against the loss of jobs, to apply this same mechanism on behalf of the working class. It can be defended as preserving a public resource that redounds to
community needs and survival. The time is ripe for American labor to pursue the strategy of eminent domain as public policy to protect the livelihood and promote the general welfare of millions of “at risk” workers. Plant and enterprise closings have severe negative repercussions and societal externalities on workers and communities. The collective social rights of workers who have built up the value of the firm through years of hard work and applying their know-how and skill have to be legally asserted. The companies cannot be free of societal obligations. By closing or outsourcing jobs they have broken a contract for which there must be reparations and consequences. In a very real sense the workers are keeping their place of work that they have fostered and developed over many years rather than taking it away from an irresponsible and profit-maximizing and aggrandizing private employer.

In Cuba we find a similar groundswell developing on the edges of a society still basically dominated by party, state and government bureaucracies. The recent Communist Party Guidelines of 2011 point to a recognition that the political system must adapt to the needs of working class productivity and empowerment. The expropriation process will be unnecessary in Cuba, but the implementation of cooperatives will follow similar processes and procedures as workers begin to organize themselves into collective and democratically-run enterprises separate and autonomous from state dominance and controls.

The cooperative initiatives in Cuba, scheduled for late 2012 and early 2013 are being approached parallel to the more troubling unleashing of small entrepreneurial businesses with limitations on the number of employees. However, the state presumptions and rationale are similar: workers must be afforded greater autonomy and decision-making in order to be more productive and less alienated. The Cuban state seems to have decided that cooperatives are 1) both rational in that they will keep the laborers and employees in productive jobs and avoid unemployment, extreme social poverty and malaise that is dangerous to the Cuban state and 2) it is doing the right thing by way of enhanced income distribution for the majoritarian class in Cuban society.

Markets in the US and Argentina would continue under cooperative development and Cuba will decentralize its economy by various cooperative and entrepreneurial reforms. With the rise of cooperative federations, already in formation in Argentina, we can envision economies based over time on more and more worker ownership, control and management. The state’s role continues but it becomes less a state penetrated by corporations (like the US and Argentina) nor a producer state (like Cuba’s). Argentina, the US and Cuba continue their functions as regulatory states focusing on fiscal and monetary policy, trade, ecology and the environment, consumer protection, health and human rights,
economic investment banking, infrastructure development, education, foreign and defense policy but surrendering over time the reins over the domestic economy and eventually the commanding heights of the industrial and service economy.

To return to Marx once more. In his Inaugural Address to the Working Men’s International Association in London in 1864, he made an early assessment of worker cooperatives. He said, “The value of these great social experiments cannot be over-rated. By deed, instead of by argument, they have shown that production on a large scale, and in accord with the behests of modern science, may be carried on without the existence of a class of masters employing a class of hands; that to bear fruit, the means of labor need not be monopolized as a means of dominion over, and of extortion against the laboring man himself; and that, like slave labor, like serf labor, hired labor is but a transitory and inferior form destined to disappear before associated labor plying its toil with a willing hand, a ready mind and a joyous heart.”

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The Crisis of Education as a Public Good

Henry A. Giroux 11 October 2012

With the advent of Neoliberalism, we have witnessed the production and widespread adoption within many countries of what I want to call the politics of economic Darwinism. As a theater of cruelty and mode of public pedagogy, economic Darwinism removes economics and markets from the discourse of social obligations and social costs. The results are all around us ranging from ecological devastation and widespread economic impoverishment to the increasing incarceration of large segments of the population marginalized by race and class. Economics now drives politics, transforming citizens into consumers and compassion into an object of scorn. The language of rabid individualism and harsh competition now replaces the notion of the public and all forms of solidarity not aligned with market values. As public considerations and issues collapse into the morally vacant pit of private visions and narrow self-interests, the bridges between private and public life are dismantled making it almost impossible to determine how private troubles are connected to broader public issues. Long term investments are now replaced by short term profits while compassion and concern for others are viewed as a weakness. As public visions fall into disrepair, the concept of the public good is eradicated in favor of Democratic public values are
scorned because they subordinate market considerations to the common good. Morality in this instance simply dissolves, as humans are stripped of any obligations to each other. How else to explain Mitt Romney’s gaffe caught on video in which he derided “47 percent of the people [who] will vote for the president no matter what”? [i] There was more at work here than what some have called a cynical political admission by Romney that some voting blocs do not matter.[ii] Romney’s dismissive comments about those 47 percent of adult Americans who don’t pay federal income taxes for one reason or another, whom he described as “people who believe that they are victims, who believe the government has a responsibility to care for them, who believe that they are entitled to health care, to food, to housing, to you-name-it,”[iii] makes clear that the logic disposability is now a central feature of American politics.

As the language of privatization, deregulation, and commodification replaces the discourse of the public good, all things public, including public schools, libraries, transportation systems, crucial infrastructures, and public services, are viewed either as a drain on the market or as a pathology.[iv] The corrupting influence of money and concentrated power not only supports the mad violence of the defense industry, but turns politics itself into mode of sovereignty in which sovereignty now becomes identical with policies that benefit the rich, corporations, and the defense industry.”[v] Thomas Frank is on target when he argues that “Over the course of the past few decades, the power of concentrated money has subverted professions, destroyed small investors, wrecked the regulatory state, corrupted legislators en masse and repeatedly put the economy through the wringer. Now it has come for our democracy itself.”[vi]

Individual prosperity becomes the greatest of social achievements because it allegedly drives innovation and creates jobs. At the same time, massive disparities in income and wealth are celebrated as a justification for a survival of the fittest ethic and homage to a ruthless mode of unbridled individualism. Vulnerable populations once protected by the social state are now considered a liability because they are viewed as either flawed consumers or present a threat to a right-wing Christian view of America as a white, protestant public sphere. The elderly, young people, the unemployed, immigrants, and poor whites and minorities of color now constitute a form of human waste and are considered disposable, unworthy of sharing in the rights, benefits, and protections of a substantive democracy. Clearly, this new politics of disposability and culture of cruelty represents more than an economic crisis, it is also speaks to a deeply rooted crisis of education, agency, and social responsibility.

Under such circumstances, to cite C. W. Mills, we are seeing the breakdown of democracy, the disappearance of critical intellectuals, and “the collapse of those public spheres which offer a sense of critical agency
Since the 1970s, we have witnessed the forces of market fundamentalism strip education of its public values, critical content, and civic responsibilities as part of its broader goal of creating new subjects wedded to consumerism, risk-free relationships, and the destruction of the social state. Tied largely to instrumental purposes and measurable paradigms, many institutions of higher education are now committed almost exclusively to economic goals, such as preparing students for the workforce. Universities have not only strayed from their democratic mission, they seem immune to the plight of students who have to face a harsh new world of high unemployment, the prospect of downward mobility, debilitating debt, and a future that mimics the failures of the past. The question of what kind of education is needed for students to be informed and active citizens is rarely asked.

Within both higher education and the educational force of the broader cultural apparatus— with its networks of knowledge production in the old and new media— we are witnessing the emergence and dominance of a powerful and ruthless, if not destructive, market-driven notion of education, freedom, agency, and responsibility. Such modes of education do not foster a sense of organized responsibility central to a democracy. Instead, they foster what might be called a sense of organized irresponsibility—a practice that underlies the economic Darwinism and civic corruption at the heart of American and, to a lesser degree, Canadian politics.

The anti-democratic values that drive free market fundamentalism are embodied in policies now attempting to shape diverse levels of higher education all over the globe. The script has now become overly familiar and increasingly taken for granted, especially in the United States and increasingly in Canada. Shaping the neoliberal framing of public and higher education is a corporate-based ideology that embraces standardizing the curriculum, top-to-down governing structures, courses that promote entrepreneurial values, and the reduction of all levels of education to job training sites. For example, one university is offering a master’s degree to students who commit to starting a high-tech company while another allows career officers to teach capstone research seminars in the humanities. In one of these classes, the students were asked to “develop a 30-second commercial on their ‘personal brand.’”

Central to this neoliberal view of higher education is a market-driven paradigm that wants to eliminate tenure, turn the humanities into a job preparation service, and reduce most faculty to the status of part-time and temporary workers, if not simply a new subordinate class of disempowered educators. The indentured service status of such faculty is put on full display as some colleges have resorted to using “temporary service agencies to do their formal hiring.” Faculty in this view are
regarded as simply another cheap army of reserve labor, a powerless group that universities are eager to exploit in order to increase the bottom line while disregarding the needs and rights of academic laborers and the quality of education that students deserve.

There is no talk in this view of higher education about shared governance between faculty and administrators, nor of educating students as critical citizens rather than potential employees of Wal-Mart. There is no attempt to affirm faculty as scholars and public intellectuals who have both a measure of autonomy and power. Instead, faculty members are increasingly defined less as intellectuals than as technicians and grant writers. Students fare no better in this debased form of education and are treated either as consumers or as restless children in need of high-energy entertainment—as was made clear in the recent Penn State scandal. Nor is there any attempt to legitimate higher education as a fundamental sphere for creating the agents necessary for an aspiring democracy. This neoliberal corporatized model of higher education exhibits a deep disdain for critical ideals, public spheres, and practices that are not directly linked to market values, business culture, the economy, or the production of short term financial gains. In fact, the commitment to democracy is beleaguered, viewed less as a crucial educational investment than as a distraction that gets in the way of connecting knowledge and pedagogy to the production of material and human capital.

Higher Education and the Crisis of Legitimacy
In the United States, many of the problems in higher education can be linked to low funding, the domination of universities by market mechanisms, the rise of for-profit colleges, the intrusion of the national security state, and the lack of faculty self-governance, all of which not only contradicts the culture and democratic value of higher education but also makes a mockery of the very meaning and mission of the university as a democratic public sphere. Decreased financial support for higher education stands in sharp contrast to increased support for tax benefits for the rich, big banks, the Defense Budget, and mega corporations. Rather than enlarge the moral imagination and critical capacities of students, too many universities are now wedded to producing would-be hedge fund managers, depoliticized students, and creating modes of education that promote a “technically trained docility.”[xi] Strapped for money and increasingly defined in the language of corporate culture, many universities are now “pulled or driven principally by vocational, [military], and economic considerations while increasingly removing academic knowledge production from democratic values and projects.”[xii]

College presidents are now called CEOs and speak largely in the discourse of Wall Street and corporate fund managers while at the same time
moving without apology or shame between interlocking corporate and academic boards. Venture capitalists scour colleges and universities in search of big profits to be made through licensing agreements, the control of intellectual property rights, and investments in university spinoff companies. In this new Gilded Age of money and profit, academic subjects gain stature almost exclusively through their exchange value on the market. It gets worse as exemplified by one recent example. BB&T Corporation, a financial holdings company, gave a $1 million gift to Marshall University’s business school on the condition that Atlas Shrugged by Ayn Rand [Paul Ryan’s favorite book] be taught in a course. What are we to make of the integrity of a university when it accepts a monetary gift from a corporation or rich patron demanding as part of the agreement the power to specify what is to be taught in a course or how a curriculum should be shaped? Some corporations and universities now believe that what is taught in a course is not an academic decision but a market consideration.

Not only does neoliberalism undermine both civic education and public values and confuse education with training, it also treats knowledge as a product, promoting a neoliberal logic that views schools as malls, students as consumers, and faculty as entrepreneurs. It gets worse. As Stanley Aronowitz points out, [t]he absurd neoliberal idea that users should pay for every public good from parks and beaches to highways has reached education with a vengeance[xiii] as more and more students are forced to give up attending college because of skyrocketing tuition rates. In addition, thousands of students are now saddled with debts that will bankrupt their lives in the future. Unfortunately, one measure of this disinvestment in higher education as a public good can be seen in the fact that many states such as California are spending more on prisons than on higher education.[xiv] Educating low income and poor minorities to be engaged citizens has been undermined by an unholy alliance of law and order conservatives, private prison corporations, and prison guard unions along with the rise of the punishing state, all of whom have an invested interest in locking more people up, especially poor minority youth, rather than educating them. It is no coincidence that as the U.S., and Canada to a lesser degree, disinvests in the institutions fundamental to a democracy, it has invested heavily in the rise of the prison-industrial complex, and the punishing-surveillance state. The social costs of prioritizing punishing over educating is clear in one shocking statistic provided by a recent study which states that “by age 23, almost a third of Americans or 30.2 percent have been arrested for a crime...that researches say is a measure of growing exposure to the criminal justice system in everyday life.”[xv]

Questions regarding how education might enable students to develop a keen sense of prophetic justice, utilize critical analytical skills, and cultivate an ethical sensibility through which they learn to respect the
rights of others are becoming increasingly irrelevant in a market-driven and militarized university. As the humanities and liberal arts are downsized, privatized, and commodified, higher education finds itself caught in the paradox of claiming to invest in the future of young people while offering them few intellectual, civic, and moral supports.

If the commercialization, commodification, and militarization of the university continue unabated, higher education will become yet another one of a number of institutions incapable of fostering critical inquiry, public debate, human acts of justice, and public values. But the calculating logic of the corporate university does more than diminish the moral and political vision and practices necessary to sustain a vibrant democracy and an engaged notion of social agency. It also undermines the development of public spaces where matters of dissent, critical dialogue, social responsibility, and social justice are pedagogically valued—viewed as fundamental to providing students with the knowledge and skills necessary to address the problems facing the nation and the globe. Such democratic public spheres are especially important at a time when any space that produces “critical thinkers capable of putting existing institutions into question” is under siege by powerful economic and political interests.[xvi]

Higher education has a responsibility not only to search for the truth regardless of where it may lead, but also to educate students to make authority and power politically and morally accountable while at the same time sustaining “the idea and hope of a public culture.”[xvii] Though questions regarding whether the university should serve strictly public rather than private interests no longer carry the weight of forceful criticism they did in the past, such questions are still crucial in addressing the purpose of higher education and what it might mean to imagine the university’s full participation in public life as the protector and promoter of democratic values.

What needs to be understood is that higher education may be one of the few public spheres left where knowledge, values, and learning offer a glimpse of the promise of education for nurturing public values, critical hope, and a substantive democracy. It may be the case that everyday life is increasingly organized around market principles; but confusing a market-determined society with democracy hollows out the legacy of higher education, whose deepest roots are moral, not commercial. This is a particularly important insight in a society where the free circulation of ideas are not only being replaced by ideas managed by the dominant media, but where critical ideas are increasingly viewed or dismissed as banal, if not reactionary. Celebrity culture and the commodification of culture now constitute a powerful form of mass illiteracy and increasingly permeate all aspects the educational force of the wider cultural apparatus.
But mass illiteracy does more than depoliticize the public, it also becomes complicit with the suppression of dissent. Intellectuals who engage in dissent and “keep the idea and hope of a public culture alive,”[xviii] are often dismissed as irrelevant, extremist, or un-American. Moreover, anti-public intellectuals now dominate the larger cultural landscape, all too willing to flaunt co-option and reap the rewards of venting insults at their assigned opponents while being reduced to the status of paid servants of powerful economic interests. At the same time, there are too few academics willing to defend higher education for its role in providing a supportive and sustainable culture in which a vibrant critical democracy can flourish.

These issues, in part, represent political and pedagogical concerns that should not be lost on either academics or those concerned about the purpose and meaning of higher education. Democracy places civic demands upon its citizens, and such demands point to the necessity of an education that is broad-based, critical, and supportive of meaningful civic values, participation in self-governance, and democratic leadership. Only through such a formative and critical educational culture can students learn how to become individual and social agents, rather than merely disengaged spectators, able both to think otherwise and to act upon civic commitments that “necessitate a reordering of basic power arrangements” fundamental to promoting the common good and producing a meaningful democracy.

**Dreaming the Impossible**

Reclaiming higher education as a democratic public sphere begins with the crucial project of challenging, among other things, those market fundamentalists, religious extremists, and rigid ideologues who harbor a deep disdain for critical thought and healthy skepticism, and who look with displeasure upon any form of education that teaches students to read the word and the world critically. The radical imagination in this discourse is viewed as dangerous and a dire threat to political authorities. One striking example of this view was expressed recently by former Senator Rick Santorum who argues that there is no room for intellectuals in the Republican Party. Needless to say, education is not only about issues of work and economics, but also about questions of justice, social freedom, and the capacity for democratic agency, action, and change, as well as the related issues of power, inclusion, and citizenship. These are educational and political issues, and they should be addressed as part of a broader effort to re-energize the global struggle for social justice and democracy.

If higher education is to characterize itself as a site of critical thinking, collective work, and public service, educators and students will have to redefine the knowledge, skills, research, and intellectual practices currently favored in the university. Central to such a challenge is the need
to position intellectual practice “as part of an intricate web of morality, rigor and responsibility” that enables academics to speak with conviction, use the public sphere to address important social problems, and demonstrate alternative models for bridging the gap between higher education and the broader society. Connective practices are key: it is crucial to develop intellectual practices that are collegial rather than competitive, refuse the instrumentality and privileged isolation of the academy, link critical thought to a profound impatience with the status quo, and connect human agency to the idea of social responsibility and the politics of possibility.

Connection also means being openly and deliberately critical and worldly in one’s intellectual work. Increasingly, as universities are shaped by a culture of fear in which dissent is equated with treason, the call to be objective and impartial, whatever one’s intentions, can easily echo what George Orwell called the official truth or the establishment point of view. Lacking a self-consciously democratic political focus, teachers are often reduced to the role of a technician or functionary engaged in formalistic rituals, unconcerned with the disturbing and urgent problems that confront the larger society or the consequences of one’s pedagogical practices and research undertakings. In opposition to this model, with its claims to and conceit of political neutrality, I argue that academics should combine the mutually interdependent roles of critical educator and active citizen. This requires finding ways to connect the practice of classroom teaching with the operation of power in the larger society and to provide the conditions for students to view themselves as critical agents capable of making those who exercise authority and power answerable for their actions. Such an intellectual does not train students solely for jobs, but also educates them to question critically the institutions, policies, and values that shape their lives, relationships to others, and myriad connections to the larger world.

I think Stuart Hall is on target here when he insists that educators also have a responsibility to provide students with “critical knowledge that has to be ahead of traditional knowledge: it has to be better than anything that traditional knowledge can produce, because only serious ideas are going to stand up.”[xix] At the same time, he insists on the need for educators to “actually engage, contest, and learn from the best that is locked up in other traditions,” especially those attached to traditional academic paradigms.[xx] It is also important to remember that education as a utopian project is not simply about fostering critical consciousness but also about teaching students to take responsibility for one’s responsibilities, be they personal, political, or global. Students must be made aware of the ideological and structural forces that promote needless human suffering while also recognizing that it takes more than awareness to resolve them. This is the kind of intellectual practice that Zygmunt Bauman calls “taking responsibility for our responsibility,”[xxi]one that is
attentive to the suffering and needs of others.

Education cannot be decoupled from what Jacques Derrida calls a democracy to come, that is, a democracy that must always “be open to the possibility of being contested, of contesting itself, of criticizing and indefinitely improving itself.”[xxii] Within this project of possibility and impossibility, education must be understood as a deliberately informed and purposeful political and moral practice, as opposed to one that is either doctrinaire, instrumentalized, or both. Moreover, a critical pedagogy should be engaged at all levels of schooling. Similarly, it must gain part of its momentum in higher education among students who will go back to the schools, churches, synagogues, and workplaces in order to produce new ideas, concepts, and critical ways of understanding the world in which young people and adults live. This is a notion of intellectual practice and responsibility that refuses the insular, overly pragmatic, and privileged isolation of the academy. It also affirms a broader vision of learning that links knowledge to the power of self-definition and to the capacities of students to expand the scope of democratic freedoms, particularly those that address the crisis of education, politics, and the social as part and parcel of the crisis of democracy itself.

In order for critical pedagogy, dialogue, and thought to have real effects, they must advocate the message that all citizens, old and young, are equally entitled, if not equally empowered, to shape the society in which they live. This is a message we heard from the brave students fighting tuition hikes and the destruction of civil liberties and social provisions in Quebec and to a lesser degree in the Occupy Wall Street movement. If educators are to function as public intellectuals, they need listen to young people all over the world who are insisting that the relationship between knowledge and power can be emancipatory, that their histories and experiences matter, and that what they say and do counts in their struggle to unlearn dominating privileges, productively reconstruct their relations with others, and transform, when necessary, the world around them. Simply put, educators need to argue for forms of pedagogy that close the gap between the university and everyday life. Their curricula need to be organized around knowledge of those communities, cultures, and traditions that give students a sense of history, identity, place, and possibility. More importantly, they need to join students in engaging in a practice of freedom that points to new and radical forms of pedagogies that have a direct link to building social movements in and out of the colleges and universities.

Although there are still a number of academics such as Noam Chomsky, Angela Davis, Stanley Aronowitz, Slavoj Zizek, Russell Jacoby, and Cornel West who function as public intellectuals, they are often shut out of the mainstream media or characterized as marginal, even subversive
figures. At the same time, many academics find themselves laboring under horrendous working conditions that either don’t allow for them to write in an accessible manner for the public because they do not have time—given the often almost slave-like labor demanded of part-time academics and increasingly of full-time academics as well—or they retreat into a highly specialized, professional language that few people can understand in order to meet the institutional standards of academic excellence. In this instance, potentially significant theoretical rigor detaches itself both from any viable notion of accessibility and from the possibility of reaching a larger audience outside of their academic disciplines.

Consequently, such intellectuals often exist in hermetic academic bubbles cut off from both the larger public and the important issues that impact society. To no small degree, they have been complicit in the transformation of the university into an adjunct of corporate and military power. Such academics have become incapable of defending higher education as a vital public sphere and unwilling to challenge those spheres of induced mass cultural illiteracy and firewalls of jargon that doom critically engaged thought, complex ideas, and serious writing for the public to extinction. Without their intervention as public intellectuals, the university defaults on its role as a democratic public sphere capable of educating an informed public, a culture of questioning, and the development of a critical formative culture connected to the need, as Cornelius Castoriadis puts it, “to create citizens who are critical thinkers capable of putting existing institutions into question so that democracy again becomes society’s movement.”[xxiii]

Before his untimely death, Edward Said, himself an exemplary public intellectual, urged his colleagues in the academy to directly confront those social hardships that disfigure contemporary society and pose a serious threat to the promise of democracy. He urged them to assume the role of public intellectuals, wakeful and mindful of their responsibilities to bear testimony to human suffering and the pedagogical possibilities at work in educating students to be autonomous, self-reflective, and socially responsible. Said rejected the notion of a market-driven pedagogy, one that created cheerful robots and legitimated organized recklessness and illegal legalities. In opposition to such a pedagogy, Said argued for what he called a pedagogy of wakefulness and its related concern with a politics of critical engagement. In commenting on Said’s public pedagogy of wakefulness, and how it shaped his important consideration of academics as public intellectuals, I begin with a passage that I think offers a key to the ethical and political force of much of his writing. This selection is taken from his memoir, Out of Place, which describes the last few months of his mother’s life in a New York hospital and the difficult time she had falling to sleep because of the cancer that was ravaging her body. Recalling this traumatic and pivotal life experience, Said’s meditation
moves between the existential and the insurgent, between private pain and worldly commitment, between the seductions of a “solid self” and the reality of a contradictory, questioning, restless, and at times, uneasy sense of identity. He writes:

‘Help me to sleep, Edward,’ she once said to me with a piteous trembling in her voice that I can still hear as I write. But then the disease spread into her brain—and for the last six weeks she slept all the time—my own inability to sleep may be her last legacy to me, a counter to her struggle for sleep. For me sleep is something to be gotten over as quickly as possible. I can only go to bed very late, but I am literally up at dawn. Like her I don’t possess the secret of long sleep, though unlike her I have reached the point where I do not want it. For me, sleep is death, as is any diminishment in awareness..Sleeplessness for me is a cherished state to be desired at almost any cost; there is nothing for me as invigorating as immediately shedding the shadowy half-consciousness of a night’s loss than the early morning, reacquainting myself with or resuming what I might have lost completely a few hours earlier. I occasionally experience myself as a cluster of flowing currents. I prefer this to the idea of a solid self, the identity to which so many attach so much significance. These currents like the themes of one’s life, flow along during the waking hours, and at their best, they require no reconciling, no harmonizing. They are ‘off’ and may be out of place, but at least they are always in motion, in time, in place, in the form of all kinds of strange combinations moving about, not necessarily forward, sometimes against each other, contrapuntally yet without one central theme. A form of freedom, I like to think, even if I am far from being totally convinced that it is. That skepticism too is one of the themes I particularly want to hold on to. With so many dissonances in my life I have learned actually to prefer being not quite right and out of place.[xxiv]

It is this sense of being awake, displaced, caught in a combination of diverse circumstances that suggests a pedagogy that is cosmopolitan and imaginative–a public affirming pedagogy that demands a critical and engaged interaction with the world we live in mediated by a responsibility for challenging structures of domination and for alleviating human suffering. As an ethical and political practice, a public pedagogy of wakefulness rejects modes of education removed from political or social concerns, divorced from history and matters of injury and injustice. Said’s notion of a pedagogy of wakefulness includes “lifting complex ideas into the public space,” recognizing human injury inside and outside of the academy, and using theory as a form of criticism to change things.[xxv] This is a pedagogy in which academics are neither afraid of controversy or the willingness to make connections that are otherwise hidden, nor are they afraid of making clear the connection between private issues and broader elements of society’s problems.
For Said, being awake becomes a central metaphor for defining the role of academics as public intellectuals, defending the university as a crucial public sphere, engaging how culture deploys power, and taking seriously the idea of human interdependence while at the same time always living on the border — one foot in and one foot out, an exile and an insider for whom home was always a form of homelessness. As a relentless border crosser, Said embraced the idea of the “traveler” as an important metaphor for engaged intellectuals. As Stephen Howe, referencing Said, points out, “It was an image which depended not on power, but on motion, on daring to go into different worlds, use different languages, and ‘understand a multiplicity of disguises, masks, and rhetorics. Travelers must suspend the claim of customary routine in order to live in new rhythms and rituals … the traveler crosses over, traverses territory, and abandons fixed positions all the time.’”[xxvi] And as a border intellectual and traveler, Said embodied the notion of always “being quite not right,” evident by his principled critique of all forms of certainties and dogmas and his refusal to be silent in the face of human suffering at home and abroad.

Being awake meant refusing the now popular sport of academic bashing or embracing a crude call for action at the expense of rigorous intellectual and theoretical work. On the contrary, it meant combining rigor and clarity, on the one hand, and civic courage and political commitment, on the other. A pedagogy of wakefulness meant using theory as a resource, recognizing the worldly space of criticism as the democratic underpinning of publicness, defining critical literacy not merely as a competency, but as an act of interpretation linked to the possibility of intervention in the world. It pointed to a kind of border literacy in the plural in which people learned to read and write from multiple positions of agency; it also was indebted to the recognition forcibly stated by Hannah Arendt that “Without a politically guaranteed public realm, freedom lacks the worldly space to make its appearance.”[xxvii]

For public intellectuals such as Said, Chomsky, Bourdieu, Angela Davis, and others, intellectuals have a responsibility to unsettle power, trouble consensus, and challenge common sense. The very notion of being an engaged public intellectual is neither foreign to nor a violation of what it means to be an academic scholar, but central to its very definition. According to Said, academics have a duty to enter into the public sphere unafraid to take positions and generate controversy, functioning as moral witnesses, raising political awareness, making connections to those elements of power and politics often hidden from public view, and reminding “the audience of the moral questions that may be hidden in the clamor and din of the public debate.”[xxviii] At the same time, Said criticized those academics who retreated into a new dogmatism of the disinterested specialist that separates them “not only from the public
sphere but from other professionals who don’t use the same jargon.”[xxix] This was especially unsettling to him at a time when complex language and critical thought remain under assault in the larger society by all manner of anti-democratic forces.

The view of higher education as a democratic public sphere committed to producing young people capable and willing to expand and deepen their sense of themselves, to think the “world” critically, “to imagine something other than their own well-being,” to serve the public good, and to struggle for a substantive democracy has been in a state of acute crisis for the last thirty years.[xxx] When faculty assume, in this context, their civic responsibility to educate students to think critically, act with conviction, and connect what they learn in classrooms to important social issues in the larger society, they are often denounced for politicizing their classrooms and for violating professional codes of conduct, or, worse, labelled as unpatriotic.[xxxi] In some cases, the risk of connecting what they teach to the imperative to expand the capacities of students to be both critical and socially engaged may costs academics their jobs, especially when they make visible the workings of power, injustice, human misery, and the alterable nature of the social order. What do the liberal arts and humanities amount to if they do not teach the practice of freedom, especially at a time when training is substituted for education? Gayatri Spivak provides a context for this question with her comment: “‘Can one insist on the importance of training in the humanities in [a] time of legitimized violence?'”[xxxii]

In a society that remains troublingly resistant to or incapable of questioning itself, one that celebrates the consumer over the citizen, and all too willingly endorses the narrow values and interests of corporate power, the importance of the university as a place of critical learning, dialogue, and social justice advocacy becomes all the more imperative. Moreover, the distinctive role that faculty play in this ongoing pedagogical project of democratization and learning, along with support for the institutional conditions and relations of power that make it possible, must be defended as part of a broader discourse of excellence, equity, and democracy.

Despite the growing public recognition that market fundamentalism has fostered a destructive alignment among the state, corporate capital, and transnational corporations, there is little understanding that such an alignment has been constructed and solidified through a neoliberal disciplinary apparatus and corporate pedagogy produced in part in the halls of higher education and through the educational force of the larger media culture. The economic Darwinism of the last thirty years has done more than throw the financial and credit system into crisis; it has also waged an attack on all those social institutions that support critical modes
of agency, reason, and meaningful dissent. And yet, the financial meltdown most of the world is experiencing is rarely seen as part of an educational crisis in which the institutions of public and higher education have been conscripted into a war on democratic values. Such institutions have played a formidable, if not shameless role, in reproducing market-driven beliefs, social relations, identities, and modes of understanding that legitimize the institutional arrangements of cut-throat capitalism. William Black calls such institutions purveyors of a “criminogenic environment”—one that promotes and legitimates market-driven practices that include fraud, deregulation, and other perverse practices.[xxxiii] Black claims that the most extreme pedagogical expression of such an environment can be found in business schools, which he calls “fraud factories” for the elite.[xxxiv]

There seems to be an enormous disconnect between the economic conditions that led to the current financial meltdown and the current call to action by a generation of young people and adults who have been educated for the last several decades in the knowledge, values, and identities of a market-driven society. Clearly, this generation will not solve this crisis if they do not connect it to the assault on an educational system that has been reduced to a lowly adjunct of corporate interests and the bidding of the warfare state.

Higher education represents one the most important sites over which the battle for democracy is being waged. It is the site where the promise of a better future emerges out of those visions and pedagogical practices that combine hope, agency, politics, and moral responsibility as part of a broader emancipatory discourse. Academics have a distinct and unique obligation, if not political and ethical responsibility, to make learning relevant to the imperatives of a discipline, scholarly method, or research specialization. But more importantly, academics as engaged scholars can further the activation of knowledge, passion, values, and hope in the service of forms of agency that are crucial to sustaining a democracy in which higher education plays an important civic, critical, and pedagogical role. If democracy is a way of life that demands a formative culture, educators can play a pivotal role in creating forms of pedagogy and research that enable young people to think critically, exercise judgment, engage in spirited debate, and create those public spaces that constitute “the very essence of political life.”[xxxv]

Finally, I want to suggest that while it has become more difficult to imagine a democratic future, we have entered a period in which young people all over the world are protesting against neoliberalism and its pedagogy and politics of disposability. Refusing to remain voiceless and powerless in determining their future, these young people are organizing collectively in order to create the conditions for societies that refuse to use
politics as an act of war and markets as the measure of democracy. They are taking seriously the words of the great abolitionist Frederick Douglas who bravely argued that freedom is an empty abstraction if people fail to act, and “if there is no struggle, there is no progress.”

Their struggles are not simply aimed at the 1% but also the 99 percent as part of a broader effort to get them to connect the dots, educate themselves, and develop and join social movements that can rewrite the language of democracy and put into place the institutions and formative cultures that make it possible. Stanley Aronowitz is right in arguing that “The system survives on the eclipse of the radical imagination, the absence of a viable political opposition with roots in the general population, and the conformity of its intellectuals who, to a large extent, are subjugated by their secure berths in the academy. [At the same time,] it would be premature to predict that decades of retreat, defeat and silence can be reversed overnight without a commitment to what may be termed ‘a long march’ though the institutions, the workplaces and the streets of the capitalist metropoles.”[xxxvi]

The current protests in the United States, Canada, Greece, and Spain make clear that this is not–indeed, cannot be–only a short-term project for reform, but a political movement that needs to intensify, accompanied by the reclaiming of public spaces, the progressive use of digital technologies, the development of public spheres, the production of new modes of education, and the safeguarding of places where democratic expression, new identities, and collective hope can be nurtured and mobilized. A formative culture must be put in place pedagogically and institutionally in a variety of spheres extending from churches and public and higher education to all those cultural apparatuses engaged in the production and circulation of knowledge, desire, identities, and values. Clearly, such efforts need to address the language of democratic revolution rather than the seductive incremental adjustments of liberal reform. This suggest not only calling for a living wage, jobs programs, especially for the young, the democratization of power, economic equality, and a massive shift in funds away from the machinery of war and big banks but also a social movement that not only engages in critique but makes hope a real possibility by organizing to seize power. There is no room for failure here because failure would cast us back into the clutches of authoritarianism—that while different from previous historical periods–shares nonetheless the imperative to proliferate violent social formations and a death-dealing blow to the promise of a democracy to come.

Given the urgency of the problems faced by those marginalized by class, race, age, and sexual orientation, I think it is all the more crucial to take seriously the challenge of Derrida’s provocation that “We must do and
think the impossible. If only the possible happened, nothing more would happen. If I only did what I can do, I wouldn’t do anything.”[xxxvii] We may live in dark times as Hannah Arendt reminds us, but history is open and the space of the possible is larger than the one on display.

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Back

IMT sympathiser shot in Swat

Malala Yousufzai speaking at the Marxist school in SWAT

Barbarism must not prevail!
Alan Woods 10 October 2012
The suffering of the people of Pakistan is largely unknown in the West. A veil of silence has been carefully drawn over the number of people killed every day by American drones and Taliban murders. But recently a small corner of the curtain was raised as the result of a particularly appalling event.

Malala YousafzaiYesterday Malala Yousafzai was brutally shot by gunmen as she was returning home from school. Masked assassins stepped onto a bus filled with terrified children, identified her, and shot her at point blank range in the head and neck.

Who are these men who wage war on defenceless schoolgirls? We know who they are because they have already admitted their guilt. The cowardly murderers who perpetrated this vile deed feel no need to hide away from public opinion. They feel no shame, for they are utterly shameless. The Pakistan Taliban has claimed responsibility for this act of bloodthirsty savagery.

What crime did this fourteen year-old girl commit that could justify the taking of her life? Was she a friend of American imperialism? Did she support the occupation of Afghanistan? Was she on the side of the Pakistan government and its army?

No, she was none of those things. On the contrary, Malala was on the side of the oppressed people of Pakistan and Afghanistan and every other country. She was an enemy of imperialism, landlordism and capitalism. She stood for the cause of freedom, progress and socialism. And for that they have tried to take her young and innocent life.

Swat laid waste
Perhaps nowhere has the sufferings of the people of Pakistan been greater than in the mountainous area known as Swat. The Swat valley is a picturesque place that was famed for its music and tolerance. It used to be a favourite holiday and honeymoon destination. Now it has been laid waste by a war characterised by the utmost savagery on all sides.

Because of its proximity with Afghanistan, this beautiful region has been plunged into a bloody war, in which the Pakistan army, the Taliban and US imperialism have vied with each other to win domination.

First the Taliban seized control. They made life a hell for the people of Swat, forcing men to grow beards, beheading their opponents, imposing sharia law and other reactionary measures to keep the masses in a state of ignorance and illiteracy in which they would be more easily dominated by the mullahs and religious fanatics.
In one incident the Taliban killed 14 people in one village and hanged their bodies from the trees as a warning. Only two people dared to bury the bodies. Later they began to organize resistance to the terrorists and they are now members of the IMT. Despite all the difficulties and dangers, the comrades of the International Marxist Tendency in Swat organized a very successful Marxist School this summer, from July 13th to July 15th.

The school was attended by more than 225 comrades from all over the country. Even some soldiers were present. Also present was comrade Malala Yousafzai, who spoke in the debates. She was full of confidence and enthusiasm in the just cause for which she was fighting.

Now, not three months later, she is fighting for her life in an intensive care ward in a Peshawar hospital, with a bullet lodged close to her brain.

**Reactive nature of the Taliban**

There are those in the West who consider themselves “lefts” who think it is right to support the Taliban, allegedly because they are “fighting imperialism”. Here we have ignorance and cynicism combined in equal proportions.

The Taliban and other such reactionary outfits were never anti-imperialists. In the past they were sponsored, armed and financed by imperialism, which used them as a tool against the Soviet army in Afghanistan. Then the western media described them as “freedom fighters”. Now they describe them as terrorists. In fact they were counterrevolutionary terrorists then, and they are counterrevolutionary terrorists now.

Reactionary movements like the Taliban are intimately linked to the landlords and capitalists. They defend the interests, not of the poor, but of the wealthy merchants, money-lenders, landlords and drug smugglers. It is an open secret that they are financed, armed and, to a great extent, controlled by elements in the Pakistan state and the notorious intelligence service, the ISI.

To the extent that they are opposed to the American presence in Afghanistan, it is because their masters in the ISI are seeking to turn Afghanistan into a colony of Pakistan. This would not represent an advance for the suffering people of Afghanistan, only the exchange of one brutal foreign oppressor for another.

The struggle against imperialism can only be successful if it is led by the working people under the guidance of a revolutionary Marxist party. The real way to defeat the imperialists is to root out their points of support – the corrupt landowners and capitalists. The fight against the foreign
oppressors can only be successful if it is linked to the overthrow of landlordism and capitalism.

The Pakistan Marxists have consistently exposed the close connections between the Islamic fundamentalists and the Pakistani state. That has earned them the undying hatred of the Taliban, who fear, quite correctly, that the spreading influence of revolutionary Marxism is undermining them.

In Swat our comrades have organized the local masses against these reactionaries. As a result many comrades have been the victims of fundamentalist terrorism. One comrade had eight bullets from a G-3 rifle pumped into him. The comrades reported that "only his will power and hatred of a repressive state and the Taliban counterrevolutionaries kept him alive".

**Malala’s heroism**

Malala Yousufzai speaking at the Marxist school in SWAT

After the horrors of the Taliban occupation, the Pakistani Army swept into the valley causing mayhem. That offensive uprooted an estimated 1.2 million Swat residents. The army has also been guilty of human rights abuses, including murder, torture and the massacre of prisoners. The ordinary people were, as usual, caught in between.

The Taliban counterrevolutionaries were particularly opposed to women playing any role in society other than that of domestic slaves. They wanted to prevent girls from going to school. Such was their fanatical hatred of learning that they destroyed schools and murdered schoolteachers. Malala’s father was the head of the last girls’ school to be closed.

During the occupation of Swat by the Taliban in 2009, Malala, then 11 years old, spoke out against the closure of girls’ schools. At a time when the cowardly politicians in Islamabad were busy appeasing the Taliban, she spoke out against them. She wrote a blog for BBC Urdu under a pseudonym. She has subsequently continued to speak up against the Taliban, an action that took tremendous courage on her part. They began to threaten her, but she continued her defiant struggle, which took on an increasingly conscious and political character.

The Taliban leaders put out false information, accusing her of being pro-Obama and pro-Western. That is a lie. Although she was fundamentally opposed to the counterrevolutionary Taliban, comrade Malala was also opposed to US imperialism and the corrupt bourgeois regime in Pakistan. Her sympathies lay in a different direction altogether: with revolutionary socialism and internationalism.
Of course, at this point it suited the bourgeois that someone like her should expose the crimes of the Taliban. She was given the national peace prize in 2011. But then the bourgeois sources go quiet on her activities. The news reports of her attempted assassination make oblique references to her growing interest in politics, but they do not say what these politics consisted of. In fact, she was a sympathiser of the IMT.

This is not hard to understand. At the present time, the Pakistan section of the IMT is the only organized Left force that exists in Swat. Over the past few years our ranks have been swelled by an influx of former members of the Communist Party who have remained loyal to the ideas of Marx and Lenin and who are continuing to struggle for socialism despite all the dangers.

The report of the Marxist school in Swat, which we published in Marxist.com, concluded: “This school has given us great energy and strength to fight for the ideas of scientific socialism which could provide an alternate to religious fundamentalism and bourgeois liberalism”.

A Taliban spokesman, Ehsanullah Ehsan, confirmed by phone that Malala had been the target, calling her crusade for education rights an “obscenity.” The real obscenity is a society that is based on the slavery of millions of workers and peasants and treats women as slaves of slaves. The real obscenity is child labour and illiteracy, poverty, disease and ignorance. And these are precisely the things the Taliban wishes to perpetuate.

Malala is one of the many outstanding young comrades who are looking for a way out of the present infernal impasse by taking the revolutionary road. In so doing she was well aware of the risks. She was prepared to put her life at hazard to fight for such basic human rights as education. And she has paid a heavy price.

Every class conscious worker in the world will keenly feel the tragedy of a young girl shot down in cold blood by a cowardly assassin for the crime of demanding rights for women. Our hearts bleed for the suffering of her family, friends and comrades. We fervently wish for her recovery.

This vicious attack will not deter us from our task. By exposing the baseness and cruelty of our enemies, which is only the distilled essence of the baseness and cruelty of the society that spawned these monsters, it will steel our resolve to continue the fight for which comrade Malala made such a great sacrifice.

Now more than ever the only choice for humanity is: socialism or
barbarism. It is a choice between the forces of darkness and light, between ignorance and knowledge, between savagery and civilization. It is an easy choice to make, and Malala made it. Let her life and courage be an example to us all.

• Down with the murderous counterrevolutionaries! Down with imperialism!
• Let us fight for justice for all, for a life free from ignorance, violence and oppression.
• Let us step up the fight for a better future in a socialist world.

When Will We See Tanks In Barcelona?

Esther Vivas 8 October 2012

“Independent Catalonia? Over my dead body and those of many other soldiers”. It was with these words that on August 31, retired infantry lieutenant-colonel Francisco Alaman Castro referred to the possibility of an independent Catalonia. And he added: “We will not make it easy. Although the lion seems to be sleeping, they have no interest in provoking it too much, because it has already given enough proof of its ferocity over the centuries. These plebs are not up to much, if we know how to confront them”.

In the current verbiage that some politicians have adopted, these statements are not the only ones that we might call “undemocratic”, “putschist” and “anti-system”. After the demonstration on September 11, [1] the UPyD spokesperson [2], Rosa Díez, called on the government to suspend the autonomy of Catalonia if the region used money from central government aid "to finance its secession”. Not to be outdone, the MEP (representing the Popular Party, in power in Madrid) and vice-president of the European Parliament, Alejo Vidal Quadras, requested that a brigadier-general, preferably from the Civil Guard, take charge of the "Mossos de Esquadra“ [3] to curb the independence process.

The El Mundo newspaper, in its editorial of September 27, demanded from the government "a penal response to the challenge launched by Artur Mas" who has called for a referendum on self-determination in Catalonia. El Mundo urged the government to amend the Criminal Code to “punish by imprisonment any call for an illegal referendum”. And for good measure, the extremist “Reconversion”, platform, whose leaders are Alejo
Vidal Quadras and José Antonio Ortega Lara, demanded that if such a referendum were to be held the government place Catalonia under tutelage, on the basis of articles 161.2 and 155.1 and 2 of the Constitution.

And that’s not all. The Spanish Military Association (AME), composed of former members of the army, has threatened Catalan president Artur Mas with a Council of War and has warned those who promote “the breaking-up of Spain” that they will have to answer before a military court on charges of “high treason”. Nothing more than that! It speaks volumes about the present situation when a conservative politician such as Artur Mas, enmeshed to the marrow of his bones with the powers of finance, especially with the La Caixa and Aberti banks, who is leader of a party as un-subversive as the CiU [4] elicits such reactions. What will happen then when it comes to someone on the left, who is opposed to the interests of the employers and is a sincere defender of the right to self-determination?

In the light of the above, I ask myself a question. If all of this was happening, for example, in a Latin American country, how would it be characterized? The BBC has published a long report that makes the link between the threats to Catalonia and the “pact of silence” introduced during the Transition [5]. And this is quite right. The Amnesty Law of 1977 guarantees immunity to those who committed crimes against humanity under the Franco regime and during the Civil War. These individuals are still there, and today they are raising their heads again, without any restraint.

At a time where the Hispanic Titanic is taking in water on all sides, with a crisis which worsens each day and scaffolding that is creaking everywhere, it is the true nature of the regime that is revealing itself. And so are the limits of a transition that has been so beatified that it has prevented people from seeing the reality for decades. All of a sudden, the mask of “democrat” has fallen from their faces. Crises have at least the advantage of clarifying things.

According to them, democracy is a good thing as long as it does not go beyond a certain framework. As a result, all those who disturb things, whether it is these “hooligan” Catalan independentists or these “dangerous” 25S activists, must be quickly silenced. Broadcast television images of police charges? What a scandal! People will become indignant and will demonstrate even more. Solution: limit the right to demonstrate and the right to be informed and the business is settled. The president of the Popular Party group in the European Parliament, Jaime Mayor Oreja, and the Delegate of the Madrid government Cristina Cifuentes have understood this well.

The current crisis is not only an economic and social crisis, but really an
unprecedented regime crisis that calls into question the state model that came out of the Transition, its “pacts of silence” and the very shaky democratic system that we have today.

In the middle of this mess, we must support all democratic demands that come up against the monarchical corset of the Transition, starting with the right of the Catalan people to decide its own future. Who is afraid of such a referendum in Catalonia? Those who are not willing to accept its result. We should not, however, let the Spanish chauvinist fury against Mas make us take such a politician - whose only achievement in government is to have reduced social rights and taxes for the rich - for a herald of democracy and freedom. On the contrary, we, Catalans, will have a better life when we get rid of Mas, his squire Felip Puig and their team.

Infantry lieutenant-colonel Francisco Alaman Castro said that "the current situation resembles that of 1936". That is quite a declaration of intent. Today, as then, our democracy, our rights and our future are threatened. What is at stake is important. When will we see tanks in the streets of Barcelona? It would not be the first time. But there is one thing I am sure of: the people will not remain silent. The most important thing will be not to make any mistake about who the enemy is, and while we fight against the badly recycled Francoists, we should remember that the interests of the majority of the Catalan people have very little to do with those of the Messiah Artur Mas.

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[2] Unión Progreso y Democracia (Union, progress and democracy) is a political party of the radical populist Right, founded in 2007, which defends an uncompromising Spanish nationalism.

Rwanda: From victim to perpetrator of genocide

Antoine Roger Lokongo First Published in Error! Hyperlink reference not valid. 8 October 2012

Paul Kagame has presided over the plunder of DR Congo’s mineral wealth to consolidate Tutsi hegemony in Kigali. Now with the support of his powerful western allies, Kagame is eyeing Congolese territory.

1. INTRODUCTION
It is true that the DRC is hundreds of times bigger and richer in natural and mineral resources than Rwanda. Rwanda may one day discover its own minerals. But for the time being, feeling cheated by nature and coveting land and minerals in Congo, the regime in power in Kigali has convinced its backers, some of the most powerful superpowers this world boasts, that it can militarily, not through regional cooperation, eliminate that inequality, proving Timothy M. Shaw and Malcolm J. Grieve (1978) right when they described the roots causes of African conflicts as follows:

(1) Ecological coincidence: what resources are located in the country in terms of economic riches, oil, and mineral reserves?

(2) External demand: given the prevailing level of technology and consumption, what goods are sought by foreign interests?

(3) Response to dependence: given external demand for the state’s resources, is the dominant reaction collaboration or confrontation?

(4) National ideology: does the state in general advocate ‘socialism’ or ‘capitalism’ as a reflection of its economic strategy and structure?

(5) Economic strategy: does the state have its function determined by the prevailing international division of labour, or does it attempt to follow its own plan for industrialization and diversification?
(6) Sub-imperial potential: does the state dominate a ‘sub-region’ and so provide the services of centre within the periphery? And finally,

(7) Class formation: to what extent does economic growth, especially if it involves semi-industrialisation, generate its own contradiction of intensified class consciousness and conflict?

This mixture of problems applies in the case of Congo-Rwanda border dispute.

2. MUSEVENI AND KAGAME, THE NEW ‘BISMARCKS OF AFRICA’: IMPLEMENTING AMERICA’S NEW POLICY?

In a previous article published by Pambazuka on 16 November 2011, we argued that, as the only superpower left, the United States of America – which did not participate in the Berlin Conference – is claiming the lion’s share of Africa’s resources. In fact, the US’s desire to devour Africa was best explained by the late American Under-Secretary of State for Commerce, Ron Brown, while visiting Uganda. He told a dinner party audience that, ‘For many years African business has been dominated by Europeans while America gets only 17 percent of the market. We are now determined to reverse that and take the lion’s share.’ (Kintu 1997:1).

We then raised the following questions which remain valid: why should democratically elected African governments give or let the US take the lion’s share instead of giving the lion’s share to the people who elected them? Which should come first – American interests or African people’s interests? What means would the US use to take the lion’s share? Is it possible to respect democratically established governments in Africa and take the lion’s share at the same time?

The invasion of the Democratic Republic of Congo by Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi in 1998 with the backing of well-known superpowers, trampled the African Union principles of non-interference of foreign forces in African affairs and the sanctity of pre-independence colonial frontiers as the basis of the statehood of its members, taking a leaf from the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia by which several European polities agreed to respect each other’s sovereignty and boundaries. What explains the way Rwanda has gone about colonizing eastern Congo is the fact that from the very beginning, Rwandan President Paul Kagame indicated that what was at issue in the DRC was ‘another Berlin’ division. Rwanda fought not just for security concerns, not for coltan and other strategic minerals, but more importantly for the widening of Rwanda’s borders and Rwandans’ living space to accord with the myth of the so-called Chezi dynasty which encompassed the Congolese provinces of North Kivu and South Kivu (Nabudere 2004:95).
Rwanda has got no grounds for such claim because the case of the border between Rwanda and Congo was settled with the Belgians, the Germans and the British at the Kivu-Mfumbiro Conference convened by the Belgian Foreign Ministry in February 1910, to settle the claims of three European countries over the disputed territory, as Roger Louis (1963) had demonstrated.

The matter was settled when the Belgians successfully proved that there was no ethnographic connection whatsoever between the Africans on the Congolese side and those in Ruanda (after all, it was an Anglo-American explorer, Henri Morton Stanley who collected local chiefs’ signatures of allegiance to King Leopold II which the latter used at the Berlin Conference as the basis for his claim of that territory, so the Belgians should have known better); and that the presence of German missionaries on the Congolese side could not prejudice Belgian Congo’s territorial rights (Louis 1963: 79-91).

Separate protocols between Germany and Belgium, Germany and Britain, and Britain and Belgium were signed on 14 May 1910. Boundary commissions were appointed; after the frontiers were demarcated, the protocol was signed by the boundary commissioners, formally ending the Kivu-Mfumbiro controversy (Louis 1963: 79-91). It is needless to repeat that Germany lost her colonies (what is today Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania) in compensation to Belgium and Britain after loosing the First World War (fought over colonies in Africa). Ironically, Belgium ‘got back’ all the territories west of the true 30th meridian and Britain got Ndorwa (part of Tanzania which today blocks Rwanda’s access to Lake Victoria) initially promised as part of the compensation of the 1890 Anglo-German Treaty. So, is Rwanda going to wage war against Tanzania as well to gain access to Lake Victoria? If not, which ‘colonial injustice of the past’ is Rwanda talking about?

After this Belgian-German-British settlement, the Belgian colonial administration brought Tutsi’s and Hutu’s much needed labour in Congolese mines and plantations. In addition, any time Hutu and Tutsi killed each other in Rwanda and Burundi, this has always had a spill over into Congo which had always welcomed refugees.

3. HISTORICALLY THERE ARE NO CONGOLESE BANYAMULENGE
In Congo, every tribe’s name is also the name of that tribe’s language. Congolese are Bangala, Baluba, Bakongo, Mongo, Batelela, Tongando because they speak, respectively, Lingala, Tshiluba, Kikongo, Lomongo, Tetela, Longando and so on. Mulenge is just a hilly area in South Kivu Province, eastern Congo, where Rwandan Tutsi refugees settled in Congo after the post-independence Hutu-Tutsi conflict in Rwanda. So, since there
is no language in Congo called Banyamulenge there is no Banyamulenge tribe either in Congo or in Rwanda originally before the refugee emigration to Congo. That is a historical fact. The Belgian colonial administration never identified any ethnic group called Banyamulenge among the 250 ethnic groups that Congo boasts. We challenge anybody to prove the contrary.

However, the current constitution has solved the problem. Any Tutsi or Hutu whose parents were in Congo at the time of independence, that is, 30 June 1960, is Congolese and must serve the interest of the Congolese nation first and foremost. So what discrimination against the Banyamulenge does Rwanda talk about? There has been a Munyamulenge vice-president in Congo by the name of Ruberwa. Tutsi have a bigger share of positions in national institutions than most of the other ethnic groups in Congo especially in the army, but they strictly refuse to go and serve in other areas of Congo except near the Rwandan border. For a purpose! They have attempted many times to annex eastern Congo to Rwanda through many so-called rebellions! Aren’t they very hard to accommodate Congolese? Was it not thanks to the March 2009 accords that Bosco Ntanganda became a general? Lie, lie, there will always be something left to lie about! But for the Congolese people, enough is enough!

Recently Congolese President Joseph Kabila made a deal with Kagame to allow Rwandan troops to remain stationed in eastern in order to hunt down the Hutu militia, known as the genocidists FDLR. Rwanda has been militarily present in Congo since 1997. Who can believe Rwanda’s pretext to intervene in Congo because of the FDLR threat?

In fact, already in 2010, Peter Swarbrick and Michael Soussan of the UNHCR published an article in the The Huffington Post stressing that ‘the UN and donors should insist that the FDLR, though also blamed for countless other atrocities against Congolese civilians, no longer constitutes a significant military threat to Rwanda. Insofar as it portrays itself as representing the 85 percent of the Rwandan population that is Hutu, FDLR may constitute a political threat to Tutsi control of the Rwandan government – but one that should be dealt with by political means. Rwanda is the only country in its sub-region that refuses to talk to its political opponents, on the grounds that they are associated with the genocide. The accusations now leveled against Rwanda itself render that claim rather hollow’ (Soussan and Swarbrick 2010).

Instead, Kagame has been accused of being responsible for the extermination of Hutus. Nick Gordon, a BBC reporter, investigated and reported that the Kigali regime has built crematoriums at Bugasira, Ruhengeri, Byumba, Kibungo, Inyungwe and other locations where
thousands of Hutus and Congolese deportees (80 Congolese youth were deported from Uvira, South Kivu, into Rwanda in January 2001 and are unaccounted for today, according to the Missionary News Agency MISNA), are killed daily and their bodies incinerated under the program called ‘Manpower Duties’ while US officials are looking the other way (Snow 2007). The aim is to reduce the Hutu majority. It is also known that Kagame releases Hutus from prison and sends them to Congo to loot minerals, rape and kill (Barouski 2006).

4. IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF LEOPOLD II: KAGAME IN CONGO
Kagame is rather following in the footsteps of ‘the royalty of Europe and the colonial powers who decimated the Congolese people and stole their vast underground wealth for a century’, as he put it sarcastically recently in an interview he gave US-based Harvard International Review (Kagame 2012). ‘You know, the violent history of Congo began long before I was born,’ said Kagame. ‘It is a matter of public record that the royalty of Europe and the colonial powers decimated the people and stole their vast underground wealth for a century.’

Well, first of all, as an African Kagame knows well that no African country escaped the hell of slave trade, imperialism, colonialism, apartheid and neo-colonialism today. Which one?

Even some Chinese were brought to Congo by the British under the request of King Leopold II of Belgium in 1898 to work as slave labourers to build the first railway in Congo from Kinshasa to Matadi. The Chinese, Congolese and some West Africans and Carribeans had to break the rocks with their bear hands to make the way for the placement of the rails. Many of them died (Hochschild, 2000:170-172).

A pictorial painting in Kinshasa’s Central Railway Station still commemorates their lives. In fact, the Chinese high tech company Huawei has just built nearby its biggest centre in Africa, making history come alive again in a spectacular way.

The point is Congolese people are not an exception and do not deserve Kagame’s ‘talk down’.

We all know that Rwanda has had a long history of its citizens living outside as refugees. The country’s refugees are among the oldest refugee population in the continent; in fact the return to and integration of the various generations of refugees into their original communities and country as a whole present daunting challenges (Msangi 2009).

Second, here we see Rwanda under Paul Kagame claiming to be another power in Congo in equal footing with the US and China in the words of
the president himself. No wonder feeling the heat but instead of seizing this opportunity to clear Rwanda’s name, Kagame, undiplomatically, arrogantly, anti-socially, insensitively, disgracefully and disrespectfully, walked out of a meeting on the situation in eastern Congo organised on the fringe of the 67th UN General Assembly, showing contempt not only to more than 14 world leaders who attended the meeting, including President Joseph Kabila, but also to the UN General Secretary Ban Ki Moon who chaired the meeting (Umurungi 2012). The meeting was called to break a stalemate over the Congo conflict after he was reportedly challenged by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belgium Didier Reynders over Rwandan support to the rebel group M23. The question is: how are we going to find durable solutions if Kagame can use blackmail to hold the whole international community hostage? 

Kagame, the American-like strongman in Congo, recently told PRWEB in an interview: ‘When the Chinese or Americans have companies in DR Congo making deals that is fine for the world to live with. Similarly, can’t Rwandan individuals and companies have the right to take part without Rwanda being accused? What right do other companies from China, America and wherever have to be in Congo that companies from Rwanda do not have? There are companies there from all over the world,’ wondered Kagame. http://goo.gl/t989G

Paul Kagame changes his story just like the weather. First it as the Hutu militia threat to Rwanda’s security; then the protection of ethnic Tutsi in Congo; now the right to do business just like China and the US in Congo.

The DRC is open to regional, continental and international cooperation but it is opposed to the looting of its natural and mineral resources through aggressions, occupations, massacres and rapes.

According to Filip Reyntjens, professor of African Law and Politics and Chair of the Institute of Development Policy and Management at the University of Antwerp, Belgium, the Rwandan government established a ‘Congo Desk’ of the ESO (External Security Organisation) which included a section called ‘Production’ which was in charge of the exploitation and trade of Congolese resources. Ugandan military and businessmen were engaged in similar activities. Rwanda’s and Uganda’s invasion of the Democratic Republic of Congo has led to what Reyntjens calls the ‘satellisation’ of large parts of Congo’s territory, owing to the extreme weakness of the Congolese state. This has in turn led to the privatisation and criminalisation of public space, to the advantage of both neighbouring countries and local, regional and international ‘entrepreneurs of insecurity’.” (Reyntjens 2004).

That is what Prunier (2008:336) calls ‘actions of looting supervised by the
states’ just like it was during the European Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648), in which looting was one of the fundamental activities of the contending armies. If that is the case, one may conclude that the war of invasion of Congo is financed out of Congolese natural and mineral resources.

5. RWANDA RESPONSIBLE FOR WAR CRIMES, CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY EVEN GENOCIDE IN CONGO

In our previous article titled ‘Complicit neighbours: Rwanda, Uganda and East DRC’, published by Pambazuka on 14 June 2012, we explained the genesis of the most recent attacks on the DRC was Rwanda, which has managed to get away with destabilizing the east of the DRC since 1998, this time through a group of Tutsi insurgents named M23, led by Bosco Ntangada who is wanted for war crimes and crimes against humanity by the international justice system. The M23 is already responsible for untold crimes against humanity, massacres, rapes and looting, as the latest UN Report written by a group of experts indicates. This is just one in a series of reports, including ‘DRC: Mapping human rights violations 1993-2003’, published in 2010, which have castigated Rwanda for war crimes, crimes against humanity, even crime of genocide in Congo.

Again, The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights under the leadership of Navanethem Pillay was responsible for producing the report. According to Friends of the Congo, it mapped and documented ‘the most serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed within the territory of the DRC between March 1993 and June 2003.’ The report generated widespread press coverage. The claim that the victims of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda may be culpable of committing a genocide in the Congo has generated a great deal of interest. In fact the report was leaked because the authors indicated that they were concerned that the language of ‘genocide’ may be watered down before the official publishing of the document; therefore they felt it necessary to leak the report to safeguard its integrity.

Although the report did not actually charge Rwanda with committing genocide in the Congo, it said that ‘it will be for a competent court to make a decision on the issue.’ Although a lot of the focus has been on Rwanda, the report also focused on other countries. It looked at the commission of human rights violations by numerous external players such as Uganda, Burundi, Angola, Zimbabwe and others. Also, it documented some of the internal human rights violations that have taken place. It is true that core elements of the mapping report were established in other UN reports as early as 1997. In the late 1990s, the United Nations charged Roberto Garreton to investigate human rights violations in the Congo. Garreton’s report documented gross human rights violations, crimes against humanity and possible genocide.
What initiated the launch of Garreton’s report? The discovery of three mass graves in North Kivu in 2005 was a stark reminder to the United Nations that the past human rights violations in the Congo had remained largely uninvestigated. This prompted the UN to reactivate earlier investigative efforts but on a much larger scale.

The ultimate purpose of the study as outlined by its authors was ‘to provide Congolese authorities with the elements they need to help them decide on the best approach to adopt to achieve justice for the many victims and fight widespread impunity for these crimes.’ The full report is available here: [http://goo.gl/EHcO6](http://goo.gl/EHcO6)

The fundamental question now is: Seeing that the report has referenced charges of genocide, does the International Criminal Court (ICC) have a role to play in bringing perpetrators to justice? When a state is either unwilling or unable to carry out investigations and prosecute, the ICC is brought in. However, the ICC’s jurisdiction is limited only to crimes under international law committed in the DRC since July 1, 2002 and most of the crimes addressed in the mapping report occurred before 2002.

How can Kagame who branded the Congolese as ‘the Ibicucu’ in his native Kinyarwanda language, which means, the ‘nobodies’ or ‘good for nothing’ (Braeckman 2003, p. 235), get away with it? Did he not say that the Hutu also branded the Tutsi as ‘cockroaches’ before killing them? Is he not more or less calling the Congolese the same, which therefore justifies the genocide he is committing in Congo? Who cannot make that comparison?

6. THE WAY FORWARD

The way forward for the very much troubled Great Lakes Region of Africa is an inter-Rwandan dialogue for Hutu and Tutsi to look at all the aspects of their problems in Rwanda, pave the way for reconciliation and the sharing of power. Rwanda must learn lessons from Northern Ireland, South Africa and Kenya recently. The Tutsi regime in Rwanda remains a problem, as Reyntjens suggests. Eighteen years after the 1994 genocide, Rwanda is experiencing not democracy and reconciliation but dictatorship and exclusion under the leadership of the Tutsi-dominated Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF), according to Reyntjens.

Reyntjens argues that although the government led by the RPF has achieved rapid institutional reconstruction and relatively good bureaucratic governance, it has also concentrated power and wealth, looted in eastern Congo, in the hands of a very small Tutsi minority, practiced ethnic discrimination, eliminated every form of dissent, destroyed civil society, conducted a fundamentally flawed
‘democratisation process’ and massively violated human rights at home and abroad in Congo.

The Belgian professor has as factual evidence the fact that the Rwandan army has several times invaded neighbouring Congo, where its initial security concerns gave way to a logic of plunder, rape and massacres of more than five million Congolese, as well as Hutu refugees, thus necessitating a special tribunal for Congo pending the political will on the part of the international community. Even the former British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, when presenting his mémoires, entitled Point of Departure, at City University, London, said in response to a question this writer had asked him, that ‘although Rwanda’s security concerns can be understood after the 1994 genocide, the current regime in Kigali bore a great responsibility in the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo.’

However, listening to former British Prime Minister Tony Blair praising Rwanda as ‘an inspiration to the world’ while on a visit there on 8 May 2009 and after talks with President Paul Kagame, despite Rwanda’s overlooked and shadier actions (invasion, economic pillage under the pretext of counter-genocide) in Congo, beggars belief. After his term in office, Blair accepted an unpaid ‘special adviser’ role to the Rwandan government to help it attract private investment as it seeks to build its economy (Wintour, 2008).

Rwanda, writes Reyntjens, has succeeded in avoiding condemnation by astutely exploiting the ‘genocide credit’ and skilful information management. Reyntjens concludes that the international community has been complicit in the rebuilding of a dictatorship under the guise of democracy. He warns that it assumes a grave responsibility in allowing structural violence to develop once again, just as before 1994, and that in years to come this may well lead to renewed acute violence (Reyntjens, 2004: 180-182).

Interestingly, Reyntjens confirms that those killed by the extremists of the old regime in 1994 were their opponents, Hutu and Tutsi alike, and that during the same period, the advancing RPF committed widespread war crimes and crimes against humanity, mostly against the Hutu and the clergy. Even Bosco Rutagengwa, the founder of the genocide survivors’ organisation Ibuka has now found asylum in the United States because he said that the Tutsi who were living inside Rwanda were the victims of a genocide, not the RPF Tutsi insurgents who came from Uganda and led by Fred Rugiema (who was killed in mysterious circumstances) and then by Paul Kagame! Former Hutu president under RPF Pasteur Bizimungu founded another party other than the RPF to challenge RPF’s mono-ethnic policy in politics and the organisation of the army. He was not only stripped of all his privileges as former head of state but was also thrown
into jail (Reyntjens, 2004: 180-182).

7. CONCLUSION
There will be no lasting peace in the Great Lakes Region unless Rwanda genuinely democratises. Anybody who opposes the regime is immediately accused of harbouring a ‘genocidal ideology’. However the genocide credit enjoyed by the regime in Kigali is wearing off because it is committing similar sorts of crimes in Congo. As of now, the Congolese people are the ones paying a price for their hospitality and for Kagame’s intransigence while his powerful backers are patting him in the back; as long as minerals still flow for him and for them. However, there is a Chinese proverb which says: ‘An army burning with righteous indignation is bound to win’. This applies to the people of Congo.

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Flim Flam Substitutes for Debate

Stephen Lendman (Pravda) 6 October 2012

So-called presidential debates are well-rehearsed, prescribed theater. Theater of the absurd best describes them. Election outcomes aren’t influenced. They don’t edify. They insult. Wednesday night was no exception.

Even some media scoundrels were underwhelmed. At least one was honest as far as his editors let him. London Guardian contributor Charles Ferguson headlined "America's duopoly of money in politics and manipulation of public opinion," saying:

"Behind the divisiveness lies a deeper bipartisan consensus in which donors own democracy and there are no votes (for) reform."

"Presidential campaigns aren't where you look for honest, serious" policy discussions. Candidates prefer "slogans." They steer clear of controversy.

"(S)ometimes, as with George W. Bush, we also get a moron." This election is different. We're "explicitly seeing the effects of America's new political duopoly" up close and personal.

It's not new. At most it's repackaged to look that way, but not to observers who know how things in America work.
Obama and Romney "completely (avoided or remained) dishonest about (key) economic issues." The bizarre was also evident. A Republican attacked a Democrat on unemployment. He, in turn, said give us more time. We'll fix things.

Obama's first term was spent wrecking them. Neither candidate plans undoing decades of damage. Both know the score but won't say so. They also claim they'll "reform Washington." Neither means it.

They avoided serious issues begging for discussion. They include "causes of the financial crisis; the lack of prosecution of banks and bankers; sharply rising inequality in educational opportunity, income and wealth (disparity)....the impact of industrialized food on” health and skyrocketing food and healthcare costs; budget deficits and national debt; disappearing jobs not being replaced, and war and peace.

How can what's most important be omitted? How can either candidate claim he debated? Politics and honesty are mirror opposites. Both candidates ignore what most needs addressing. Obama "can win because he's somewhat less bad, somewhat less utterly bankrupt, than the other guy. Welcome to America's new and improved two-party system." It's the same one, just more corrupt.

Salon editor at large Joan Walsh said Obama was "subdued, deferential, (and) over-prepared." Romney shook his "(E)ch-a-Sketch and lied his way through the entire debate with no challenge from moderator Jim Lehrer" or Obama.

The New York Times headlined "An Unhelpful Debate," saying:

Wednesday night "sunk into an unenlightening recitation of tired talking points and mendacity." Voters perhaps walked away saying a pox on both candidates. Romney avoiding discussing anti-populist policies he endorses. Obama failed to challenge the worst about him. He's got plenty of his own crosses to bear. Viewers weren't helped by moderator Jim Lehrer's pathetic performance. He never challenged either candidate on vital truths. Expect debates two and three to be painful repetitions of Wednesday night. Why anyone bothers to watch shows the deplorable state of the US electorate. Most are uninformed, out of touch, and indifferent.

A Chicago Tribune editorial said Obama "skipped this debate. (He) slumped his shoulders, smiled mostly to himself, and for some reason kept staring mostly down." Hope and change were gone. They never were there in the first place. USA Today said both candidates "avoid(ed) reality in
debate." Key issues were unexamined. The Washington Post said they "evaded the hard truths." Canned talking points substituted. It didn't surprise. It's always that way.

Both candidates "studiously maintained the evasions and omissions at the heart of their policies. The debate was wonky (but not) honest." Issues most important weren't discussed.

Obama and Romney "were strikingly complicit in failing to confront the magnitude of the fiscal challenge the winner will face immediately. The overriding feature of the debate was a tacit conspiracy of avoidance."

Russia Today (RT) called the evening "tepid." Arguments and accusations heard before were repeated. Same old, same old doesn't wash. Domestic issues were stressed. Slogans and one-liners substituted for solutions. "(M)any Americans may well be confused as to what exactly the differences are between the two candidates."

They're in lockstep on issues mattering most. Overall, barely a dime's worth of difference separates them. Duopoly power allows little wiggle room. What it says goes. Alternative parties are excluded. RT quoted Ralph Nader telling Time magazine:

America's "duopoly has every conceivable way to exclude and depress and harass a third party. Whether it's ballot access. Whether it's harassing petitioners on the street. Whether it's excluding them from debates. Whether it's not polling them."

"And with a two-party, winner-take-all electoral system, it's easy to enforce all those. Unlike multi-party Western countries where you have proportional representation, the voters (in America) know that if you get 10 per cent of the vote, you don't get anything. Whereas in Germany, you get 10 per cent of the parliament."

So voters say, 'Let's just vote for the least worst.' Half the electorate disses both sides and opts out.

Historian Gerald Horne told RT US voters lack alternatives. Party platforms and debates "exclude the critiques of the present dilemmas and problems that (American) people face, for example rising poverty, rising unemployment et cetera."

Whether in office, campaigning or debating, rhetoric substitutes for commitment. The best from Obama was saying vote for me and I'll try harder. Press TV called his Wednesday night performance "weak." Despite getting super-rich as a corporate predator, Romney ate his lunch.
He dissed Obama's economic policies. They're "not working. The proof of that is 23 million people out of work. The proof of that is 1 out of 6 people in poverty. (Wrong: one in two are or bordering on it according to Census data.) The proof of that is we've gone from 32 million on food stamps to 47 million on food stamps. The proof of that is that 50 percent of college graduates this year can't find work."

It's hard arguing with truths. Too bad most others were excluded. Not a word on imperial lawlessness, permanent wars, $1.5 trillion spent annually on defense, everything related to it, homeland security, intelligence, and black budgets as far as the eye can see with estimates only on what's in them.

What about banker bailouts, tens of billions in other corporate handouts, out-of-control corruption, a sham electoral process, and growing poverty at Great Depression levels! What about past and planned domestic spending cuts when stimulus is urgently needed! What about tax cuts for corporations and rich elites when vital people needs go begging! What about bipartisan governance making America no fit place to live in and a threat to world peace!

What about holding politicians accountable when they lie and betray constituents that elected them! What about addressing issues mattering most and changing things! What about doing the right thing instead of same old, same old!

Priorities not discussed include ending imperial wars, downsizing America's military, stimulating economic growth and creating jobs, holding criminal bankers and other corporate crooks accountable, addressing Depression level unemployment, homelessness, hunger, poverty, and overall human need no free society should tolerate.

What about fixing America's broken infrastructure instead of waging wars and destroying it in one country after another! What about prioritizing populism instead of slash and burn budget cuts affecting ordinary people most! What about giving government of, by, and for the people real meaning! What about doing what never was done before! What about making America beautiful instead of being hated for threatening humanity! Don't expect any of the above from Republicans and Democrats. Blackguards, scoundrels, scalawags, and menaces best describe them. Expect more of the same or worse post-election.

It doesn't matter who wins. It's the American way. It's up to ordinary people to change things. They have to do it on their own. It won't happen any other way.

english.pravda.ru
Wildcat strike movement may birth new political party

Mandy de Waal 4 October 2012

The bloody violence, police clampdowns and wildcat labour strife that’s spreading across the country like a virus is not just about wages and living conditions, it’s about something much bigger. It is the contagious birth struggle of an emerging socialist movement that could deliver a new labour party to South Africa. By MANDY DE WAAL.

The wildcat strike that started on Marikana’s platinum mines on the North West, and which has already seen the loss of some 46 lives, has now spread to the iron ore industry. Workers at Kumba Iron Ore’s Sishen mine in the Northern Cape have downed tools. Kumba Iron Ore is an Anglo subsidiary.

On the Gauteng/North West border, thousands of workers at Harmony Gold’s Kusasalethu mine near Carletonville started an illegal strike. “Last night, following a mass meeting, about 300 people started barricading the area to Kusasalethu. They hindered the night-shift guys from going underground,” said Marian van der Walt, the mine’s corporate and investor relations executive. She added that negotiations had begun between management and strikers, who had already handed over a memorandum of wage demands.

But the industrial action isn’t only about better wages, says Mametlwe Sebei, a leader in SA’s Democratic Socialist Movement, which is helping to co-ordinate independent strike committees in Rustenburg and beyond.

“We are campaigning for a new party, for a labour or socialist party to
emerge,” says Sebei, who added that the Democratic Socialist Movement was mandated to draw up a resolution that can be voted on by mine workers to make a case for a party. The paper, which has not yet been circulated amongst workers, would also highlight the programme and ideology of what would be a new socialist, labour party.

“This is not an idea that emerged from us at the Democratic Socialist Movement, but in actual fact it has emerged on the ground,” says Sebei. “That is not to say that we haven’t been consciously campaigning for this, but the circumstances and conditions in Rustenburg have rapidly changed consciousness. What the workers are asking is: ‘What are we doing about this government that is killing us?’ The ANC has never represented the working class, and even though this country has been built on the blood of mining workers, neither does Cosatu.”

Sebei said the spreading wildcat strike action illustrates that the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and Cosatu are losing their power base amongst workers. “The illegal strikes show that NUM has consciously acted against the mandate it has been given by the workers, and if anything they are the conscious agents of the mining bosses. NUM through Cosatu is knotted into the tripartite alliance that of and by itself ties itself to the interests of the mining bosses who are represented by the ANC.”

A case in point, believes Sebei, is the sponsorship of Cosatu by Patrice Motsepe, who ranks as the fourth wealthiest man in South Africa with a net worth of some R22.75 billion as at March 2012, according to Forbes. Motsepe has interests in platinum, gold, coal, iron and manganese through African Rainbow Minerals, the company that helped build his billions, and was one of the first big BEE winners post democracy, when mining rights were only granted to ‘empowered’ companies. In its profile, Forbes talks about how Motsepe is labelled as an ‘oligarch’ in this country.

“But for all the adulation, in South Africa such success comes with a price: being labelled an oligarch. Even many blacks have complained that the country's 1994 transformation from Apartheid to democracy has benefited only the elite few,” the Forbes article on Motsepe reads. “The criticism stems from laws that require substantial black ownership in certain industries, including mining. A handful of politically connected individuals have grown enormously wealthy as a result,” the article states, pointing out that one of Motsepe's sisters, Bridgette Radebe, is married to ANC deputy chair and Minister of Justice and Constitutional Development, Jeff Radebe.

“Motsepe has been sponsoring Cosatu for years. If you look at the report for the congress before this one, Motsepe was the biggest donor. This
means that Cosatu is highly compromised,” says Sebei. As the Cosatu congress was underway in Midrand this September, Business Day showed African Rainbow Minerals to be the unions’ biggest private financial supporter:

“African Rainbow Minerals (ARM), owned by businessman Patrice Motsepe, is the largest private donor to the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu), having contributed R1.75m to the federation over the past three years,” the report read. “This does not include ARM’s donation to this year’s congress, where Mr Motsepe was again the biggest donor. The size of this year’s donation has not yet been disclosed.”

Motsepe funded Cosatu’s 2009 conference to the tune of R1m, and that same year donated R1.75m to a trust that supports dependents of deceased officer bearers.

“A debate has emerged about whether it is time to reconstitute the labour movement,” says Sebei. “This is a debate that is emerging within our own ranks, but the events of Rustenburg and the workers’ own action in defiance of mine bosses and NUM show that the move to earnestly rebuild the labour movement from scratch has begun. The workers will reclaim the labour movement for their own control and their own struggle, and I think that is a warning to Cosatu and to the rest of the other unions in Cosatu who think that they have a God-given right to lead the workers.”

Sebei said that the Democratic Socialist Movement was campaigning for a new socialist, labour party to emerge. “We need to be able to build a mass political party that will unite all the workers in the mining industry with all other workers in all other industries, but also with all communities in struggle, and with youth in campuses… this is an idea that has found its echo in Rustenburg and beyond.”

The call for a mass political alternative, which Sebei said would be based on the ideas and programme of socialism, would be given a loud voice on 13 October 2012 when workers, activists and youth would march from Church Square in Pretoria to the Union Buildings.

“We are saying that the entire mining industry, and the rest of the economy, must be brought under democratic control and the management of the working class. This means that mines must be nationalised first and foremost, so that the economy can be planned to meet the needs of the people, and not for the profits of those who have become rich at the expense of all of us during the past 18 years of democracy,” Sebei says.

According to Sebei, march organisers have been having significant problems with the police and local authorities “using every trick in the book” to try and stop the march from going ahead. “The authorities are
being very difficult and trying to block us, but we are giving ourselves all the time we need to ensure we comply with Constitutional requirements, so that our march can go ahead,” says Sebei, who believes that some 10,000 workers, activists and students will participate in the protest action in the country’s capital.

“The working class needs a political party and government of their own, one that will take the entire economy under democratic control to ensure that our sweat and blood is not for the few, and to ensure that the misery we are wallowing isn’t a natural order of things. Our country is enormously wealthy – wealthy enough to create a better life for those living in misery, poverty and unemployment. All the parties that exist currently are different shades of capitalism. There is no one party that represents the interests of the working class. If you look at the number of people who are qualified to vote and who don’t vote, it is not because of a lack of political interest, it is because no one represents the workers. There is no one to take our issues to government,” he says.

Government has failed South Africa’s poor, and what it has delivered to the working class is in too many ways disappointing. The notion that capitalism has betrayed the working classes is a global phenomenon which will not escape this country either. But its expression here could be more militant: those with nothing to lose may finally cry: “Enough!”

Sebei says that the police clampdown in Rustenburg, together with the difficulty workers and political activists have been experiencing in exercising their right to gather, are as a direct result of the rising interest in a new political party. He adds that the first matter to attend to should be the strikes, and anticipates it is likely that the new labour-driven political party will be launched next year.

dailymaverick.co.za

Mandy de WaalMandy de Waal is a writer who reports on technology, corruption, science, the media and whatever else she finds interesting. She loves small stories and human narratives, and dislikes persistent evangelists, bad poetry and the insane logic that currently passes for political rhetoric. Back in journalism after spending time in the corridors of corporate greed, de Waal has written for Mail & Guardian, Noseweek, City Press, Rapport, MoneyWeb, Brandchannel (New York) and a number of other good titles. She now writes for The Daily Maverick because it’s the smart thing to do.

Will the Russian Left Respond to Deepening Economic Crisis?
PAUL JAY, SENIOR EDITOR, TRNN: Welcome to The Real News Network. I'm Paul Jay in Baltimore.

And now joining us from Moscow for an update on things in Russia is Aleksandr Buzgalin. He's a professor of political economics at Moscow State University. He's also editor of the independent democratic left magazine Alternatives. Thanks for joining us again, Aleksandr.

ALEKSIANDR BUZGALIN, PROF. POLITICAL ECONOMICS, MOSCOW STATE UNIV.: Thank you for invitation.

JAY: So the recession deepens in Europe. Unemployment continues at extremely high rates in the United States. What is the situation in the Russian economy? How much is it affected by what's going on globally? And how is the left in Russia responding to it?

BUZGALIN: It's very important topic for us, and I'm very glad to talk about this with international audience. First of all, I want to stress that in Russia we have a very long and deep recession. It's not maybe new wave of crisis in all forms, but we have very interesting and specific elements of this recession which are not typical for the West.

And main form is nonpayments between different enterprises, firms, and so on. As a result, people typically are working for nothing. I have very interesting examples when one firm will order some work for another, the work will be done, and then this organization will wait for one, two, three, five months when money will come. It's very strange situation, but we do not have any real opportunities to fight against such situation. And this creates very big problems for ordinary people, because they do not have wages. They are working, but they do not have wages.

It's similar with problems of 1990s, when we had very deep crisis, not simply recession, and it's create absolutely [incompr.] atmosphere in the [incompr.] Plus a lot of problems in the sphere of education, health care, housing, are not solved.

And when people—officials, not people, officials are explaining that inflation is not so high, only 10, 12 percent, maybe a little less officially, they will never say that for ordinary people inflation is much higher, because all main consumer goods, plus public transport entering Russia,
it's very important for ordinary people, plus housing, heat, electricity, water supply, and so on. Prices in all these spheres are growing 15, 20, 25 percent and jumping permanently. So this is really big problems for our people.

Plus we still have a very unpleasant general atmosphere as far as political climate is concerned. We do not have dictatorship. We do not have even pure authoritarian regime. But people are tired from a situation where they're like puppets in the hands of officials, in the hands of mass media, in the hands of mass culture.

And this is very unpleasant situation for many Russians who became more citizens after rallies which took place last winter and spring when we had up to 100,000 people on demonstrations in main squares. And it was really important, and atmosphere, spirit of these rallies were very unusual, because ordinary Russians understood that they're real members of civil society, maybe first time after many years. Only in 2005 we had big rallies against monetization of benefits.

JAY: Right. When we talked about this last, about the big rallies, you pointed out that much of the leadership were coming from forces that in fact wanted a different variation of neoliberal economics, and they were raising the democratic questions sort of to serve those interests—maybe less so about, you know, a kind of more genuine democracy. So if that's the case, how is the left responding to that now?

BUZGALIN: It's very important that you ask this question, because the last rally, which took place September 15, had officially 12,000 participants. Really it was maybe two times bigger, but still not as big as before, and the whole atmosphere was not so enthusiastic as before. But among all these people, participants, left groups, left, different political, social movements and organizations were represented much, much bigger than before, and it was not maybe 5, 10 percent of people with red flags or left slogans, but maybe 30 or something like that.

The situation is moving and changing. A lot of people understood that these formal democratic slogans, which are important—honest elections and so on—really will not solve deep social contradictions. And to solve them is key question now for Russia, not only democratic. Both democratic and social questions are important [incompr.] And this is the main agenda of forum of leftist forces, second forum of left forces, which took place before a rally September 8 in Moscow in a big hotel. And more than 300 people came—mainly from Moscow, because the Russian periphery could not come. They simply cannot pay for ticket. To come from Siberia to Moscow costs more than to fly to New York now. For ordinary Russians it's necessary to spend three, four, five months' wage to
come to Moscow, and they cannot do this. But they were with us. We had a lot of requests and proposals from different cities, regions, and so on.

More than 20 different left organizations, different forms of non-Stalin communist organizations, people who were excluded from Communist Party of Russian Federation because they were too democratic and not enough Stalinist, not enough nationalist. It's like a joke, but that's true—they were excluded for this. All those people, including some Trotskyist groups, a lot of young people, left feminist girls, and so on, came together, made, I think, very strong and important declaration, made march anticapitalism, regular march also successful—not very big, but very active, and good, enthusiastic atmosphere on it.

It was not bad reflection of this event in local internet, and not only internet, mass media. So it's really movement forward. And I hope in the future we have more and more consolidation.

Now it's only coordination. We have coordination council of forum of left forces. It's approximately 30 leaders and militants of different organizations. It's interesting, but this council can work like organizations and social forums. It's mainly democracy of consensus.

**JAY:** And are they planning in terms of what they plan to do in terms of movements in the streets? Or are they also developing some electoral strategy?

**BUZGALIN:** Mainly it's now, first of all, a continuation of the street activity. But idea is to have bigger left influence and more social slogans and goals in this movement, I mean, street activity. And this is successful tactic, not strategy, I can say. Then we are planning to make new social forum, because we must and we want to—not must, we want to involve different social organizations—greens, trade unions, and so on. And they are—独立 trade unions, they're really left in my country. So I between the successful also integration of political and social, different initiatives.

I'm afraid to make very optimistic prognosis in Russia, because we have very strong cooperation from different sides, from authorities, from even mass media, for trying not to show that we exist; from even opposition, because for Communist Party and Just Russia, they're thinking that we are competitors, and we are not. We want to work with them, and we are trying to do this, and sometimes successfully. So I have some positive, how to say, intentions and positive feelings about this process now.

**JAY:** And what's planned in terms of the opposition movement? The rally, you say, the last one, was not nearly as big as before. Why is that?
And where are things at in terms of the broader opposition movement?

**BUZGALIN:** First of all, their result is predictable, was predictable, because only formal slogans of very strange mixture of leaders, which were dominant before, led to the crisis of such form of demonstration as we had before. Now it's recruitment. And I hope the more we have social and democratic slogans on these demonstrations and other leaders and in other background and other networks included in these movements, the more we have success. And the question now is not simply 100,000 or 50,000. It's important, but the key question is atmosphere, activity, and continuation of the struggle. Now we have a small break, and I think we must have a small break for recruitment, for reorganization of forces and creation of new coalitions and umbrella organizations. And this process is developing, and [incompr.] I hope successfully and will be developed.

**JAY:** Alright. Thanks for joining us, Aleksandr.

**BUZGALIN:** Thank you. And sorry for this glass of water. It's not so simple at the end of the day to talk. But I was very, very glad to have this interview and I hope to continue cooperation. Thank you. Goodbye.

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

Aleksandr Buzgalin is a Professor of Political Economy at Moscow State University. He is also editor of the independent democratic left magazine Alternatives, and is a coordinator of the Russian social movement Alternatives, author of more than 20 books and hundreds of articles, translated into English, German and many other languages.

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**Indonesia: First general strike in 50 years**

Ted Sprague 2 October 2012

Tomorrow, October 3, will witness an important event in the history of the labour movement in Indonesia. For the first time in 50 years, Indonesian workers will carry out a national general strike which will involve an estimated 2 million workers in 21 different cities. Three demands serve as the basis of this general strike: increases in the official minimum wage, an end to all outsourcing arrangements, and universal national health care for all.
This general strike is not something that falls from the sky. It is the culmination of the radicalization process in the workers movement for the past one year. Radical actions of hundreds of thousands of workers who have gone on strike and blockaded industrial areas and major highways; the leadership of the workers in the movement against the fuel price increase this March that forced the government to back down; the largest May Day rally with 160,000 workers on the streets, followed by the formation of the MPBI (Council of Indonesians Workers and Labourers) that united 5 million workers; all these form a continuing process that leads to this general strike.

Workers have also started to fight for demands that go beyond the confines of their factories, from workers in Gresik, an industrial area in East Java, who fought for free education for the people to all-Indonesia workers’ actions against a fuel price increase this year. Workers’ struggles have gone beyond “day-to-day demands in the factory” to “day-to-day demands of the wider masses”. This in turn will touch on the questions of politics and power. To win “day-to-day demands in the factory”, it is normally enough for workers to strike in the said factory to press the boss. However, to win “day-to-day demands of the wider masses” (free healthcare, free education, etc.), the struggle has to be brought to a wider political stage. It is here that the question of state power is posed, where economic struggle is linked to political struggle. It is also here that workers find their leadership role in the struggle for the general well-being of the masses.

The Indonesian working class has gone through a number of important phases in the past 50 years, ones which are filled with ebbs and flows, advances and retreats:

1. **Period of Glory (late 50s to early 60s)**
The labour movement is at its peak in the late 50s and early 60s, with SOBSI as the largest workers’ federation at that moment, claiming a membership of 3 million workers, even more than any federation or confederation today.

2. **Defeat (1965)**
In 1965 the labour movement suffered its biggest defeat, destroyed physically and ideologically in the hands of the New Order regime.

3. **Rebirth (mid 1980s)**
The shift in the Indonesian economy from oil-gas exports to manufacturing in the mid-1980s created a new layer of proletariat. This new proletariat, thrown into the factories in their thousands, was one of the forces that shook the Soeharto regime. The number of recorded strikes...
in the 1990s increased significantly, from 61 in 1990 to 300 in 1994.

The 1998 Reformasi Movement, even if it didn’t bring about a fundamental change, opened the democratic gateway for the workers. Independent trade unions mushroomed in the aftermath of 1998. Meanwhile, SPSI workers, awakened by the Reformasi, also started to shake this New Order trade union. (The SPSI, the state sponsored union and the arm of the regime in the workplaces, was until 1998 the only recognised workers’ organisation.) The stranglehold of the SPSI was weakened and splits took place. In this period, workers were re-learning their long-lost fighting traditions. This general strike will be the next phase in the history of the Indonesian labour movement, a turning point whereby the working class becomes a real political force that is not only recognized and respected by the wider masses but also feared by the ruling class. Workers with their national strike, for the first time will enter the national political arena. In the eyes of the toiling masses, they will no longer just be “tens or hundreds of workers in factories demanding wage increases”, but they will be seen as the Indonesian working class who fought for the welfare of the whole people of Indonesia. In the period of Reformasi, this position was held by the students who became an extension of the voice of the people. Today workers will start claiming their historical role as the class that leads the struggle of the whole of the oppressed masses.

The complete victory of capital over labour during the Soeharto dictatorial regime made the Indonesian capitalist class somewhat arrogant. For the past 50 years since the destruction of the labour movement, they have never felt seriously threatened by the working class. They even believe themselves that there is no longer any such thing as the working class, that there are no longer classes in society, in other words a “bourgeois classless society” has been attained. This national general strike will wake the capitalists up from their sweet dream and make them learn to fear once more the might of the working class.

One thing that has to be noted by all revolutionaries is the fact that this general strike has been initiated by the MPBI, which can be generally described as a reformist or even yellow trade union. This emphasizes once again the fact that when the workers move they will use whatever organizations they have in their hands, regardless of how reformist or even corrupt their organization or the majority of their leaders are. The bulk of the workers are still in these reformist organizations. It is therefore the task of revolutionaries to orientate to these organizations. Attempts to isolate oneself in red trade unions will only separate the revolutionaries and their ideas from the wider layer of workers.

Statements of support from many red trade unions for this general strike,
and even the involvement of some of them, are a correct step. This step has to be deepened and should not stop here. The task of the most advanced workers is to orientate toward workers whose consciousness is lagging behind, no matter where they are. We have to be able to work in any workers’ organizations, from the reddest ones to the reactionary ones if need be. There shouldn’t be obstacle in principle raised against working in reformist workers’ organizations.

This first general strike will not immediately bring about successes. Like a baby who is learning to stand for the first time, it will fall numerous times. But we know that at the end of the day the baby will stand, and then walk, run, and jump. Also when the baby stands up for the first time, the world will look very different to him/her. This general strike will shake the consciousness of a wide layer of workers. They will start seeing beyond their factory gates, that out there are millions of workers whose fate and interests are the same as theirs. They will start seeing themselves as a class for itself. They will start seeing themselves as the class that can – and must – lead the struggle of the whole oppressed people.

The Indonesian working class has begun to stand up and walk upright with confidence. Those who in the past denied the revolutionary potential of the workers are now faced with hard facts. They can no longer close their eyes to the might of the working class. And for those who will still continue to deny the role of the working class after this general strike, we will leave them to the dustbin of history as the workers move forward toward their historical task: the overthrow of capitalism and the building of socialism.

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Occupy South Africa – Alive And Kicking

Joe Hani and Tim Gee 1 October 2012

When Tahrir Square was occupied as part of the struggle against President Mubarak in Egypt, it became the iconic image of what was dubbed the ‘Arab Spring’. Inspired by events in the Middle East, when US activists set up tents in New York’s financial district it began the global phenomenon ‘Occupy’.

But one part of the movement has been consistently overlooked by international press, namely the groups that adopted the ‘Occupy’ moniker in sub-Saharan Africa. I asked Joe Hani, an activist with the ‘Taking Back
South Africa’s online campaign (part of Occupy South Africa) to help shed light on the movement in his country.1

**How did the Occupy movement in South Africa start?**
It started with a loose coalition of organizations and organization members staging protests in different cities across South Africa on 15 October 2011 and thereafter. The organizations involved to my knowledge include Taking Back the Commons, Communities for Social Justice, the Unemployed People’s Movement, Students for Social Justice, the Democratic Left Front, September National Imbizo, the Zeitgeist Movement, Anonymous South Africa and the groups involved in Occupy COP17.

**What are the achievements of the Occupy movement in South Africa so far?**
In my opinion, the greatest achievement thus far of the groups involved in the Occupy South Africa idea was that they exposed both the African National Congress (ANC) and the Democratic Alliance (DA) simultaneously as two sides of the same corporate obedient anti-poor political party coin.

This was most clearly seen when the Unemployed People’s Movement and their leader Ayanda Kota were attacked by the ANC government in the Eastern Cape and the poor communities of Cape Town were attacked during Occupy Rondebosch Commons by the DA government in the Western Cape.

**What was your view of the Occupy movements of the US and Europe?**
Personally I give them my general support in so far as they attempt as a people’s movement to seriously challenge the entire political leadership and corporations behind them in their countries. I am in touch with some of the good people involved in the Greek uprising and the Real Democracy movement in Spain too.

Occupy South Africa, however, does not – and should not – attempt to simply imitate these groups, and we recognize that in South Africa we have our own unique dynamic and we move in accordance to our own challenges.

**What challenges has Occupy South Africa faced?**
The biggest challenge is the poor and the workers getting rid of the false socialist leeches who attach themselves to the people’s struggle when the opportunity becomes ripe while continuing their allegiances to the ANC, the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) who are in fact the very South African
government we are fighting.

I predicted in my last interview with ‘People vs Profit’ that the coming South African uprising will expose the false Left before it brings down the capitalists. This is what we saw earlier this month when striking miners were effectively massacred by a coalition of a transnational corporation (Lonmin), the ANC state police and NUMSA (COSATU) Trade Union. Then the SACP condemned the murdered workers and called them hooligans. Our challenge is to tell groups and individuals who have ambitions of somehow attaching themselves to the ANC that the ANC and COSATU leadership are enemies of the people and we regard them as such.

What’s next for Occupy in your country?
While Occupy South Africa should, I believe, forget too much debate and just get out on the streets and make noise, I also believe that ultimately the uprising in South Africa will not come from these organizations but rather from simple people like Andries Tatane and the Marikana miners, who may not have been intellectuals but whose actions spoke louder than a thousand words.

I read a line of prose that says ‘It is better to die on our feet than to live on our knees’. All groups should now join the uprising. Even groups that focus solely on social issues like crime should realize that social injustices will not be solved without solving economic injustices first.

I make this call in particular to largely White and Muslim groups. To the people of the script I also say that the Bible says that ‘The righteous care for justice for the poor but the wicked have no such concern’ and to the Muslims of the Cape Flats I say that Muhammad said: ‘None of you has complete faith when he goes to bed full while his neighbour (in Khayelitsha) goes hungry’. Let us all rise up and never look back.

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