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Shadow of Liberation

Contestation and Compromise in the Economic and Social
Policy of the African National Congress, 1943–1996

Vishnu Padayachee and Robert van Niekerk

This book seeks to answer the question of what happened between 1990 and 1996, years during which the ANC abandoned its earlier advocacy of a social democratic welfare state to embrace instead ‘market driven’ neo-liberalism. Padayachee and Van Niekerk’s achievement in researching this story from the surviving archival materials as well as the recollections of participants is impressive. Combining fine scholarship with vivid narrative, this is an economist’s detective story.

— Tom Lodge, Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences and Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Limerick

When the prospect of a negotiated settlement came onto the political agenda in the 1980s, one outcome of policy discussions within the ANC was the birth of the Macro Economic Research Group (MERG). This book provides the first comprehensive account of what became of MERG, once considered the ANC’s ‘trickle up’ economic plan, and sheds interesting light on a chapter of our recent history that is often forgotten.

— Z. Pallo Jordan, head of ANC’s Department of Information and Publicity from 1987, cabinet minister 1994–2009, and a member of National Executive Committee of the African National Congress until 2014.

Shadow of Liberation explores in intricate detail the twists, turns, contestations and compromises of the African National Congress’ (ANC) economic and social policy-making, particularly during the transition era of the 1990s and the early years of democracy. Padayachee and Van Niekerk focus on the primary question of how and why the ANC, given its historical anti-inequality, redistributive stance, did such a dramatic volte-face in the 1990s and moved towards an essentially market-dominated approach. Was it pushed or did it go willingly? What role, if any, did Western governments and international financial institutions play? And what of the role of the late apartheid state and South African business? Did leaders and comrades ‘sell out’ the ANC’s emancipatory policy vision?

Drawing on the best available primary archival evidence as well as extensive interviews with key protagonists across the political, non-government and business spectrum, the authors argue that the ANC’s emancipatory policy agenda was broadly to establish a social democratic welfare state to uphold rights of social citizenship. However, its economic policy framework to realise this mission was either non-existent or egregiously misguided.

With the damning revelations of the Zondo Commission of Inquiry into State Capture on the massive corruption of the South African body politic, the timing of this book could not be more relevant. South Africans need to confront the economic and social policy choices that the liberation movement made and to see how these decisions may have facilitated the conditions for corruption— not only of a crude financial character but also of our emancipatory values as a liberation movement – to emerge and flourish.

About the Authors

Vishnu Padayachee is Distinguished Professor and Derek Schrier and Cecily Cameron Chair in Development Economics at the School of Economic and Business Sciences at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. He was a member of the Steering Committee of the Macroeconomic Research Group (MERG).

Robert van Niekerk is Chair of Public Governance at the Wits School of Governance. He was active in policy-making processes for a democratic South Africa in education and health during and after the 1990’s transition era, including serving as a co-ordinator and policy analyst for the health section of the National Commission on Higher Education.

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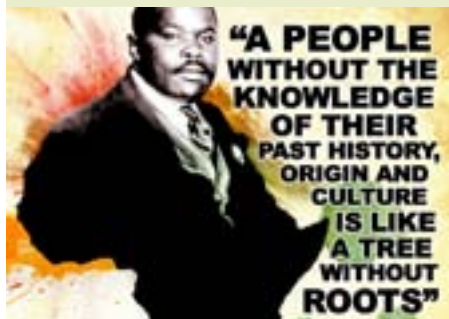
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Something has got to give



We have a gang economy in many townships around the country. People left with such hopelessness that they will ever get employment, even at a poverty wage, that they participate in a parallel economy of drugs and abuse.

AS IF IT WASN'T BAD ENOUGH. AS if the suffering of the impoverished masses of South Africa wasn't deep enough. Already we are experiencing unprecedented levels of homelessness and hunger. Already we are witnessing a seemingly endless wave of retrenchments, as a manufacturing industry, already decimated in the last 25 years, continues to shrink. Already, as we have highlighted in this magazine recently, we have a gang economy in many townships around the country. People left with such hopelessness that they will ever get employment, even at a poverty wage, that they participate in a parallel economy of drugs and abuse. They are not deviant individuals – they are people desperate for an income. Scared and desperate to feed their families.

Over 10 million South Africans cannot find work. 12 million by some methods of calculation. At least 38% of the workforce.

And the ANC/SACP government wants to lay down an austerity agenda on that base. They want to cut public expenditure, as we reported in *Amandla!* 66, by 5% in 2020 and 6% in 2021.

There is no mystery about who suffers from cuts in public expenditure. The major consumers of public services are the poor. The wealthy, in South Africa, have

their own hospitals, their own doctors and their own schools and universities. The government can cut public health expenditure as much as they like. It won't affect the members of Discovery Health. Their risk is a different one – predatory doctors who will chop them up for profit. But it will affect the long lines of poor and working class people who form the queues outside the clinics; who queue all day to get treatment. Already, some of them get sent home if they have not got there early enough. The numbers sent home will increase. The numbers who fail to get reasonably prompt treatment will increase. The numbers who don't get the medicine they need will increase. The numbers who die in our health facilities are increasing.

ANC factionalism prevents movement

THIS SITUATION IS, BY ANY HUMAN definition, a crisis. And yet what happens? The government of the ANC and SACP (and Patricia de Lille) is driving the skorokoro economy in the wrong direction.

We said in this editorial at the beginning of this year that the major challenges for Cyril Ramaphosa were going to be two confrontations with organised workers. One would be with

NUM and Numsa at Eskom. The other would be with the public sector unions around shrinking the size of the public sector wage bill. In general, the forces of neoliberal capital, represented by the ratings agencies, are pulling them in this direction. And they are wedded to that neoliberal strategy – the smaller state and the expanded private sector.

What deters the Ramaphosa faction from actually making progress with that strategy is not primarily fear of the organised working class. Yes, it's true that, even if Cosatu is a shadow of its former self, public sector workers are still capable of responding if their interests are seriously threatened. But the more serious threat is from the “revolutionaries” of the Magashule / Zuma, “Radical Economic Transformation” faction, waiting for their opportunity.

Neoliberalism is yesterday's strategy

MEANWHILE, THE LESSONS OF THE small, outsourced state are being increasingly revealed. The mass protests in Chile against the results of the most extreme version of neoliberal strategy. Privatising, retrenchments, cutting budgets, withdrawing subsidies, raising user fees – all of these increase the costs and pain for the poor. They are fuelling protests from Chile to Iraq, from Sudan and Iran to Lebanon. We report on some of these in this issue of *Amandla*.

And the irony is that these neoliberals who want to shrink the state are so far behind the times. They ignore:

- The failing outsourcing giants of the UK economy.
- The forced de facto renationalisation of train services because of the sheer incapability of outsourced companies.
- The private prisons which abuse prisoners.

AS WE ARE WRITING, THE BRITISH Labour Party, simply a party of left social democracy, is standing in the British general election on a huge programme of renationalisation – water, railways, energy, even broadband.

In another instance, the recent agreement signed between the unions and South African Airways makes provision for a task team whose mandate is to see how much money could be saved by insourcing services. For so long, the

dominant narrative has been – if you want to save money, outsource. The lesson that is starting to be learned is that, no matter how much you drive down wages and working conditions through outsourcing, it doesn't guarantee that you save money. What it does guarantee is that you reduce standards.

They will come for you

AT THIS POINT, THOSE who still have full-time, “permanent” jobs have a choice. To adapt a classic cautionary tale: first they came for the steel workers, and I did not speak out because I was not a steel worker. Then they came for the public sector workers, and I did not speak out because I was not a public sector worker. Then they came for me. and there was no one left to speak for me.

The “permanent” workers, members of Cosatu and Saftu, can keep quiet and hope that no one comes for them. They can breathe a sigh of relief that they didn't work for Highveld Steel (1,800 retrenched), Standard Bank (1,200), Tongaat Hulett (5,000), Sibanye-Stillwater (3,450), Multichoice (2,000), ArcelorMittal in Saldanha Bay (1,000)... They can play Russian Roulette and hope that the next retrenchment doesn't hold a bullet for them.

Or they can seriously mobilise to change the direction of the government.

How to avert disaster

WE HAVE TO BE CLEAR STRAIGHT AWAY. A one-day stayaway, even two one-day stayaways, will make no difference. They are simply token events. They say – we want to show that we disapprove; but we know that we can't stop what is happening. The situation is now far too severe for expressions of disapproval. If “crisis” is an overused word, we are facing disaster.

So, if expressions of disapproval are insufficient, what must we do? We cannot prescribe the way forward from this small magazine. But we can illustrate the scale of need and possibility. If token one-day action is not useful, what might be? To actually stop government in its tracks

would require action that continues until it achieves its goal. That would mean the “rolling mass strikes” that are often talked about but never implemented. Steelworkers out today. Food workers out tomorrow. Prison workers out the day

negotiate training layoff schemes and the most generous packages we can get, and we accept. Management buys off our members with packages they feel they can't resist. The training received by retrenched workers is enough to salve the consciences of the employers who get rid of them. But it's not enough to make any difference to the lives of those workers. They are plunged in an instant from the inadequate but tolerable conditions of an exploited worker to the misery of unemployment and unemployability.

So what alternatives are there? At the very least we must start to think of developing exemplary struggles of working class resistance. Argentinian labour history contains many examples of factory occupations in response to waves of retrenchments and factory closures. The British have, from time to time, done the same. The well-known historical example of an armaments factory in Britain, Lucas Aerospace, which, although ultimately it was never implemented, produced a plan to turn an armaments factory into a manufacturer of socially useful goods. This plan was produced out of an alliance of progressive intellectuals and workers. They said that, bad as the situation is for us, we have not accepted

defeat. We are laying down, for future generations, markers for what workers self-organisation can do.

So, it is time to get out of the routinist box of retrenchment consultations and the occasional one-day mass action. They are fine for a situation where we are not under immediate threat. That is not where we stand today. Today we stand on the edge of a precipice of disaster. The political leadership is leading us over the edge. Are we going quietly? ■



The government of the ANC and SACP (and Patricia de Lille) is driving the skorokoro economy in the wrong direction.

after. Mineworkers the next day. Teachers the day after that. Your turn will come round once a month.

It's painful to lose a day's wages every month, but it's manageable. And it keeps the pressure on continuously. It can be ramped up as the immediate situation demands. The only drawback it has is that it requires intensive organisation. It would require unions to go back down to their members and organise, educate and mobilise in ways that we haven't seen in the labour movement for many years, to the point where some wonder if those muscles still exist. But perhaps that analogy is a useful one. Because the only way to restore atrophied muscles is to exercise them.

Similarly with retrenchments. At the moment we complain, we consult, we

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The views expressed in these articles do not necessarily reflect those of the Alternative Information & Development Centre, or the *Amanda!* Editorial Collective.

news briefs & social media

news briefs

Hong Kong election

AFTER WRITING THE ARTICLE ON PAGE 14, Au Loong Yu sent us this update after the local government elections:

The landslide victory by the opposition in the current local election could be considered to be a referendum on both the Hong Kong government and Beijing.

The people's voice is a clear and loud "No" to the latter's hard-line policy. In general, the opposition parties enjoy 55-60 percent support in legislative elections. But in local elections, such as these, they drop to 40 percent. The fact that the opposition has garnered 57 percent (up to now) of the vote, compared with the pro-Beijing parties' 41 percent, is surely a big victory.

In terms of seats, it is an even bigger victory. Opposition parties got 388 seats in total, an increase of 263 seats, while pro-Beijing parties lost 240 seats and were only able to retain 59 seats. The popularity of the pan-democrat camp could already be seen in a poll before the election: 83



In recent months there have been numerous incidents of police brutality meted out against zamazamas (artisanal miners) operating in the Langlaagte area on the West Rand.

percent of the population lay the blame of violence at the door of the government, while 40 percent thought it is chiefly the protestors' responsibility.

What this poll shows also coincides with another poll: 70-80 percent of the population support the five demands of the movement. Still, nobody ever thought that the pan-democrats could win such a landslide victory in a local election. Especially when it occurred in a context where the movement is in a decline. At the time of writing, the police have been laying siege to the Polytechnic University since last week. Despite several dozen protestors still refusing to give themselves up, there is little they or their supporters outside can do.

The victory in the election surely boosts the morale of the opposition in general, thus neutralising the demoralising effect of the defeat at the two universities. Today more than sixty newly elected district board members went to the gate of the university to express solidarity with the protestors inside. That is also an encouraging scene.

Amadiba Crisis Committee

IN NOVEMBER 2018 THE HIGH COURT ruled that 128 directly affected applicants and the Umgungundlovu community have the Right to say No to the "Xolobeni Mining Project". The following month, the Department of Mineral Resources (DMR) applied for leave to appeal. Since then

they have done nothing. The case can only proceed if DMR applies to have the case set down. But they continue to do nothing. So now the Umgungundlovu community has applied to the court to have the appeal dismissed.

It seems that the DMR has learned from their former boss, Jacob Zuma, the art of playing the judicial system. Exhaust the opposition with legal tricks until they run out of patience or money.

This is the same ANC government which stood for election on the slogan "Better life for all". Apparently "all" didn't include rural communities like Umgungundlovu.

Global car sales

THE GLOBAL AUTO INDUSTRY CONTINUES to slump, mainly due to broke consumers after a decade of low-interest rates and endless incentives.

The auto slowdown has sparked manufacturing recessions across the world, including manufacturing hubs in the us, Germany, India, and China. A prolonged downturn will likely result in stagnant global growth as world trade continues to reduce.

Global auto sales fell by 1.2 million, from 81.8 million in 2017 to 80.6 million in 2018. That was the first annual decline in nearly a decade. 2019 sales are likely to fall by 3.1 million, or 4%, to 77.5 million. That's the most significant drop since 2008. The slowdown in auto sales has been one



The Umgungundlovu community won the Right to say No in court. Now the Department of Mineral Resources is stalling the process with its appeal.

of the largest contributors to the global manufacturing recession.

China has been labelled as the primary source of falling demand. So far this year, auto sales in the country are down 11% compared with the first ten months of 2018. There are no signs that a recovery in the industry will be seen in 2020. The US and Western Europe are expected to see declines of 2% this year. Brazil, Russia, and India are expected to record a drop of at least 5.5%.

South African auto assembly plants are part of that global system. So this could be another source of economic downturn for this country. And when the assembly industry slumps, it takes the supporting components industry down with it.

Police attack zamazamas

IN RECENT MONTHS THERE HAVE BEEN numerous incidents of police brutality meted out against zamazamas (artisanal miners) operating in the Langlaagte area on the West Rand. Support organisations such as the Legal Resources Centre (LRC) and the Benchmarks Foundation have visited the area on a number of occasions. Every time that visits have been made to Langlaagte, acts of police brutality, intimidation, assault and general criminality have taken place in the presence of the visitors or just as they were leaving the area. And when they are carrying out their illegal acts, SAPS members do not wear name tags/badges. So they hide their identity.

On 21st November, a group of miners was assaulted and robbed of cash by the police. One of the miners who was beaten was seriously injured and had to be taken to hospital

Amazingly, when Lt. Col. Sibande was asked to talk to his men and order them to stop the assaults, he said that speaking to them wouldn't make any difference because they do not listen to him.

It is ironic that it is the very police who treat zamazamas as outlaws engaged in illegal activity. Yet it is they themselves who are the thieves and robbers, out of the control of their commanding officer. We can see who are the real outlaws in Langlaagte. And it's not the zamazamas. ●

Child Support Grant

IT SHOULD HAVE ANOTHER NAME. Because the one thing it won't do is support a child. On 1st October it was increased by R10 to R430. That leaves it 23% below the food poverty line of R561. The Pietermaritzburg Economic Justice and Dignity Group (PMBEJD) has established a baseline cost of R576.67 to provide a basic nutritious diet for a small child between 10 and 13 years. The so-called Child Support Grant is 25% below that level. ●

National Minimum Wage

THE PMBEJD HAS ALSO LOOKED AT HOW a worker can manage on the minimum wage. In October 2019 a general worker earning the National Minimum Wage at

the 10% exemption level, and working for a full 23 days, earned R3,312 for the month. Transport cost R1,288 (38,9% of the wage) and electricity cost R598.52 (18,1% of the wage). Together, transport and electricity charges take up 57% (R1,886,52) of the National Minimum Wage, leaving R1,425.48 for all other expenses (including food).

The cost of a basic nutritional basket of food for a family of four was R2,353.55 and for a family of seven (the average household size for households living on low incomes in Pietermaritzburg) was R4,115.76.

So the bottom line is that it is impossible to feed a family properly on the much heralded national minimum wage. In October 2019 PMBEJD data shows that families are underspending on proper nutritious food by 23%. And that's the very best-case scenario. ●

social media

AIDC podcasts

FOR THE FIRST TIME, WE SHOWCASE podcasts, and specifically AIDC's new podcast series "Voices of the Streets". Here is Sizwe's response to *Voices of the Streets* – [Episode 2: Tito's budget for the rich.](#)

Sizwe:

THANKS FOR THE PODCASTS. I HAVE learnt and realised that the demands from the public have been restricted, perhaps by the understanding of politics or not understanding of politics. I don't claim to have understanding. But I feel really bad to hear people talk of water, toilets, jobs, but not touching economic freedom (not EFF), and not speaking of land. It seems the demands are selective. But AIDC must make more of these podcasts, also just play them in events, like book launch. Maybe even have a podcast listening option in the AIDC library, just to spark some fire (self awareness and introspection). ●

In response to the article in *Amandla!* 66 "GEFP, budget austerity and Eskom debt crisis"

John Richards

IN THE DAYS WHEN DEFINED BENEFIT funds were commonplace, an employer "contribution holiday" was often used to absorb unnecessarily high surpluses. Is that not an option in this case? A two year holiday would make R100m available to support Eskom in a budget-neutral manner without having to tinker with contractual obligations. ●

Sudan: a cry for justice and a revolution far from ending

By Muzan Aneel and Walaa Salah



Protestors near the Military Headquarters in April 2019. The protestors were dispersed violently by the military on the morning of June 3rd 2019, in what was later on known as the Military Headquarters' June Massacre.

IN MID-DECEMBER 2018, THE people of Sudan took to the streets demanding the overthrow of their dictator of 30 years, Omar al-Bashir, and his regime. The nation-wide protests continued for four months and were followed by a 58-day sit-in at the military's headquarters in 15 different cities in Sudan. The sit-ins started on April 6th 2019 and were dispersed violently by the military on the morning of June 3rd 2019, in what was later on known as the Military Headquarters' June Massacre.

Though al-Bashir is in jail facing corruption charges, Sudan is currently ruled by a power sharing agreement between his military apparatus generals and the opposition leadership. This fragile agreement did not achieve the demands of the protestors in overthrowing the regime. However, as its supporters often state, it did stop the bloodshed. Right now, Sudan lingers in a tension: on one

side there are arguments for stability and stopping bloodshed. On the other side there are arguments for justice and the continuation of the revolution to achieve its demands for freedom, peace, justice and full civilian rule.

Control over the military, militias and the police remains in the hands of the military half of the government. Meanwhile, the executive civil government is trying to walk a very fine line: providing the public with satisfactory outcomes without angering their military frenemies.

Protests revived

ON OCTOBER 21ST 2019, THE SUDANESE people revived their revolutionary customs of mid-day protests that sustained the first four months of the December 2018 revolution. Protestors took to the streets in over 20 different Sudanese cities on the 55th anniversary of the October 1964 revolution that

led to the fall of former President, Ibrahim About.

These protests came with demands varying from justice for the martyrs, to dissolving Bashir's ruling party, to returning the investments under army control to the public treasury, and many others. There were two sorts of issues in the demands: issues which the current transitional government has decided – up to now – to stay quiet about; and issues which it has made decisions on that were unsatisfying to the public. An example of an unsatisfactory decision is the formation of an investigation committee into the massacre of June 3rd. This committee came with many flaws, starting with the participation of the Ministry of Defense and the Interior in the investigation of crimes carried out by the Ministry's own troops.

The protests were all held under the common slogan of "supporting the civilian government and correcting the path of the revolution".

The tension between the two halves of the slogan cannot be denied. The first half confirms support for the government. The second, by demanding corrections, confirms that the transitional government has deviated from the path of the revolution. This is a reflection of the tension between, on the one hand, hope that the transitional government can achieve the "freedom, peace, and justice" people fought for. And, on the other hand, deep doubts that the power-sharing agreement which gave birth to this government will allow real change.

In the first weeks following the signing of the power-sharing agreement, the doubtful, critical voices were branded "pessimistic" and were alienated from the public debate. That is rapidly changing now, as we can see by looking at the number of protestors, cities and resistance committees that participated in the march of October 21st. And they did this without the leadership of the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC) coalition, for the first time since December 2018.

GLOBAL WAVE OF UPRISINGS

The change in public opinion against the current power structure in the country was gradual but with major milestones.

The missing body of an activist

ONE MAJOR SHIFT WAS ON OCTOBER 3RD 2019, when the body of a person who had been missing since the day of the massacre was found. Gussai Hamadto was the name of the young man, in his early 20s. He was killed on June 3rd. His body was in the morgue from June 6th, but he was not identified until four months later, on October 3rd. This is the same morgue where Gussai's family, friends, neighbourhood committee and the Missing People Initiative went to inquire about bodies from the day of the massacre. They were told, again and again, there weren't any.

Gussai's body was carried to his burial by protestors chanting that he was killed by al-Burhan, the head of the transitional sovereign council and the main representative of the military half of the government.

The severe mismanagement of the issue of justice for the victims of the massacre, seen in the story of Gussai, may be nothing but lack of capacity, systems or an individual mistake. There may be no ill intention to obstruct justice. But the rest of the events of the day were more worrying.

Protestors shot in Talodi

ON THE SAME OCTOBER 3RD, SUDAN witnessed what happened in Talodi. This is a small town, in a gold-rich area in southern Sudan, that protested. It held a month-long sit-in against the dumping of untreated, poisonous cyanide in the area, which was jeopardising the health, life and environment of the town's residents.

The sit-in succeeded in getting an official decision from the governor to close all the mining companies – known in Sudan as Death Companies – in the area. This decision was followed by all the companies around Talodi, with the exception of the two death companies owned by the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces and their commander, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, better known as "Hemeti". On the morning of October 3rd, the residents of Talodi marched to the companies, demanding their closure as per the official decision. They were met with live ammunition from Hemeti's soldiers.

On that night, a few minutes before midnight, the transitional government issued a statement. It condemned the loss of assets by Hemeti's death companies. It did not condemn the violations of human rights the residents of Talodi have faced.



On October 21st 2019, the Sudanese people revived their revolutionary customs of mid-day protests that sustained the first four months of the December 2018 revolution.

That was a night Sudan saw the transitional government prioritise maintaining good relations with their military partners – by protecting their investments – over justice for the oppressed. That was also the night we saw tyres burned in protests around Sudan, in numbers never seen since the power-sharing agreement was signed. In some places, copies of the power-sharing agreement were burned and there were chants against "documents that can't bring justice".

Justice first

THE EVENTS OF THIS DAY ALONE ARE A clear example of how the lack of capacity and of political will for justice are threatening an already very fragile social contract between the people and the transitional government. However, in the wider context, the government's economic decisions have not helped. Decisions such as the lifting of subsidies repeat the pattern of the same policies which led to the public anger that overthrew Bashir.

Looking at the statements made by the prime minister and his cabinet since they took office, it is very clear that stability and "economic development" are their top priorities. However, it seems that this transitional government is not aware of the depth and weight of the demands for justice. What the transitional government and many regional actors have not yet been able to grasp is that the slogan of "justice first" is not just a principled position. It is also very practical.

The oppressed people of Sudan have marched the streets on June 30th, four

weeks after the massacre – more than 7 million protestors. They marched against fear and for justice, chanting "we wear the blood of the martyrs around our necks". It is not logical to expect them to compromise on justice.

To avoid the tragedy of a total collapse, the transitional government and its regional and international partners must understand the commitment of the protestors to justice. They must learn the lessons of October 21st: the country will not see stability if the people do not see justice. Prioritising the compromise with the military over the demands of the people might seem like the easy way out. But first of all, it is unethical. If that doesn't matter anymore, then maybe it will matter that it is also a strategic mistake. It can lead the people, as they lose hope in the transitional government, to take the matter to the streets again to correct the path of the revolution. But this time without supporting the transitional government. ■

Muzan Alneel is an engineer, a Marxist activist and a blogger. One of many activists detained during the uprising, Muzan is one of the most important critical voices in Sudan today, pointing to the weaknesses and contradictions of the current political arrangement.

Walaa Salah is a human rights activist with a legal background. In 2007, she was the first woman and youngest ever to be elected as the President of the Khartoum Students Union. Walaa currently lives in Nairobi, where she works on Sudan issues, and travels back frequently to the country.



The most spectacular chain of events is what started in Tunisia in December 2010 and spread to the whole Arabic-speaking region in 2011, becoming known as the “Arab Spring.”

More than just a “Spring”

“Roar” editor, **Joris Leverink**, interviews **Gilbert Achcar**

This is an edited version of an interview that first appeared in “Roar” magazine.

IN LATE 2018, THE PEOPLE OF SUDAN took to the streets demanding an end to Omar al-Bashir’s authoritarian rule. This immediately triggered memories of 2010, when Mohamed Bouazizi burned himself to death in protest against the Tunisian regime. This set in motion a process of popular uprisings and revolutions across the region that have since become known as the Arab Spring.

Since then, massive protest movements have taken shape in Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon and Iraq. Each has its own specific triggers and dynamics, and they have had different degrees of success. In Sudan and Algeria, the people managed to rid themselves of their respective authoritarian rulers. In Lebanon, the government was forced to resign. The uprising in Egypt was short-lived and violently repressed, and the violent crackdown in Iraq has already cost the lives of hundreds of protesters.

Joris Leverink (JL): Earlier this year, when the people of Sudan and Algeria took to the streets en

masse, the question was raised whether what we were seeing was the beginning of a “Second Arab Spring.” Since then, mass revolts have erupted in Egypt, Lebanon and Iraq – each with different outcomes, and the latter two still very much developing stories. You have pointed out that the terminology of an Arab “Spring” was misleading to begin with, that the revolts of 2011-13 were not a come-and-go seasonal event, but rather the beginning of a long-term revolutionary process. Could you explain this.

Gilbert Achcar (GA): THE EVENTS we see happening now, across the globe, occur at two different levels. One is a general crisis of neoliberal capitalism, which was made worse by the Great Recession of 2008. This triggered a number of social protests across the globe and caused a political polarisation. This was expressed on the one hand in the rise of the far right. Fortunately, on the other hand, there have been significant developments of the radical left in some countries, including, most surprisingly, the United States and the United Kingdom.

Within that global framework, the most spectacular chain of events is what started in Tunisia in December 2010 and spread to the whole Arabic-speaking region in 2011, becoming known as the “Arab Spring.” The general crisis of neoliberalism revealed in the Arab region a very deep structural crisis related to the specific nature of its state system. The region’s developmental blockage was made worse by the prevalence of rentier patrimonial states. They are “patrimonial” in the sense that they are dealt with by ruling families as their private property. This developmental blockage caused a gigantic explosion of social unrest across the region, which can only be overcome by a radical change encompassing its political, social and economic structures.

That is why I emphasised from the start in 2011 that this was only the beginning of a long-term revolutionary process that will carry on for years and decades, as upsurges and backlashes alternate.

At the time of euphoria, I warned against the illusion that the region’s transformation will be fast and smooth, and at the time of gloom I kept asserting that there will be other uprisings, other “springs” to come.

What is now unfolding in the Arab region proves that it is indeed a revolutionary process for the long haul that began in 2011.

JL: What is common to all these different revolts?

GA: WHAT THEY HAVE IN COMMON IS A rejection of political regimes held responsible for increasingly intolerable social and economic conditions. Youth unemployment in the Arab region affects young graduates disproportionately in this part of the Global South. It is characterised by a relatively high rate of enrolment in tertiary education. The connection between this fact and uprisings that are mostly youth rebellions, in which educated young people play a leading role, is obvious.

JL: What has been the secret to the success of the uprisings in Sudan and Algeria? And what are the challenges that lie ahead for the movements in both countries?

GA: THE POPULAR MOVEMENTS learned the lesson of the Egyptian events. Protracted revolutionary processes are also learning curves: popular movements learn the lessons of previous revolutionary experiences and take special care not to repeat their errors. The Sudanese and

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The masses in Sudan and Algeria had no such illusions. In both countries, the uprisings remained defiant of the military. They understood that the army, in removing the president, only sought to preserve its dictatorial power. These were *conservative* coups, not even *reformist* coups. They kept their movement going.

But the key difference between the two movements is that there is no recognised leadership of the mass movement in Algeria, whereas there is very clearly one in Sudan.

The movement in Sudan has already gone far beyond what has been achieved in Algeria, where the military are just ignoring – or pretending to ignore – the popular movement. The grassroots Sudanese social organisation, the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), was formed in 2016 as an underground network of associations of teachers, journalists, doctors, lawyers and other professions. The SPA was decisive in laying the ground for what eventually led to the popular uprising. It grew massively when the uprising started: it was joined by independent unions sprouting up in various sectors until it ended up organising the bulk of the country's working class. This kind of coordinated network of unions and associations has been the most advanced type of leadership to emerge in the region since 2011. And it has become a model: in both

Iraq and Lebanon, there are ongoing efforts at grassroots organising inspired by the Sudanese model.

JL: In late September, protesters across Egypt took to the streets demanding the resignation of President Sisi. It was quickly and violently crushed. What is the difference between 2011 and 2019? And why did the people of Sudan and Algeria succeed in occupying the streets, whereas their Egyptian brothers and sisters failed?

GA: SISI HAS CREATED THE MOST repressive regime Egypt has seen in decades – a dictatorial neoliberal regime leading to massive impoverishment and huge inflation. The prices of food, basic staples, fuel, transport – all basic needs – have risen massively. Normally, people would have taken to the streets in great numbers to demand that these measures be repealed, but they were deterred by the repressive context.

A climate of terror has descended over Egypt since 2013. Additionally, the population can't see an alternative to the regime. And it brings us back to the question of popular alternatives represented by groups, organisations and associations – the problem of leadership. The recent attempts at mobilising against Sisi in September were significant, but they failed to reach the level required to take down a dictatorial government. It would need something on the scale of what happened in 2011 at the very least.

Another weakness is the legacy created by massive errors of the Egyptian left, the bulk of whom supported the coup in 2013, contributing to fostering illusions about the military and discrediting themselves. Egypt will need something like what we have seen in Sudan: the formation of a grassroots network capable of mobilising the population and providing an alternative in its eyes.

JL: Lebanon is currently witnessing what is probably the biggest popular uprising in its history. The movement has already forced the government to revoke some of the regressive taxes and Prime Minister Hariri announced his resignation. These are significant successes. But the movement keeps demanding the removal of the entire ruling class. What is the historic relevance of the current protests and how should we understand them in the context of the long-term revolutionary process?

GA: IN FACT THE ONGOING MASS movement is not the largest that Lebanon has seen in recent history. In 2005, you had a huge mobilisation against Syrian domination. But at that time, the country was divided along sectarian lines: a mass counter-mobilisation of mostly Shia people took place in support of the Syrian regime.

This time, what has been most impressive about the movement is that the whole country is involved and most



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importantly, given the sectarian nature of Lebanon's political system, people belonging to all religious sects.

Sectarianism is the key tool through which Lebanon's ruling class has traditionally controlled society. What is most important about the ongoing movement, and allows the building of horizontal solidarity, is that the movement encompasses various social groups: the poor, the unemployed, workers and even the middle-class. Against that, there have been attempts at countering the social mobilisation with sectarian mobilisation. Most prominent behind such efforts is Hezbollah. It has come forward as a prominent reactionary force, threatening the demonstrators with thugs and defending the existing structures of power.

However, in Lebanon, as in Algeria, there is not yet a recognised leadership of the movement, which started as a truly spontaneous uprising.

"Leaderless movements" are fine in the early phase of an uprising, but to go forward, the movement must organise in some form. Leadership is needed – not in the sense of some charismatic leader or "vanguard party," but in the sense of a network of grassroots organisations that can coordinate and steer the movement towards fulfilling its aspirations.

JL: We know the Iranian regime's involvement and connections in Lebanon, Iraq and Syria. Why is Iran keen on suppressing the protest movements in both Iraq and Lebanon, and how do you see that developing?

GA: IRAN IS A THEOCRATIC government, a clerical government, a sort of regime that can only be deeply reactionary.

Iran's regime is not motivated by anti-imperialism; they do not even use that term. They refer to the US with a religious phrase – "the great Satan." The regime has its own expansionist agenda and spreads its influence through the build-up of sectarian paramilitary forces in neighbouring Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, and in Yemen as well despite the lack of territorial continuity between Iran and that country.

In spreading its influence by such means, Tehran is not pursuing some progressive agenda. It is building up a regional empire that is as neoliberal and corrupt as the Iranian regime is. In Syria, they intervened on behalf of the regime against the revolution that started in 2011. Iran and its regional proxies have been crucial in enabling the Syrian regime to turn the uprising into a civil war, and to eventually win that war with its help and that of Russia. This was a blatant counter-revolutionary intervention that those who support it try to portray as part of an anti-Israel and anti-US strategic design. But that is not true: neither Israel nor the US wanted the overthrow of the Syrian regime.

The counter-revolutionary character of the Iranian regime is also obvious in the way it repressed mass protests in Iran itself. Likewise, the Iranian regime, through paramilitary forces connected to it, has been engaged in the repression of the Iraqi people's uprising. Iran is thus definitely part of the regional counter-revolution. Along with the Saudi kingdom, they constitute two rival counter-revolutionary poles at the regional level, as both Russia and the US are at the global level.

JL: Do you think it is part of Iran's strategy to provoke popular uprisings into taking up arms in

response to an extremely violent repression, so that it has an excuse to intervene militarily?

GA: THE UPRISING IN IRAQ INVOLVES the Shia population in open opposition to Iran's domination. The Shia are the very community that Iran is keen on keeping under its control. Tehran cannot afford to alienate these masses completely. In Lebanon, the uprising involves people from all sects and communities.

An important difference between Lebanon and Iraq is that the Iraqi Sunnis have mostly stayed aloof. The present uprising there has been essentially restricted to Shias until now, whereas in Lebanon it has been cross-sectarian from the very start.

The anti-Iran character of the uprising in Iraq is much more pronounced than in Lebanon, where Iran's direct interference is less prominent. This is one reason for the harsher repression in Iraq, where a high number of people have been killed already. On the other hand, the protesters are very keen on sticking to nonviolent forms of protest, especially in Lebanon, where the movement resembles those of Algeria and Sudan in that regard. That is because they know that if they fall in the trap and allow violence to escalate, it will provide the reactionary forces with the opportunity to crush the movement and deter it from carrying on.

JL: We are now talking about Chile, Ecuador, Haiti, Hong Kong, Catalonia: it is all connected. What is the best way to show international solidarity in confronting the system against which people are revolting globally?

GA: THE BEST WAY TO BE IN solidarity with an uprising in another country is to have one in your own. But it is also important, of course, to express cross-border solidarity with the uprisings.

And it is also crucial to condemn any reactionary attempts at putting the revolts down. In the future, one hopes there will be more direct connections between local organisations. There has been a lot of talk about the role of social media and new communication technologies in facilitating the coordination of local struggles. The same goes for solidarity between the movements of various countries. It is imperative to build real physical networks to carry the struggle to a higher stage. ■

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The uprising in Lebanon



Demonstration in Tripoli, Lebanon, on October 20th. What triggered this uprising were the taxes the government was planning to implement two months prior to the uprising, and which were to be included in the national budget in 2020.

Amandla! interviewed Mohamad Kleit, a Lebanese journalist specialising in international affairs and a socio-political activist seeking proper change in his country.

Amandla!: When did the uprising in Lebanon begin? I understand that it was spontaneous. Is that correct? If it was spontaneous what sparked it? Or, put in another way, what was the tipping point?

Mohamad Kleit: THE UPRISING began on 17th October at 6:30pm when a small group of people gathered in Riad Soloh square in Downtown Beirut. By 8pm, that small group of around 30 people grew to around 300 protesters. Then a big group joined an hour later, coming from other parts of Beirut, so the number gradually increased until it became around 5,000 by 2am. What triggered this uprising were the taxes the government was planning to implement two months prior to the uprising, and which were to be included in the national budget in 2020. The most notable taxes were new ones on fuel, food products, and strangely enough, WhatsApp calls.

A!: Are there uprisings throughout Lebanon, or is it confined to Beirut?

MK: THE PROTESTS HAVE COVERED most areas in Lebanon, such as Beirut, Jounieh, Jbeil (Byblos), Saida, Tyr, Nabatieh, Baalbek, Zahle, Aley, Chouf, Rashaya, Shtoura, Khalde, Ne'me', Barja, Akkar, Batroun, Jal el Dib, Bint Jbeil, and other smaller areas and towns.

A!: The impression that we get from the Western media, is that the cause of the uprising is corruption by politicians. Is that correct? Or are there other factors?

MK: THE CAUSES OF THE demonstrations go back to the 50s, when the political turmoil started in Lebanon between different political factions, that caused the civil war. This in turn made the country a cake that sectarian militia commanders and political leaders cut for their own benefit and to protect their interests, whether personal or sectarian-based. The system that was formed after the end of the civil war in 1990 was economically corrupt and based on a capitalist economic system. This led to them sucking money out of the people

without providing proper services in return, such as electricity, water supply to houses, public transport, fixing roads (5% of roads in Lebanon are fit for driving), and other related issues.

In addition to that, there are the banks, headed by the Central bank which has had the same governor, Riad Salame, since 1993. They have benefited a lot from the political system, and they have made huge profits. And they have increased Lebanon's national debt to almost \$103 billion. This in turn has increased general living expenses, while wages have remained low. (Beirut is one of the most expensive Arab cities). It's also worth mentioning that the US has put sanctions on some Lebanese individuals and banks that they claim support Hezbollah, which the US considers a terrorist group. In fact Hezbollah was formed in 1982 as a resistance group against the Israeli occupation. They became part of Lebanese politics in 1996.

The economic crisis that started recently has led the government to take austerity measures, while avoiding fighting the corruption of the banks, major businessmen, and politicians (present and former). So, on 17th October, the government put forward

the decrees as part of the 2020 national budget. The increased taxes on fuel oil, communication (a tax on WhatsApp calls), and others has caused an outrage amongst the public, who took to the streets to protest against the deteriorating economy, corrupt politicians, and Central Bank policies.

A!: Are there any political and/or religious organisations involved in the uprising?

MK: THERE ARE several political groups, mainly leftist and liberal movements such as The People’s Movement (left), Communist party (left), Youth Movement for Change (left), and Sabaa party (liberal), in addition to NGOs, youth groups, universities, environmental campaigns, and a few trade unions.

A!: Lebanon went through a terrible sectarian war in the period 1975-1990 that resulted in over 120,000 deaths. The scars are still very evident in Tripoli and in some buildings in Beirut. Is sectarianism still a feature of Lebanese life? Is there any danger of the present uprising degenerating into a violent sectarian conflict?

MK: OF COURSE THERE is. 15 years of civil war revolved around sectarian political groups and fed sectarian hatred. These sects and political affiliations have been there amongst people since the 50s. The hatred has continued as a psychological and societal aftermath of the war, where people of different sects won’t enter areas inhabited by people from other sects.

The uprising broke some of these barriers amongst people. But politicians and political leaders have used the “fear of returning to the civil war” as a scarecrow to make their supporters hesitate to join the masses in the streets.

A!: People are chanting ‘thawra, thawra’ – revolution,

revolution. Are there other popular chants expressing the outrage of the protestors?

MK: ONE PROMINENT CHANT WAS “hela hela hela hela ho” and the protestors would cuss one of the politicians or the Governor of the Central Bank. It’s worth noting that some groups have called it the “hela ho revolution”.

Other chants include “the people want

present population of Lebanon are Syrian refugees. Does the issue of refugees ever feature in the demands of the protestors (in a positive or negative way)?

MK: THE ISSUE OF REFUGEES HAS seldom been mentioned during the protests; I recall it was mentioned once by an activist. They chanted against a right-wing political leader and the

minister of foreign affairs, Gibran Bassil, because he created an anti-refugee atmosphere. He worked constantly on kicking them out of Lebanon and back to Syria. Now it’s also a demand by the Lebanese in general that the refugees should return to the safe areas in Syria, but not to act in a racist manner towards them.

But the main demands were economic reforms, snap elections based on full proportional representation, formation of a government of experts not political parties, and an unbiased legal system to take the corrupt politicians, businessmen, and bankers to court.

A!: This movement is unique globally in the almost party-like atmosphere of many of the gatherings – music, dancing, picnics. How did this come about?

MK: WELL, THE Lebanese are known to be life-lovers. We love to party and enjoy ourselves, even in serious situations such as protests and uprisings. Even in times when we have a political problem, we deal with it through joking and memes. It’s a double-edged sword though. It could be beneficial to grab attention

and at the same time it could belittle the seriousness of the situation.

A!: What are the forms of communication used by the movement to conscientise ordinary citizens who are not presently committed.

MK: WE’VE USED DIRECT communication through social media,



Aftermath of a car bombing just outside Beirut in May 1986. 15 years of civil war revolved around sectarian political groups and fed sectarian hatred. These sects and political affiliations have been there amongst people since the 50s.

to topple the system”. This is a famous chant that was used in 2010 during the anti-sectarian system protests. It was then heard in Arab countries that witnessed the Arab Spring revolutions.

A!: What are the movements demands? Is it only about political change or does it include economic change? For example, I understand that about 20% of the

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discussion panels in public spaces, and also word-of-mouth to spread the demands, goals, and activities of the uprising. We, as demonstrators, try always to explain practically and factually why we are protesting in front of the Central Bank, for example.

An indirect form of support to the uprising was, strangely enough, getting attacked and beaten up by political parties' supporters. This created a sense of outrage amongst the masses. We have witnessed in several areas more people joining a demonstration or a march after those politically affiliated supporters attacked the protesters.

A!: The uprisings have been ongoing for some time now. What will happen if there is no substantial change? What will you do?

MK: WE'VE ALREADY FIGURED THAT the fight with the political stratum won't be easy or short. The ruling class in Lebanon has been there since the 50s, and Lebanon gained its independence on 21st November 1943. These parties still rule up to today (with some changes and new parties joining in the 80s and 90s), so they won't let go of their personal interests and profits easily.

Now, they're trying to blame the uprising for the current economic predicament, rather than the real culprits – the banks and their own economic policies. They are also blaming the protesters for the sectarian problems and other issues that Lebanon has been suffering from over the past 30 years.

The protesters are well aware of these facts, and they're aware that the only thing they can do is to keep the pressure on the banks, government offices, public squares, and economic centres, right where it hurts those in power.

A!: What will the movement do in the face of state repression?

MK: WELL, WE HAVE FACED repression more than once from the riot police and political parties' supporters in several areas, and once from a former MP's guards who shot and wounded several protesters in Tripoli in the north. We have been repressed in Beirut four times, Nabatieh, Tyr, Saida, Jal el Dib, and Tripoli.

The outcome: more and more people took to the streets over the following few hours or day. This happened not only in the area where the repression took place, but also in other areas in support of the repressed area.

Now, if mass repression took place in all areas of the uprising, I believe there



The Lebanese are known to be life-lovers. We love to party and enjoy ourselves, even in serious situations such as protests and uprisings.

would be a civil conflict. This is because of the existence of some political parties which have been members of the political system since the 50s. They have tried to take control of the uprising as if they were founding members of it. These are parties which were known for their brutality during the civil war and which also have their own militia groups.

In that case, it would be very difficult to predict what the conflict could lead to, but there will definitely be blood, and our demands will be lost beneath the rubble.

A!: Do you have any sense of international solidarity? In what form would you like to see international solidarity? Or do you think that it is best that international supporters don't get involved beyond reporting on the uprising?

MK: INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY that would benefit the Lebanese people is the actual absence of it. Lebanon has been occupied by many countries over a century. Its political parties were and are part of foreign agendas on Lebanese soil, whether it be Saudi, Iranian, American, French, British, Qatari, Syrian, Egyptian, or Iraqi. And that's starting from the civil war up to today. So, proper solidarity would be that these countries would actually threaten the interests of the corrupt politicians, bankers, and businessmen abroad. One notable proposal that was put forward by an attorney is to send a complaint to the Swiss government demanding that they open the accounts of specified groups

suspected of corruption in Lebanon, so that a proper trial could take place here.

A!: What's the role of women, and their lack of rights in the present system?

MK: WOMEN AND FEMINIST movements are the core of this uprising because of what they have suffered from the corrupt political system. It has supported religious laws that in turn stripped women of some of their civil rights. The feminist movements are pushing towards a civil, secular state where everyone is subject to the same laws, rather than each sect answering to religious laws and being supported by political parties that are based on sectarian groups. One notable example of feminist movements is that of the late Nadine Jouny – one of the most prominent feminists and rights activists in Lebanon. She passed away in a car accident almost two weeks before the uprising. She had demanded for years a nursery for her son after a religious court stripped her of that right on the basis of "sharia law". Nadine was left to see her child only once a week. In the uprising, you would see her images in some areas of Beirut with the words "my nursery is my right", as part of the campaign Nadine fully supported.

There was also a woman's march, during the days of the protests, to support generally women's socio-economic and political rights which they've been striving for in recent years. ■

The battle to defend Hong Kong's autonomy

By Au Loong Yu



It was the radical youth breaking into the legislature building on 1st July which escalated the movement further.

AFTER THE FOUR DAY BATTLE between the Chinese University students and the police, between 11th and 14th November, big clashes broke out yesterday, 17th November. Hundreds of riot police besieged the Polytechnic University and, as I write, the siege is still going on.

The great Anti-Extradition Bill Movement finally succeeded in forcing Carrie Lam's administration to withdraw the bill on 4th September. Yet this has failed to calm the movement. This is partly because there are still four demands left unanswered. It is also because, over three months, the movement has thoroughly exposed the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP's) real intention of hollowing out all the substance of Hong Kong's autonomy and replacing it with direct control by Beijing, down to commanding the local police and mafia.

The movement has evolved into a big battle to defend Hong Kong's autonomy.

Where it started

IN FEBRUARY, THE HONG KONG government started to promote a new

China Extradition Bill. Hong Kong has extradition agreements with 20 countries, including the UK and the US, but not with mainland China. The pro-Beijing camp, here and overseas, argues that since Hong Kong has extradition agreements with the West, why can't it have an agreement with mainland China?

The reason is the "one country two system" arrangement. Article 8 of the Basic Law stipulates that "the laws previously in force in Hong Kong...shall be maintained". That means that Hong Kong is insulated from China's legal system. This is because, at the time the Basic Law was drafted, even Beijing tacitly agreed that the Chinese legal system was far from being fair and open. So an extradition agreement between China and Hong Kong would necessarily undermine "one country two systems". If China's legal system had improved significantly then it would be possible to discuss an extradition agreement. But in reality it has gone from bad to worse. This February, Xi Jinping released a speech re-affirming his party's stand that there will never be such a thing as judicial independence in China.

Unlike all other countries, which have sovereignty, Hong Kong is a special region of China. It does not have the necessary power to resist the central government's legal persecution, if Hong Kong's legal system is not insulated from China.

When the Hong Kong government tried to table the bill in June, it detonated a big political bomb.

Stages of the movement: Stage 1

THE MOVEMENT IN HONG Kong has gone through three stages.

The first was in June, when millions of people took to the streets. The legislative assembly was besieged and there was violence. Then Carrie Lam's administration conceded by announcing that the extradition bill would be temporarily suspended.

But discontent persisted. The labour movement should be mentioned here: on 17th June, the pro-democracy Confederation of Trade Unions called for a strike, but it was not successful.

It was the radical youth breaking into the legislature building on 1st July which escalated the movement further. But what followed was horrible: the police collaborated with the mafia in the Yuen Long region (right near the border with China) to carry out indiscriminate attacks in the train station to terrify residents and demonstrators. This antagonised people and even the most moderate liberals became angry.

So we saw a further radicalisation.

There were also 16 or 17 demonstrations in different districts. We saw a broadening of the movement to the community level, which we have never seen before in Hong Kong. This was driven by the attack from the mafia. Hundreds of thousands of people took part. The 27th July protest was even more significant. Until then, the demonstrations were legal. But on 27th July, the police refused a permit for the first time.

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Hong Kong people are very moderate – or have been for many years. Ordinarily, they would have accepted this. Instead, hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets in defiance. This was the first time since the current movement started that there has been civil disobedience in such large numbers. This laid the groundwork for August.

Stage 2

AUGUST MARKED THE beginning of the second stage, which was the climax. On 5th August, there was a second strike. This time it was successful. It's estimated that 300,000 or 400,000 people took part. On 12th August, there were more huge occupations of the airport.

Another strike was called for 2nd and 3rd September. It was not that successful however, as working people and the unions feared retaliation from Beijing. The latter has already shown its claws after the 5th August strike by making Cathay Pacific's management fire its trade union chairperson and more than 30 employees. As neither the students nor the unions could find a way to protect strikers from dismissal, it should not surprise us that this second strike was not very successful.

But the early September class boycott was very successful. Along with college students, now even high school students got organised and boycotted classes. Demonstration became a regular activity in this small city.

There were also setbacks in the movement. Since the movement is leaderless and no political party has ever been able to play any significant role at all, it tends to be very loose and chaotic. For instance, on 1st October there were multiple marches in different parts of the city instead of a single big march.

Stage 3

FROM OCTOBER ONWARDS, THE movement entered its third stage. The movement is in a bottleneck as it finds it hard to mobilise labour to strike again or to demonstrate again in millions in defiance of the ban on marching. On the other hand, the government is also unable to suppress the movement.

On 11th November there was a call for a strike and class boycott. The fight between the students and the police between 11th and 14th November was impressive. The students occupied the campus for four days, and it was the



The police collaborated with the mafia in the Yuen Long region to carry out indiscriminate attacks in the train station to terrify residents and demonstrators.

occupation in the Chinese University (CUHK) which was the biggest. This was because many students from other universities came to help. This made the resistance to police attack on the night of 12th November possible.

However the lack of organisation and coordinating bodies within the occupation magnified the differences over tactics between CUHK students and those from outside campus. CUHK students were angry over some outside students' destruction of facilities and reckless behavior. Eventually the management of the university closed the whole campus down and the occupation was ended.

The strike was not that successful either. It is true that many people could not get to work on that day. But this was not because they took the initiative to strike. It was rather because the students, through occupying campuses located next to 30 main roads or railways, practically paralysed half of Hong Kong's busiest area.

But these are actions which ordinary people with a job cannot join or are not ready to join. Increasingly, there is now a danger that the mass base of radical action will narrow. The number of people who are coming out to march despite the ban has also declined.

On the other hand, there are also signs that the government's hardline policy and police brutality has broadened support for the five demands of the movement. From September onwards, community protests have become even more common.

Ways forward

THERE ARE YOUNG ACTIVISTS WHO HAVE realised the importance of labour

struggle and are now calling for people to join or form new unions. A young public servant's call to form a new public employee union has resulted in a very good response. There have been news reports that hundreds of public servants have joined. This is also a response to the traditional unions which have been slow to react, although credit is due to them for their support for the 5th August strike. Without this strike it would not have been possible to prove to Hong Kongers the relevance of labour and to attract a new generation of labour supporters.

Local elections are scheduled for 24th November. Some people from liberal parties have appealed to the movement to stay away from militant civil disobedience so that it will not give the government an excuse to cancel the election. This is something that pro-Beijing parties have been pushing for. They fear a catastrophic defeat. There is a grain of truth in the liberals' argument, but local councils in Hong Kong are merely consultative bodies. They do not have the power to impose any tax or to administer any local government departments. If the election is relevant, it is more because it may act as an expression of an angry public.

So, very soon the movement will be put to a big test again, either by going to the election or by being banned from doing so if the government eventually cancels it.

There is an update to this article on the election result in News Briefs.

Au Loong is a long-time activist based in Hong Kong, a member of the editorial board of *China Labor Net* and author of *China Rise: Strength and Fragility*.



A demonstration in Santiago – 1.2 million people. The largest demonstration ever in Chile. A massive uprising of two million Chileans began on October 25th, in opposition to the effects of neoliberalism in every aspect of life.

Chile: neoliberal oasis in flames

By Carlos Torres

CHILE HAS FOUND ITSELF IN unexpected turmoil since October 18th, when high school students began a mass mobilisation against a subway fare increase

The international media has published impressive images of the recent events. The photographs and press reports show the result of years of accumulated anger that began with the military dictatorship in 1973. This is the result of the flagrant violation of the social and political rights of Chilean people for many decades, in the context of harsh neoliberal policies.

A massive uprising of two million Chileans began on October 25th, in opposition to the effects of neoliberalism in every aspect of life. This is a revolt against abuses and the commodification of education, health, and retirement pensions.

Background to the uprising

THE PROTESTS ARE NOT JUST ABOUT changing the government; they are about changing everything. Things have been getting worse for decades and people

worry it will get even worse in the near future and for their children. Almost everything is privatised in Chile – it is like neoliberalism on steroids. That is why the slogan “neoliberalism started in Chile and will die here” has spread across the demonstrations.

The Chilean President, Sebastian Piñera, declared that “Chile is at war against a powerful enemy.” This was the pretext for the murder, torture and violation of unarmed civilians, men and women. When Piñera declared a state of emergency and a curfew, calling on the military to guard private property, it reminded us of an axiomatic principle. In Chile the Armed Forces were founded to protect the dominant system against any popular social revolt which might emerge from the abuse and structural injustice. The only war that Chileans remember is when the armed forces attack peaceful protesters who demand that their rights be respected. They shoot those who paid for the fatal bullets with their taxes and their work.

Nothing should astonish us anymore. The history of Chile shows that when the

right is unable to maintain social hegemony, it exercises domination through state repression. To do this, the government resorts to a fictitious internal enemy or international conspiracy.

On the other hand, a social rebellion has emerged that questions neoliberal democracy and the current institutions. It is calling on us to build a new collective imaginary that invites us to rethink and reinvent the geographical territory we inhabit. We no longer know who the country belongs to or where it is heading, but we are not willing to give up without a fight. In order to challenge neoliberal domination from its roots, it is imperative to reimagine the country. That includes its institutions, the role of the economy, the character of citizen participation, the role of indigenous nations and traditional peoples, and the development model.

The constitution that governs Chile is undemocratic because of the context in which it was created. But it is also undemocratic because of its contents and the restrictions it imposes on popular sovereignty. It focuses

on private property and market freedom against the common good and societal wellbeing.

Neoliberal economists, known as the Chicago Boys, used Pinochet’s Chile as a testing ground for their theories of the withdrawal of the state from economic activity. The state’s resources were transferred into private hands to enhance the free market and further the privatisation of common goods. Neoliberal reforms took the form of abuses by the elites against the working poor. Years of exclusion and humiliation are taking their toll. People are fed up with seeing the new rich pillage the country’s wealth. They do it in the name of a development system that has enabled the ruling elites to marginalise the poverty and debt of millions of Chileans for their benefit.

They reduce the social role of the state while expanding policing, the criminalisation of dissent and repression. All other public sector functions are privatised. Neoliberalism has continued, regardless of the government in power, because during the military dictatorship

GLOBAL WAVE OF UPRISINGS

they enacted an authoritarian constitution that would control society from above.

The State that neoliberal policies built represents a culture of domination and an economic model designed to extract wealth and take possession of it in all areas of human life. Accumulation by dispossession is a concept presented by David Harvey. It defines neoliberal capitalist policies that result in a centralisation of wealth and power in the hands of a few by dispossessing the public and private entities of their wealth or land.

The recent mobilisations

THE MASSIVE MOBILISATIONS IN CHILE over the past week were entirely spontaneous, sparked by young people who jumped the subway turnstiles to protest a minor transit fare hike. Many of the young protestors were treated brutally by the police, and people reacted to defend their children. In a matter of hours, the protests spread through the entire country.

The ruling elite has stolen from the people for more than three decades. The fare hike was the last straw.

The protestors demands are related to minimum wage, pension plans, free education, health care, the well-being of retirees, the public management of water, student loans, Indigenous autonomy, anti-patriarchy, phishing matters, children's rights and protection, forestry problems, corporate tax evasion and avoidance, and the role of the state in the economy.

At present no one and everyone is leading this fight. The issues are what drive the mobilisation. I have never seen anything like this before. The masses are in the streets everywhere. This is the largest protest since the fall of the dictatorship. There is wrecking and looting, but primarily of multi-national corporations like Walmart.

Every movement in Chile has been working to support their shared demands through social networks. That includes the labour and women's movements and the student, indigenous and environmental movements. However, these movements are not coordinating or organising these protests: they are truly spontaneous. Now, the recently organised Social Unity Platform, encompassing the above sectors and many other social organisations, is becoming the forum for some form of coordination and has recently called for general strikes in October and November.

As of today, the UN Human Rights Commission, as well as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), are in Chile monitoring abuses of power. As a result, the Chilean government has ended the



Photo by Hector Gonzalez de Cincos

A water canon, known as Guanaco in Chile, covered in paint from paint bombs used by the demonstrators. The massive mobilisations in Chile over the past week were entirely spontaneous, sparked by young people who jumped the subway turnstiles to protest a minor transit fare hike.

state of emergency and curfew and has reorganised some of the ministries, while maintaining the hard-core neoliberal politicians. Piñera and his devoted team will be accountable for the massive and brutal abuses perpetrated since October 18th by the army and the police.

According to the Human Rights Institute, 5,362 have been arrested, hundreds have been tortured and 2,381 have been hospitalised as a result of wounds from gunshots, pellets and other weapons. Over two hundred people have been partially blinded by the police pellet guns. At least one young man, university student Gustavo Gatica, lost sight in both his eyes due to shots from pellet guns. There are 283 lawsuits against the police, including for torture, cruel treatment and sexual violence.

But the President has few options left. His political capital is declining and his impending resignation is quietly whispered in the business and military corridors. Citizens are demanding his resignation for the crimes that have taken place. He must be brought before the courts of justice.

Due to the political and social crisis and unrest, the Chilean government has had to cancel significant events, both international and domestic, like the APEC meeting and COP25, as well as major soccer tournaments, musical concerts and many other public events.

Where will this end?

NO ONE KNOWS. HOWEVER, CHILE DOES not look the same anymore. Although neoliberals continue to try to save the best part of the pie for themselves,

demonstrators continue to occupy the streets of the main cities across the country.

Something will emerge from the neoliberal wreckage, but nobody knows yet what it will look like. The government has had to make many concessions demanded by this uprising.

In the meantime, the political elites and government have agreed to freeze hikes in subway fares, utilities and highway tolls, and to increase pension payments for the poorest. In another important matter, there will be major constitutional reforms that will put an end to Pinochet's constitution and call for a constituent assembly. There will also be deep reforms in healthcare, drugs, parliamentary expenses and the exorbitantly high incomes of senators and deputies.

In 1970, Salvador Allende inspired the world by establishing a truly socialist democracy through an election. He died resisting the coup that took power on September 11th 1973. Once again, almost 50 years later, Chile may again inspire the world in the search for deep political transformation.

The people always want peace but in the context of justice, freedom and democracy, which is the opposite of the current scenario.

In the meantime, thousands are taking to the streets to keep fighting for their demands and pushing back the neoliberal mantra. ■

Carlos Torres is an activist and a writer on Politics and Social Movements.

The Mid Term Budget austerity and unemployment plan: let the debate and the opposition begin!

By *Amandla!* editorial team



In the October 2019 MTBPS, the Treasury expanded this policy of financing Eskom's debt service from the National Revenue Fund – in other words, with tax money.

THE MID TERM BUDGET IN OCTOBER WAS dominated by the Treasury's policy of solving Eskom's debt crisis with tax money. In summary:

1. Eskom is increasingly capitalised from the national budget.
2. This prompts the Treasury to harsh and dangerous fiscal austerity.
3. This means cuts in government spending for everything other than servicing the debts of government and Eskom.

OPPOSITION TO THIS IS URGENTLY needed before the budget in February next year. And it has already come from many corners. To give just one example of what needs to be protected from the Treasury's fiscal austerity plans: the Presidential Summit on Public Health in October 2018 reported an estimated 37,000 vacancies in public health.

If the Mid Term Budget plans go ahead, those vacant posts in hospitals and clinics will not be filled. Newly trained doctors or nurses will not get jobs. Instead, they will join the army of the unemployed. The vacancies will disappear in support of the government's war on "the public sector wage bill".

Not to mention the National Health Insurance. That disappeared, once again,

into the fog. It is again deemed to be "too expensive".

Shaken by opposition

FINANCE MINISTER TITO MBOWENI WAS obviously shaken by the extent of the opposition to new cuts in spending plans, hitting education, housing programs and public health. So he told the media after his speech that the Mid Term Budget only "opened up a debate" before the main 2020 Budget in February. The traditional significance of three year plans was undermined at a stroke.

But we will accept his invitation. Let the discussion begin.

We will start with two positive pieces of news in the MTBPS. Firstly, there is the proposed R1 billion addition to the budget of the South African Revenue Service (SARS). Let's hope it will be used to curb tax dodging. Secondly, there is the R1.2 billion addition to the budget of the National Prosecution Authority. Here the hope is of course that this money will be spent to start prosecutions against corruption and shoddy private-public contracts that have looted the State Owned Enterprises (SOEs), not least Eskom.

Now let's look at the main thrust of the MTBPS.

The political importance of the debt

THE TREASURY CONTINUED TO WALK down the path set out in Mboweni's budget speech in February.

In the February budget, R23 billion was set aside to service Eskom's debt in the current 2019 budget year. The plan was, in fact, to give Eskom R23 billion per year for ten years.

In the October 2019 MTBPS, the Treasury expanded this policy of financing Eskom's debt service from the National Revenue Fund – in other words, with tax money. Tax revenue is supposed to fund all kind of service delivery and public investment projects. But it is increasingly being used to pay interest on Eskom's debts, and to pay off the loans one by one when they expire.

Austerity questioned

THIS POLICY RIGHT NOW IS WHAT IS leading to austerity that will, in turn, aggravate the social crisis. It will multiply the futile battles working class communities launch every day against local governments, protesting against lack of proper housing and water supply, or the lack of sewage controls in townships and informal settlements. And there are still 4,000 schools with dangerous pit latrines

left to get rid of, creating many more than 4,000 opportunities for jobs to do it.

Austerity is indeed a strange thing. More and more tax revenue is diverted to pay debt and interest. And it is presented to us as if the result is that we are “living within our means” and so we are “saving money”. Meanwhile, real resources continue to be squandered and destroyed.

Take the issue of water in our water-scarce and drought-ridden country, which is becoming seriously hit by the climate crisis. 25-30% of all fresh water leaks out into the ground from old pipes in the towns and cities. Austerity means that even less is done to prevent it. This is definitely not to going to “save”. In Eastern Cape, the majority of municipalities pump out raw sewage directly into rivers. Repairs and investment in water cleaning stations are not carried out. This wastes and destroys natural resources and the environment.

The threat from another recession

MORE OPEN-MINDED MAINSTREAM observers are also starting to point out that “fiscal austerity” is dangerous. When public sector economic demand is cut, state organs buy fewer goods and services or reduce the wage bill for public employees. This can trigger an outright economic downturn: a drop in the production of goods and services in the whole economy, called “economic recession”.

This means more retrenchments in the private sector and higher mass unemployment. Government spending comprises about 30% of economic demand in the country. Public sector employee wages are also a part of that economic demand.

The danger is aggravated by the threat from a world-wide downturn in the economy. That will cause lower demand for South Africa’s exports.

Internationally renowned economist, Joseph Stiglitz, is one of the critics. He visited South Africa in November and advised against austerity policy. He contrasted half a decade of austerity policy of Greece with the rejection of austerity in Portugal. Greece continues to be in trouble with no end in sight, whilst employment in Portugal is recovering.

Unconstitutional economic policy

IN SHORT, THE MID TERM BUDGET IS A plan to take R161 billion rand out of the national budget over four years. R49 billion in the 2019/20 budget year has already been approved by Parliament. This will be followed by R56 billion, R33 billion and R23 billion in the following three years. The money will go instead to service Eskom’s debt.



In Eastern Cape, the majority of municipalities pump out raw sewage directly into rivers. Repairs and investment in water cleaning stations are not carried out. This is wasteful and destroys natural resources and the environment.

Eskom’s debt

IN THE 2017 FINANCIAL YEAR, ESKOM’S total debt stood at R358 billion. In 2018, it was R392 billion. On 31 March 2019, it had grown to R445 billion.

Eskom is taking new loans to pay back old loans and the interest on those loans. It paid R69.5 billion for debt repayments and finance costs in 2019, compared to R43.6 billion in 2018.

Eskom can’t cope with this escalation of payments to creditors. A Presidential task team estimated that Eskom cannot handle, without support, R250 billion of its debt. According to them, that part should be moved to a separate “Special Purpose Vehicle” (SPV). But if a new and separate legal outfit takes over some of Eskom’s debt, it will need to have income to continue to service it. The question is, where will the money come from? As it stands now, the Treasury’s answer will still be: tax revenue.

Several alternatives to austerity: a scale from centre to left

THERE ARE DIFFERENCES AMONG THOSE who oppose austerity. Joseph Stiglitz simply says that, in order to avoid cuts in spending, the state can take on more debt without any problem.

But there are other strategic alternatives. The government’s constitutional mandate is to gradually improve the lives of all “within its available resources”. So far, the Treasury has however not “opened up a debate” about the resources that are available that they are not using – those managed by the scandal-ridden Public Investment Corporation (PIC).

Amandla! has said it before: the PIC manages over R2.1 trillion rand in the Government Employee Pension Fund (GEPP) and unemployment

insurance money (UIF). It is the obvious alternative to using tax revenue for capitalisation of Eskom.

- GEPP is, as usual, going for a surplus of R50 billion this year, after benefits and pensions are paid.
- Despite the fact that there is mass unemployment and that UIF purports to be “unemployment insurance”, UIF has amassed a portfolio of R156 billion in financial assets over the years. This is also managed by the PIC. UIF always records annual surpluses of R7-9 billion per year

THE TREASURY HAS CONVENIENTLY forgotten about these resources.

“Making finance capitalism a little less prosperous”

TO TRANSFER ESKOM’S DEBT TO GEPP IS not to destroy wealth. It is to move money from a place where “maximised returns on investments” are not needed (GEPP and UIF), not required by the Government Employment Pension Law and not rational from the point of view of the vast majority of citizens. It would move it to the national budget, on which the daily lives of tens of millions of South Africans depends, as both public service sector users and workers.

When public sector funds are used for social aims, this also shifts the stream of interest income away from the private finance industry and rich investors, to public sector service delivery. It re-directs that money stream from private financial accumulation. It is a structural reform that makes financial capitalism a little less prosperous.

The next immediate step would be to renegotiate flawed coal contracts and regulate the profiteering of the coal producers from Eskom. ■

Tax Justice: more failed reform proposals from the OECD

By Erwan Malary



A company can ask its South African subsidiary to sell its commodity to another foreign subsidiary at a very discounted price. That subsidiary then sells the commodity to those who want it at a proper price and makes a huge profit. If that subsidiary is in a tax haven, they pay no tax on that huge profit.

CORPORATE TAX PLAYS AN essential role in a market economy. It allows the state to pay for wealth-creating activities that are otherwise unaccounted and unpaid for: building roads, educating students, ensuring workers stay healthy, etc. These activities are often labelled as a cost by capitalists and neoliberals. But they are essential for any wealth to be produced. No factory can export its products if there are no roads, railways, airports or harbours. A software company cannot sell anything if its employees can't count, write or code properly.

In a market economy, a crucial way of paying for such “free” public services is the payment of corporate tax – a tax on the profits of companies which make a profit. In other words, those who benefit the most from these services contribute back through corporate tax. They allocate to the state a share of the wealth it has contributed to.

This scheme is under threat and the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), an organisation

of the richest countries, has been tasked to solve the problem. Once again it is failing us.

The global tax race to the bottom

CORPORATE TAX PAYMENT ARE FALLING worldwide. Two linked developments explain why. The first and most obvious development is the tax race to the bottom. In order to attract foreign investment, many countries have decided to sacrifice their corporate tax revenues. The calculation is simple: first, reducing corporate taxes makes it more profitable for investors; then, by attracting investors, more jobs are created and the tax base increases. This is because there is more economic activity to tax. In the end, these benefits are greater than the initial cost of lost revenues from reducing the tax rate.

Unfortunately, this “magical” solution has a serious limit: everyone is doing the same thing. When one country reduces its taxes to become more attractive, its neighbour does the same. So they remain in the same position in relation to each

other. But both have lost resources in the process. And it is shareholders who have gained.

In this global tax race to the bottom, there are only losers. The State loses because its capacity to implement development strategies and welfare policies is eroded. Citizens lose because the economy can't provide for their essential needs. Companies also lose, because “free” state services, that were at the core of their business model, are not provided anymore.

Globalisation of value chains and the erosion of the corporate tax base

THE SECOND DEVELOPMENT IS LINKED to the globalisation of value chains. This has been facilitated by the abolition of most tariffs, the removal of capital controls and the conclusion of trade and tax agreements. This means that economies are much more connected than they were before. But it has also meant that it has been extremely easy for Multi-National Corporations (MNCs) to navigate around tax rules. And this is a huge problem: it has been estimated that currently 40% of MNCs' profits are hidden in tax havens.

To understand how this happens, we need first to understand how the international tax system is structured. Normally it is simple: if an economic activity takes place on its soil, a country has the right to impose production taxes on it. Therefore, when a local entity trades with a foreign one, if they know the price of each transaction, they know how much wealth was produced by that company. And they can tax it.

However, if the local company and the foreign company are both subsidiaries of the same MNC, it is very hard for countries to be sure the price paid was the right one. A company can ask its South African subsidiary to sell its commodity to another foreign subsidiary at a very discounted price. That subsidiary then sells the commodity to those who want it at a proper price and makes a huge profit. If that subsidiary is in a tax haven, they pay no tax on that huge profit. So the parent company reduces its global tax bill without reducing its global profit.



With the development of social media and e-platforms, it is not really clear anymore who produces the wealth.

This process is also called “profit shifting”. It is a nightmare for tax authorities.

Two wake up calls

FOR A LONG TIME, THIS WASN'T TOO much of a problem for industrialised, rich countries. The MNCs' headquarters were in those countries. So they still benefited from a substantial tax base. And their own MNCs could get a competitive advantage compared to properly taxed foreign ones, by benefiting from these fabricated tax breaks.

But two main game-changer elements came in. First, the 2008 financial crisis. Rich countries had to borrow massive (and unsustainable) amounts of money on financial markets. They tried to repay that money by imposing austerity measures on their people, but this led to social unrest. So they started to investigate the flaws of the global tax system. They couldn't afford any longer to regard this revenue stream as secondary.

Secondly, there was the digitisation of the economy. Before, trade was mostly in goods. These are fairly easy to track down for well-funded and organised tax authorities. Assessing their prices isn't always easy, but it is feasible. But now, with digitisation, it is possible to trade more and more services. A company in New York can sell advertisement services to a South African company. An Indian company can sell its IT services, while a German one can provide consultancy services. Not only can those services be produced from anywhere, but faking the provision of such services is really easy. You just need a paper trail – there is no concrete, tangible thing to trace as it goes across the border.

This means that if you want to shift your profits abroad, you no longer have to

hide them inside legitimate transactions. You just need a foreign invoice. And nobody can tell whether it's true or a fake.

Not only that. With the development of social media and e-platforms, it is not really clear anymore who produces the wealth. When Google or Facebook sell ads, who has produced the wealth? The engineer in India and America who built the algorithm to target the right customers? The SA users who fed the algorithm through search requests and clicks? Or maybe the content makers without which these websites lose their sole purpose? Probably a bit of each.

The OECD's BEPS process: rich countries' last attempt to protect a broken tax system

TO SOLVE THESE PROBLEMS, RICH countries decided to set up a forum: the BEPS forum. Of course, developing and emerging economies are mostly excluded. Through this forum a few victories were secured, like the improvement of transparency rules, but the core problems have not been addressed.

The key to solving the problem is to prevent companies from choosing the transaction prices that are convenient for them. Tax justice movements generally agree that the key solution is the creation of a common formula to split the worldwide profits of a MNC. This formula is based on tangible and fairly easily accessible figures, such as payroll, sales and local investment amounts. Using these figures for each country where a multinational is located has the advantage of being extremely simple. This is what is called a unitary tax system.

However, instead of such a simple solution, the OECD came up with another layer of complexity. The OECD's proposal has two “pillars”:

- Under Pillar 1, the profits of a MNC would be split into two parts. Part 1 (applicable to about 93.5% of a company's profit) would not be affected. For Part 2 (about 6.5%), a formula will apply. The formula will allocate this tiny minority of profit to different countries, according to sales. This effectively means that only countries with big sales (the richest countries) will actually make anything significant out of this proposal. As the Tax Justice Network says, this looks like the last attempt by rich countries to protect a broken tax system.
- On a slightly more optimistic note, Pillar 2 provides for a global minimum tax rate for MNCs. Fixed at 15% worldwide, following the US recent tax reform, this could look like progress: the tax race to the bottom will finally face a floor. This will limit the possibility for MNCs to benefit from undue tax breaks. However, there are two big drawbacks: first, since MNCs' headquarters are located in rich countries, countries of the global South will depend on them to apply the floor. Secondly, since there is no rule proposed for a fair way to split these extra taxes, rich countries will likely be the sole beneficiaries.

CLEARLY, FACED WITH SUCH PITIFUL outcomes, southern countries and tax justice movements need to oppose strongly this absence of real reforms. A fair international tax system is urgently needed. The time has come for this broken and inadequate forum that is the OECD to act.

Erwan Malary is advocacy officer working on finance and member of Attac France.

Eskom: unbundling and privatisation are not the answer

By *Amandla!* correspondent



Government's plans for dealing with Eskom first became apparent in February 2019 when President Ramaphosa announced that, as the way to deal with myriad problems facing Eskom, the government intended to unbundle the utility.

THERE IS CLEARLY AN URGENT need to deal with massive problems at Eskom. It cannot be business as usual – Eskom does need to be transformed. But this needs to happen in a way that meets the energy needs of the majority of South Africans, many of whom are currently excluded from accessing electricity, largely because of the high tariffs.

Today South Africa faces horrifyingly high levels of unemployment (close to 40%), and massive inequality. It is not surprising, therefore, that we also have high levels of energy poverty, with 47% of all households considered to be energy poor. At the same time, the global climate crisis means we should be increasing the share of renewable energy in the energy mix far more rapidly than we are.

In this context, we would argue, the emphasis must be on transforming Eskom into an effective and efficient public electricity utility that is driving renewable energy. It must work in partnership with local government, community organisations and co-operatives to meet the needs of all for affordable electricity.

Alternative Information and Development Centre (AIDC), together with Trade Unions for Energy Democracy (TUED) and the Transnational Institute (TNI), recently hosted a workshop focusing on how we can transform Eskom to do this. This workshop was part of the research on a “new” Eskom that

AIDC, TUED and TNI have been doing in conjunction with NUM and Numsa. The research is focused around three commitments:

- To build a “new” Eskom: fully public and serving the people;
- To secure a democratic and just energy transition;
- To work towards a socially owned renewable energy sector.

SHORTLY AFTER THE WORKSHOP, THE government released its vision of how to deal with Eskom. The “Roadmap for Eskom in a Reformed Electricity Supply Industry”, released on October 29 2019 by Minister Gordhan (Department of Public Enterprises), clearly sets out the steps towards the deepening liberalisation of the electricity sector. Minister Gordhan, however, was quick to assert that unbundling didn’t mean privatisation, even though the Roadmap explicitly talks about the privatisation of generation through Independent Power Producers (IPPs).

Government’s plans for dealing with Eskom first became apparent in February 2019 when President Ramaphosa announced that, as the way to deal with myriad problems facing Eskom, the government intended to unbundle the utility. The problems at Eskom are well known:

- a massive debt of R441 billion;
- major governance problems with a rapid turnover of senior management

- and board members as corruption and state capture eroded the organisation;
- operational problems which directly impact on the public when it finds expression in load-shedding; and
- massive cost overruns as well as design flaws at Medupi and Kusile.

SINCE RAMAPHOSA’S ANNOUNCEMENT, two messages have been constantly relayed. On the one hand, the urgent need to unbundle Eskom as the way to solve its problems. But, on the other hand, the argument that this does not constitute privatisation. These messages have culminated in the document released by Gordhan.

Both Numsa and NUM have vehemently opposed the unbundling. For them it is clear that it is not the solution but will only exacerbate the problem by opening up the electricity sector to market forces. They also recognise that unbundling of state utilities has generally led to privatisation.

Government’s Roadmap

AT HEART, THE ROADMAP PROPOSES THE deepening corporatisation of Eskom and the liberalisation of the electricity sector. It does this in a number of ways.

It proposes splitting Eskom into three entities – generation, transmission and distribution – which would all fall under the Eskom Holdings Company. These entities would be separated out over a number of years, starting with

Transmission which, it is envisaged, would be a separate entity by March 2020 – just three months away. Ultimately, the plan would be for three independent subsidiaries. Each generating unit (or group of units) would relate to Transmission through a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA). Transmission, in turn, would relate to distribution through Electricity Supply Agreements.

The long term vision in the Roadmap is captured in the diagram below – Reformed electricity supply industry

PPAs are typically used with IPPs to regulate the relationship between the electricity generator and the transmission company. They generally contain agreements on how much power will be delivered, when it will be available and what the price of it will be. With IPPs, these agreements often tie the electricity utility into buying a certain amount of power, at a certain price. According to the Roadmap, “each power station will have its own Power Purchase Agreement, with predefined, fixed and guaranteed tariffs for energy with the TE [Transmission Entity].”

In this way, most of the risk is carried by the public utility rather than the private entity, as the public utility is contractually required to buy a certain quantity of electricity from the generator.

The Roadmap notes that eventually the relationship between the generators and the transmission company will be based on an open-market model. But this will not create a healthier situation. It will result in public generating units having to compete with private companies. But this is not fair competition.

Private companies are driven by the need for profit maximisation. To achieve this, they look for ways to cut costs. This often means fewer jobs and job intensification. And they won't deliver services for those who can't afford to pay for them.

With the public sector on the other hand, there is a greater potential for services to be delivered on the basis



The starting point for transforming Eskom should be giving Eskom greater responsibility for renewable energy, rather than liberalising the electricity sector.

of a public sector ethos. This would ensure that all have equitable access to affordable electricity, and that public sector workers have decent jobs. But if the public sector is forced to compete with the private sector, they will be forced to act like private companies, cutting jobs, worsening working conditions and delivering only to those who can afford to pay. This will serve to increase inequalities and deepen poverty in a country where these are already major problems.

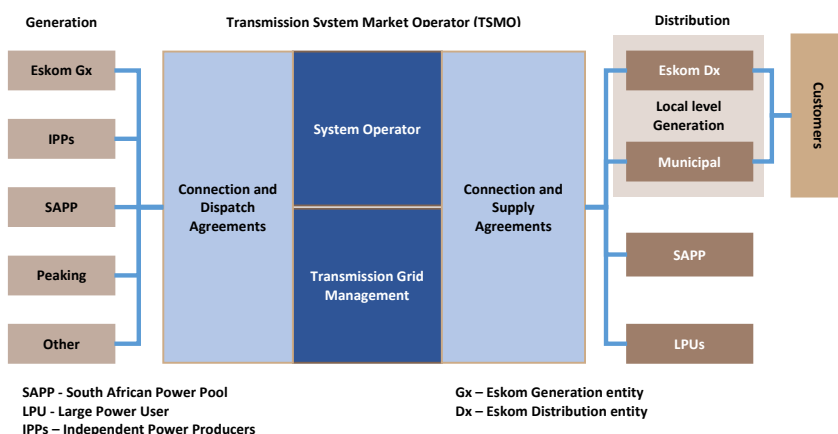
Saftu issued a statement in response to the Roadmap in which it argued:

“it is plainly obvious that what the DPE is proposing comes straight from the World Bank's privatisation handbook. It is consistent with the Bank's “privatisation in stages” approach attempted in many other countries. According to this plan, first the public utility is broken up, but its component parts will remain—for a while—in public hands. Then for-profit independent power producers (IPPs) are offered long term contracts (power purchase agreements, or PPAs) to take over new generation capacity. We have seen this already with the Renewable Energy Independent Power Producers Programme, or REIPPP. Privately owned generation is phased in, publicly owned generation is phased out.”

The roadmap places great emphasis on creating a competitive market between different electricity generators, as though this is the panacea to many of the ills besetting Eskom. It argues that with different generators competing against each other, and an independent Transmission Company buying electricity on a “least-cost” basis, generation will become more efficient and electricity as a whole will become more affordable. And yet international experience (captured in a European study by the Public Services International Research Unit at the University of Greenwich) has shown that liberalised electricity markets don't achieve what their proponents argue that they will. Instead, an open market in the electricity sector has led to greater concentration of ownership, and higher prices for electricity users.

There can be no doubt that increasing operational efficiencies and effectiveness must be an important part of transforming Eskom. But there is no clear motivation given for why this has to involve unbundling. Rather, we need a solution that doesn't leave workers bearing the brunt of the transition by cutting jobs, increasing tariffs, and making electricity unaffordable, as unbundling and privatisation will.

Reformed electricity supply industry



Source: DPE (2019) Roadmap for Eskom in a Reformed Electricity Supply Industry.

A people's roadmap

THE STARTING POINT FOR transforming Eskom should be giving Eskom greater responsibility for renewable energy, rather than liberalising the electricity sector. Eskom should play this role in partnership with local government, community organisations and co-operatives. All of them should have the capacity to generate their own electricity as well as buy electricity from Eskom. The focus should be on developing this partnership between public sector and not-for-profit entities, to ensure that all have access to affordable electricity, and that basic energy needs are being met. The private sector can't do this. ■



Load shedding and increased electricity prices have led to disinvestment from the mining and minerals beneficiation sectors. In short, the crisis of Eskom is a key factor in what has been termed the “premature deindustrialisation of the South African economy.”

Eskom in SA’s wider political economy crisis

By *Amandla!* correspondent

THE ESKOM CRISIS TAKES PLACE IN the context of a stagnating and deindustrialising economy. It also takes place in the wider context of the climate crisis and its impact and consequences for the electricity and energy sectors. It does this as issues of climate change begin to affect and impose themselves on energy policy and the public utilities responsible for electricity generation.

Equally, Eskom plays a critical role in the current crisis of South Africa’s political economy. The financial crisis of Eskom, with a debt burden of over R450 billion, weighs heavily on South Africa’s financial position and is one of the factors behind the downgrade by most of the credit rating agencies of the sovereign debt. Economic growth hovers at recessionary levels.

There are several causes: some of them are structural, (the slowdown in the world economy, a virtual investment strike by big corporations and large capital outflows). But growth is also significantly affected by the Eskom crisis. Load shedding and increased electricity prices have led to disinvestment from the mining and minerals beneficiation sectors. In short, the crisis of Eskom is a key factor in what has been termed the

“premature deindustrialisation of the South African economy.”

It is also important to contextualise the Eskom crisis within the unravelling of the minerals energy complex. Eskom is a leading institution in that complex. In fact, Eskom is both a contributing factor to, and a victim of, the crisis of the minerals energy complex and the wider economic crisis being experienced in South Africa.

South Africa’s economic and social crisis

THE ECONOMIC CRISIS SA FACES IS illustrated *not* by the anaemic growth levels, which most mainstream commentators and economic analysts focus on. Rather, it is the extreme inequality, poverty and unemployment levels that mark South Africa’s post-Apartheid political economy and act as the major constraint and obstacle to development and wellbeing.

Over 11 million people (when we take into account the more than 5 million discouraged jobseekers and “homemakers” not included as part of the work force) are without work and regular income. This has significantly contributed to more than 55 percent of the population living in poverty, according

to official statistics. These high levels of unemployment and worsening poverty have led to South Africa becoming more unequal than ever before.

South Africa’s widening inequality is seen in the fact that 10 percent of the population earn around 60 percent of all income. In the advanced economies that 10 per cent earn only 20-35 percent. So the top 10% earn far too big a share of income. And of course that means that the bottom 90% have to make do with only 40% of income.

But even those figures pale in comparison to those for ownership of wealth (by “wealth, we mean owners of assets such as real estate, pension funds and shares of listed companies). New tax and survey data suggest that the same 10% of the South African population owns between 90% and 95% of all those assets.

The export-oriented direction of the economy flows from these unequal foundations and imbalances on which the economy is structured. So does the tendency towards over-accumulation crises. The economies of scale necessary to withstand pressures of a globalised and financialised world economy cannot be achieved without wealth redistribution. This needs to take various forms, including higher wages,

extensive land and agrarian reform, comprehensive social security, a progressive system of taxation, an extensive investment programme to overcome spatial Apartheid and the remoulding of the built environment. A different set of economic (fiscal, monetary, industrial and trade) policies would be required to overcome SA's economic, social and political crises.

However, inflation targeting, tight monetary policies structured around high interest rates, and financial and trade liberalisation have eroded the productive base of the economy and encouraged investment in the speculative financial sectors. This has coincided with the big corporations that have traditionally dominated the South African economy reinventing themselves as global corporations. They have used their dominant positions and their resources in the South African economy as platforms to expand into global markets and value chains.

This reorientation of the largest South African corporations and reallocation of capital led to large-scale corporate restructuring. In particular, with the growing influence of the shareholder value movement, it has increased deindustrialisation and hindered diversification into downstream manufacturing sectors.

At the same time, the large growth in Foreign Direct Investment that the government's pro market policies banked on did not materialise. This made the economy more dependent on "hot money" portfolio flows ("hot money" is short-term capital in search of immediate returns). These inflows were necessary to match the large outflows occurring as a result of financial liberalisation. But



Eskom is both a contributing factor to, and a victim of, the crisis of the minerals energy complex and the wider economic crisis being experienced in South Africa.

they fuelled increased levels of debt-driven consumption and higher levels of imports for this consumption, reduced downstream manufacturing capacity, and led to high levels of capital flight and speculation in securities and real estate markets. The low levels of domestic investment and the domestic absorption of short-term foreign capital flows were accompanied by unsustainable increases in the rate of GDP growth that had been driven by consumption and speculation. The severe impact of the 2008 global financial crisis on the South African economy put an end to this unsustainable growth model.

Since the 2007/8 global recession, the South African economy has been in a stagnating and job-shedding cycle, as the minerals energy complex has reached its limits and begun to erode. Between October 2008 and March 2010, 1.2 million jobs were lost. Many were in key sectors such as mining and manufacturing. The opening up of the economy, particularly the liberalisation of trade and finance, has left SA largely defenceless when

faced with the contagion resulting from the global financial crisis.

This has taken a heavy toll on mining and other key sectors of the MEC. Not only has economic growth in general been low but mining and downstream heavy industries have been in recessionary mode. Investment has been subdued and several major mining companies

have announced their intention to withdraw from SA. This is for a variety of reasons, including the depressed nature of the economy, the relative fall in commodity prices, uncertainty regarding BEE ownership targets (the Mineral's Council has been in dispute with the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy (DMR) over the Mining Charter,) and the legacy of state capture.

Former South African giant corporations restructured their South African activities to focus on their core businesses. At the same time, they increased their investments abroad. Since 2000, there was restructuring and internationalisation of the conglomerates and there was a decline in their share of control over the market capitalisation of the JSE.

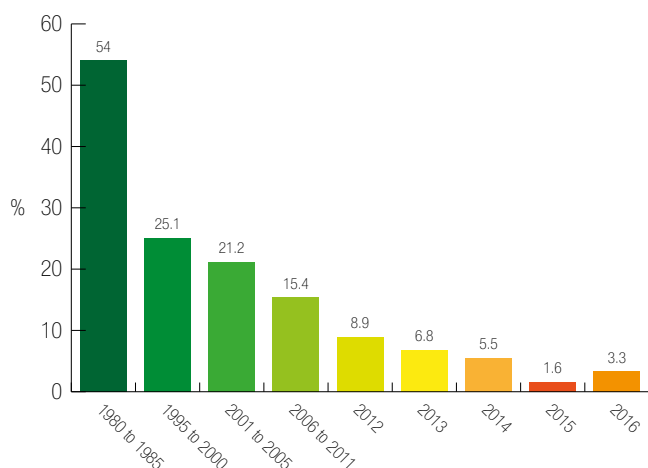
Anglo American

CONSIDER THE SITUATION OF ANGLO American, once the preeminent South African conglomerate, which at its height was worth 54% of the capital value of the JSE. Now its dominance has disappeared and it is currently worth a mere 3.3% of the total JSE value.

In the same vein, Anglo Gold Ashanti has announced its withdrawal from SA and it expects to sell off its remaining mines in SA by 2020. The reason it offers is instructive. Withdrawal from SA would result in upward rerating of its shares because of "regulatory uncertainty, Eskom electricity price increases and constraints, labour unrest, and rising and untenable levels of debt in state-owned companies that threaten the economy. These all make SA a risky investment for miners.

The internationalisation of SA's mining giants and their progressive declining ownership and withdrawal from SA has led to the unravelling of the MEC. But the ending of the era of cheap electricity is also significant and

Anglo American value as percentage of JSE





High levels of unemployment and worsening poverty have led to South Africa becoming more unequal than ever before.

has contributed to the weakening of SA's industrial base. Over a period of 10 years, Eskom's electricity prices have increased by about 356%. Inflation over the same period was only 74%. Up until recently, intensive energy users, such as smelters and steel producers, have been able to mitigate against these electricity price rises through long term contracts with Eskom. So investments in upstream production of basic metals have been supported by cheap energy agreements made in the 1990s, (some of which must be ending soon and influencing investment decisions). But downstream industries are generally purchasing electricity from municipalities at costs estimated (for foundries) to be between 19-29% higher than if they were supplied direct by Eskom.

The politics

PART OF THE EXPLANATION FOR THE decay of the MEC also lies in the political side of political economy. This is the struggle between an emerging black capitalist class, dependent on the state for accumulation, and the internationalised corporations that have traditionally dominated the SA economy. This struggle entered a more combative phase after the transition from Thabo Mbeki to Jacob Zuma as ANC president in Polokwane in 2007, and the subsequent recall of Mbeki as South African President in 2008.

Frustration had grown with the slow pace of economic transformation, especially amongst black economic empowerment groupings. Under the guise of radical economic transformation and a more radical version of African nationalism, several factions and patronage networks united to drive a more aggressive programme to gain greater control of the economy for black capital. Their focus was on government's R800 billion procurement budget as

well as the expenditure of state owned enterprises (SOEs), especially the more significant ones such as Eskom, Transnet, Prasa, SAA. It is this drive that was led by Zuma and his allies for control of key state institutions, including Treasury, the revenue services as well as key security and intelligence services. This is what became known as state capture. Their reliance on the state as an accumulation strategy predisposed them to cronyism and corruption. This especially took the form of manipulating the tender process and directing tenders to favoured corporations, from which kickbacks could be extracted.

But the result of this struggle for greater levels of black ownership and control over state procurement was to factionalise the state. It divided key agencies, demoralised public servants and left a trail of paralysis and dysfunctionality at most state owned enterprises, government departments and institutions. The economic costs were and are not small. Estimates range between R500 billion and R1 trillion. Of course, it is near impossible to put a cost on the lost opportunities that cronyism has imposed on the South African economy. This is especially the case in relation to what could have been a more sustainable development path had we had an effective state able to co-ordinate economic and industrial strategies with social priorities of job creation, poverty eradication and addressing inequality.

“New Dawn” will make things worse

SO THE BACKGROUND TO THE ESKOM crisis lies in the broader economic crisis South Africa is facing. This includes deindustrialisation of heavy industry and the associated erosion of the MEC (in which Eskom has been a critical factor) as well as cronyism, corruption and so-called

state capture. But the political transition to the era of the New Dawn is likely to only make things worse.

This is because every indication is that Ramaphosa's government is seeking to address SA's political economy and social crises through relying on attracting foreign investment and appeasing the credit rating agencies. Both investors and the credit rating agencies have made clear what they require from government:

- Austerity to deal with what they consider to be South Africa's unsustainable debt levels (projected to rise to over 65% of GDP by 2021); further pressure on the fiscus as the result of bailing out of state owned enterprises (the R59 billion Eskom bailout a case in point);
- Privatisation, or at the very least public private partnerships, and the opening up of key markets such as electricity as a way to deal with crisis-ridden SOEs;
- Labour Market flexibility “streamlining the settlement of labour lawsuits and limiting compensation for dismissals” (as the IMF put it in 2018). The obvious intention is to reduce wages and further weaken the bargaining position of the trade unions;
- Reducing the cost of doing business, which entails reducing costs of administered prices such as electricity, water, broadband etc. and easing congestion in transporting goods.

ALREADY THE MINISTER OF FINANCE, Tito Mboweni, in his 2019 Medium Term Budget Policy Statement, has signalled government's intention to adopt most if not all of these reforms. When delivering the MTBPS, in what is a clear statement of intent with relation to the reform of SOEs, he noted “I am pleased to learn that there are conversations involving SAA and potential equity partners, which would liberate the fiscus from this SAA sword of Damocles.”

In the coming months, we can expect several initiatives from government to subject Eskom to further reforms, which will open the electricity sector to private investment. Yet it is this very liberalisation of the economy that has resulted in the collapse of key sectors of heavy industry critical to Eskom's business model. Without putting in place a new industrial strategy to the withering minerals energy complex, South Africa's core manufacturing sectors have declined, with severe impact for the economy and jobs. Neoliberalism just does not have the necessary policy tools to direct investment where the South African economy needs it. So the role Eskom could and should play in revitalising the South African economy and in contributing to overcoming the deepening social crisis will be lost.

Under the New Dawn, expect Eskom's death spiral to accelerate. ■



With a crowd of 500,000, Montreal's march for the climate was the largest in the world during the September 20-27 week of climate action.

How seven thousand Quebec workers went on strike against climate change

By Alain Savard

This article first appeared on the "Socialist Project" website

WITH A CROWD OF 500,000, Montreal's march for the climate was the largest in the world during the September 20-27 week of climate action. Yet it was also noteworthy for another reason.

Despite provincial labour laws preventing unions from striking over political issues, 11 locals, representing 7,500 workers, formally voted to go on strike for a day.

Organising for the strike began in January with a handful of rank-and-file teachers who were also involved in grassroots ecological movements. They decided to organise a real climate strike. They linked up with the rank-and-file union network Lutte Commune (Common Struggle) to make connections with union activists on how to push forward.

The strategy they came up with was to get local membership meetings to pass a strike mandate. This mandate would be "conditional": it would take effect only if a critical mass – at least 10 locals, representing 5,000 workers – were participating. That way, the locals would not strike alone and be vulnerable to

repression and marginalisation. It also ensured that locals could coordinate without having to use the formal structures of labour federations for communication and strategising. The unions that the organisers thought might strike belonged to various federations. They expected the federations to be reluctant, if not hostile to the project.

Teachers vote to strike

BY JUNE 2019 THE FIRST THREE LOCALS had voted to strike, all of them representing teachers at Quebec's system of public, two-year, post-secondary, pre-university colleges, known as CEGEPs. Word was spreading fast among teachers that a climate strike was coming up, and many locals scheduled strike votes for after the summer break.

By design, these strike votes put CEGEP administrators in an awkward position. They did not want to appear to be "against the environment". So they were not eager to repress the strike movement. Under pressure, the administrations of many of the colleges decided to cancel classes for September 27th. Instead, they announced an "institutional day" where questions of climate change would be discussed.

Many local union officials therefore called off the strike votes they had

scheduled for the start of the school year. Since classes were already cancelled, they reasoned, the objective of allowing their members to participate in the rally was fulfilled.

A strike, not a class cancellation

BUT THE HALF-DOZEN RANK-AND-FILE leaders who were spearheading the movement replied with a small leaflet titled "eight reasons to vote the strike anyway." For one, not every CEGEP had suspended classes. Second, cancelling classes did not necessarily imply that teachers would be free to participate in the rally.

Most important, teachers had begun the mobilisation. It was *their* movement, not a movement organised by administrators. They were not going to march for the planet because their boss "let them" do so, but because they had decided not to work.

The small group made calls, contacted fellow teachers in other institutions, posted the leaflet on a Facebook group for CEGEP teachers, and debated the proposition in every forum they had.

This convinced eight other locals to join the movement. Most of them represented other CEGEP workers, but some represented office workers. University teaching and research assistants also voted to strike. In total, the 11 locals were members of three different labour federations.

Critical mass

AROUND SEPTEMBER 20TH, THE GOAL OF 10 locals representing 5,000 workers was reached. Quickly, the rank-and-file organisers called a meeting to gather the locals.

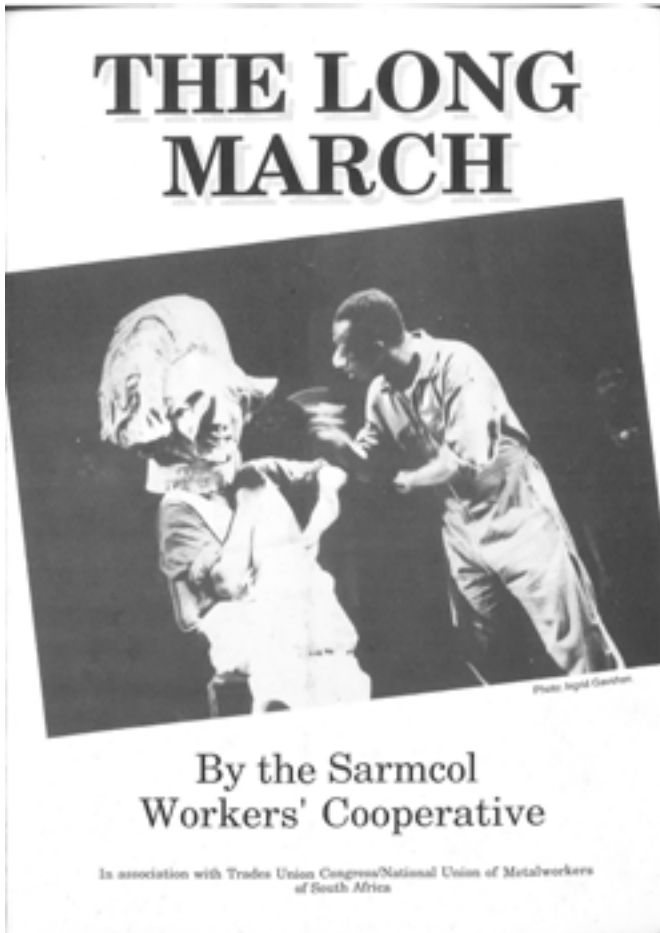
It became clear that people were not afraid of fines for holding an "illegal strike." The legitimacy of the cause and the scale of the mobilisation had cornered the bosses. Because administrators had agreed to cancel classes in many places, it was not clear how they could "prove" legally that teachers were not providing the normal workload required of them. So in a way, the workers got their strike vote "recognised." They were on political strike despite the labour laws.

On September 27th, a large part of the province was shut down. Students in universities, colleges, and high schools had voted to strike. A hundred and fifty businesses shut down and let their employees join the march. Thousands of workers took the day off. And amidst this turmoil, one group was striking in the proper sense. Seven thousand five hundred workers were proud to be on climate strike. ■

Alain Savard is a PhD candidate in political science and union militant

Rebuilding links between trade unions and co-operatives for counter-power

By Lucien van der Walt



The 1980s saw a revival of interest in worker co-ops in the left press and Cosatu. Numsa set up the Sarmcol Workers Cooperative in Howick in 1987 to assist fired workers.

Based on a talk in Tanzania on union strategy.

HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT, together with stunning failures by both private and state sectors to provide basic services, have helped reignite interest in forming co-operatives amongst the working class and poor. There is a range of left ideas behind support for building workers' co-ops. They range from ideas that cooperatives can alleviate poverty, to claims that they can form the heart of a different, solidarity-based economy, to notions that they can provide a route out of capitalism itself.

Co-ops, following the International Cooperative Alliance, are autonomous organisations to meet the common purposes and needs of members, with joint ownership and control. They are

often presented as new – in some cases, as part of an innovative “21st century socialism”. But they have a surprisingly long history. What, then, can we learn from earlier experiences in South Africa? And what role, if any, can co-ops play in reinvigorating the union and working class movements?

Limits and possibilities of co-ops

I ARGUE THAT workers' co-ops cannot play a significant role in poverty alleviation or job creation, do not challenge capitalism economically, and are not a direct route into socialism. However, there is still real value in workers' co-ops, if linked to larger working class movements for change.

Workers' co-ops face capitalist production, which is based on authoritarian management, control over capital and skills, exploitation and a disregard for workers' views and rights. They must either struggle simply to survive, or embrace capitalism. Likewise, consumer co-ops aimed at the working class are under immense pressure to provide low-price items, and so to source cheap products from capitalists. Relying on ethical consumption by richer people makes co-ops reliant on the inequalities within capitalism. Relying on states makes them reliant on ruling class patronage and politicians.

Fundamental change in society requires a massive redistribution of wealth and power – not least, socialisation of major means of production. This requires struggle and confrontation, rather than engaging in markets on the margins.

That said, workers' co-ops – whether start-ups, or from factory occupations, or land occupations, or generated in other ways – can provide valuable, concrete examples of democratic, self-managed, non-profit production. They can contribute to building the working class counter-power and revolutionary counter-culture, or consciousness needed for fundamental change. Workers' co-ops should be embedded in larger social movements, especially unions, which can provide protected markets and subsidies, including paying above-market solidarity prices.

Claims that co-ops provide an alternative are not new. They were, for example, made in the 1840s by French libertarian socialist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. He was later a major influence on the anarchist movement of Mikhail Bakunin. Proudhon wanted autonomous, bottom-up co-ops, funded by a mutual bank; his rival, Louis Blanc, an early social democrat, advocated state sponsorship. In South Africa, efforts at forming union-backed worker co-ops date back a century, and they remain central to the formal socialist strategy of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) and the South African Communist Party (SACP).

However, there is nothing intrinsically anti-capitalist, anti-statist or inclusive about co-ops. The most economically important co-ops in modern South Africa have been large-scale capitalist cartels. For example, KWV was formed in 1918 as a co-op run by white Western Cape commercial farmers. It controlled wine and distilled spirits, including prices, received state backing and was built on the back of low-wage, non-union and impoverished, mainly Coloured labour. This is an example of a user co-op providing services to clients. In this case it is also enabling capital accumulation. Around 1997, KWV became a private firm, ran BEE deals from 2004, and sold for over a billion rand in 2016.

Workers' co-ops are different: they are owned and controlled by the workers themselves. But they have significant limitations.

Co-ops in South African history

WORKERS' CO-OPS IN SOUTH AFRICA first emerged in Cape Town, according

to Evan Mantzaris. A small bakers' union started an International Cooperative Bakery on Roeland Street in 1903, and bootmakers in the non-racial General Workers Union (GWU) set up two co-op stores on Caledon Street in 1906. That year, striking cigarette rollers in the GWU formed a co-op producing "Knock-Out" and "Lock-Out" cigarettes, eventually employing 300. The latter co-ops were assisted by GWU and Social Democratic Federation militants like the anarchist Barney Levinson.

Despite enthusiasm, union support, and impressive starting capital, none lasted. Raw materials were controlled by large firms; co-ops lacked running costs and battled to pay wages; they could not access big retailers or compete with the big brands; they struggled to operate democratically and efficiently. This pattern continued over the following decades.

The 1980s saw a revival of interest in worker co-ops in the left press and Cosatu. For example, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) set up the Sarmcol Workers Cooperative (Sawco) in Howick in 1987 to assist fired workers. The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) set up 30 cooperatives in South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland, following a bruising 1987 mass strike. By 1989, Numsa was setting up the Siyanda Consumer Cooperative in Port Elizabeth, and an *East Cape Co-op Newsletter*. Other unions were also active.

From co-ops to union investment companies

THERE WAS NEVER agreement in Cosatu over co-ops' aims, but there was consensus over co-ops' limits.

In *Cosatu News* in 1989, Numsa argued they were "tiny" islands in a "hostile capitalist environment," employing hundreds only, and struggling to remain democratic. NUM ran cooperatives mainly to help, and keep contact with, ex-miners in rural areas. They were phased out in the mid-1990s. Its Phalaborwa T-shirt Printing Co-op has, however, survived. NUM's new approach was to build local businesses via a Mineworkers Development Agency (MDA).

Kate Philip, NUM co-op and then MDA coordinator, documented the disappointing outcomes of the NUM and other workers' co-ops: issues of funds, wages, skills, and management, pressure

from big capitalist firms and lack of markets. The alternative was for workers' co-ops to emulate capitalist firms, eroding co-op values.

In the 1990s, co-ops faded from union projects, and union funds moved instead into investment companies. In 2015, the total value of Cosatu-linked union investment companies stood at R20 billion. Many are embroiled in BEE deals, enriching black elites, union and ex-union leaders and established firms. Involvement in privatisation and corruption is common. They are capitalist corporations.



Mikhail Bakunin (1814 to 1876). Bakunin saw that co-ops are "overwhelmed" by monopoly capital. But he also saw their great value: they "habituate ... workers to organise themselves to conduct their own affairs", helping "plant the precious seeds" for a new society.

Role of co-ops in broader movement

THE BASIC PROBLEM FACING WORKER co-ops is that we live in capitalism. A small ruling class of capitalists and state managers controls all major means of production, administration and coercion through top-down corporations and states. This system operates according to deep logics of domination and exploitation. Projects like workers' co-ops are doomed to the margins.

Bakunin saw that co-ops are "overwhelmed" by monopoly capital. But he also saw their great value: they "habituate ... workers to organise themselves to conduct their own affairs",

helping "plant the precious seeds" for a new society.

Unions should revive workers' co-ops. They should do this without illusions that they can end poverty – that requires the end of capitalism and of states. Nor that they can end capitalism and states themselves – that requires revolution. They should do it as part of the institutional apparatus of a radical working class movement.

What matters is that worker co-ops demonstrate the features of a new world. They must contribute to a culture of self-management, practical skills and solidarity essential to a revolutionary

counter-culture. This consciousness is essential to building counter-power that can challenge the ruling class now, and later dethrone it, socialising the major resources and reconstructing society from below.

To give a concrete example, union-backed co-ops could supply t-shirts (as with successful NUM and Numsa co-ops in Phalaborwa and Howick) to unions, with large, guaranteed sales at decent prices. The unions would lose money on this – it's always cheaper in China – so this is a political, not an economic decision. It's about building the co-ops, the union, and the class. This is close to how Numsa used to approach the co-op question, using co-ops to demonstrate what they called in *Cosatu News* "democracy in production". And why not expand this into building clinics, fixing roads and establishing alternative media, technicians and universities?

This only makes sense in a larger project of union renewal, the rebuilding of union democracy, critical thinking and workers' education, and autonomy

from capitalist parties and corporations. That project would require the abolition of union investment companies. Their billions could be used for mass organising drives, a lively working class media, advice centres and union-backed co-ops, building a movement, as Bakunin put it, for a "future system of production" in which "land and all forms of capital must be converted into collective property". ■

Lucien van der Walt has long been involved in union and working class education and movements and published widely on labour, the left and political economy. Currently at Rhodes University, he's part of the Neil Aggett Labour Studies Unit and the Wits History Workshop.

The growing retail sector in Africa and the role of African retail trade unions

By Keith Jacobs



A new Shoprite store under construction in Luena, Moxico province, Angola. Shoprite is the biggest retailer in Africa.

GLOBAL RETAIL Multinational corporations (MNCs) have been spreading through Africa. Walmart entered the African market after purchasing a majority stake in Massmart, which houses major brands such as Game, Makro, Dion Wired and Builders Warehouse. Carrefour established a strong presence in North Africa and has been making inroads into west and east African countries.

At the same time, local retailers, such as Shoprite and Pick n Pay of South Africa, Choppies of Botswana and Nakumatt of Kenya, have spread out from their national bases. Shoprite is the biggest retailer in Africa. Choppies is a fast-growing supermarket which extended to Zimbabwe, Zambia, South Africa and Kenya. Nakumatt is a big supermarket from Kenya that, until it closed recently, dominated the retail market in East Africa. This collapse fuelled an intense competition between the large foreign

retailers as they battle for a larger share of the market in the region.

There are a number of reasons for this growth. These include the growing middle class in the continent, increasing rates of urbanisation, and rising levels of formal retail penetration in most regions – especially in southern and east Africa. These have contributed to the emergence of a strong and growing consumer base in the continent. Furthermore, an increasing number of countries are implementing national minimum wages – Nigeria, Mauritius, South Africa and Zambia – and welfare programmes. This ensures a stable income for the majority of the people.

The minimum wages and state transfers are small in monetary terms. But they represent a predictable form of income that retailers have been able to target, by providing consumer goods at very low prices. To make profits, the retailers cut costs by sourcing goods at low prices from suppliers and paying low wages.

The significance of the retail MNCs

THE FOREIGN RETAIL COMPANIES ARE appreciated in various countries for a number of reasons. They bring in valuable foreign investments; they enhance formalisation in the sector; they create jobs; and they sponsor the emergence of local supplier businesses and value chains.

Initially, retailers from South Africa relied on sourcing their goods from the home country. They were forced to shift towards sourcing from suppliers in host countries, as there were often long delays at borders and ports. As a result, companies like Shoprite run huge local supplier development programmes to ensure local supply of fresh produce and other goods. In countries such as Kenya, local laws require companies to source a significant proportion of their goods from local suppliers. This goes a long way in facilitating local linkages.

Interestingly, formal retail creates space for the informal sector to grow. Informal traders tend to cluster around formal retail chains, to gain access to customers and sell what the formal retailers do not provide. So, instead of formal retail destroying informal traders, there is often a healthy relationship developing between the two.

But retail work is characterised by a deficit of decent work.

Conditions of work

A LOT HAS BEEN WRITTEN ABOUT THE poor conditions of work that exist in the retail sector. Wages are very low in a sector where Executive Directors earn among the highest in the world in terms of pay, bonuses and dividends from shares. Retail companies rely on precarious forms of work, with casual, labour broker and part-time work very common. Lack of job security is a major concern for workers. They are subjected to long and flexible hours of work, where overtime is counted as part of normal working time.

Long and late trading hours create huge safety problems for workers, who



Makro workers protesting in Johannesburg. Workers employed by South African retail MNCs in other countries seek to achieve and enjoy what applies to workers in South Africa

have to travel long distances back home after knock-off time. With the majority of the workers being women, lack of transport after late trading hours becomes an even greater problem, as instances of rape of women workers increase day by day.

The problems experienced by workers has made them amenable to joining unions. Through their unions, workers have waged struggles to improve their wages and conditions of work. In South African corporations such as Shoprite, Pick n Pay and Massmart, wages and conditions in South Africa have been better, because of many years of struggles led by the South African Commercial and Catering Workers Union (Saccawu). These better conditions are often used as benchmarks for workers in other countries. So, workers employed by South African retail MNCs in other countries seek to achieve and enjoy what applies to workers in South Africa.

An important part of the struggles waged by unions has revolved around insecure forms of employment. Workers in different countries are fighting against part-time, casual and labour broker employment, in favour of direct, permanent employment with the MNCs, and against exploitative and burdensome shifts and flexible working patterns.

The unions are achieving some positive results. More and more precarious workers have been converted into permanent company employment. But where such victories are registered, the corporations (especially Walmart) have resorted to maintaining low staffing levels, linked to "smart" scheduling of available employees, to contain labour

costs. These methods have become crucial in corporations' efforts to contain labour costs. To counter these and other problematic corporate practices, the retail unions meet regularly to share information.

Regional networks

THE EXPANSION OF THE RETAIL MNCs across borders, and their malpractices, have created the need for sharing of information and exchange of strategies among the unions from the different countries. The majority belong to the Africa regional structure of the UNI Global Union – the international sector federation of unions in the retail and private services sectors such as security, banking and telecommunication. The UNI Africa regional office has formed union networks around the key retail MNCs operating in Africa. The networks hold annual meetings to share information and strategise together around their experiences with the companies. The main idea is to promote cross-border solidarity between the unions and workers employed by the corporations.

The networks are at different levels of development. The Shoprite network is the most advanced, having signed a Global Agreement with the company. This commits the company to observe key worker and trade union rights in all countries where it operates. It further provides for the unions to meet head office management on an annual basis, where the company reports on its performance and plans. In turn, the unions are able to raise problems and concerns of workers from the different countries.

Through these measures, the Shoprite trade union network was able to help the retail union in Swaziland. It faced obstacles to winning recognition at the Shoprite store in the country so that it can conduct collective bargaining on behalf of its members.

The Pick n Pay network operates at a sub-regional level in Southern Africa. The company's operations are currently confined to this sub-region, though it is exploring the possibility of entering the market in Nigeria. The unions, through UNI-Africa, have submitted a draft Global Agreement for negotiation. After a delay due to restructuring due to recent losses, the company appears to have turned the corner and is interacting with the sub-regional trade union network.

As would be expected, lots of challenges have been experienced at Massmart/Walmart, due to the company's notorious anti-union attitude. Nevertheless, Walmart recognises the unions and bargains with them. This comes from the conditions that were attached to its entry into Africa, when it bought a majority stake at Massmart. But alongside its engagement with the unions, the company implements the anti-union practices it has mastered over the years in the US. These include endless cases of dismissals against shop stewards and harassment of worker activists. Also, when negotiating over wages and conditions for workers in other African countries, the company has insisted that the negotiations be held in South Africa. This has seen trade union negotiating teams from other countries heading to Durban for wage bargaining, with costs of travel, hotel accommodation and meals borne by the company.

The Walmart strategy in Africa is clearly aimed at isolating the bargaining teams from union members, in an effort to squeeze concessions that are not favourable to workers. While most unions have co-operated with the company in this approach, they have always insisted on getting proper mandates from workers to participate in the negotiations.

Power from below

SO THE RETAIL SECTOR IN AFRICA IS expanding rapidly. The retail MNCs bring about valuable investments and stimulate local economic linkages, while creating jobs in the process. But they engage in serious malpractices that have inspired workers and their unions to rally together to advance workers' interests and promote cross-border solidarity. With limited legal instruments and political will in Africa to hold MNCs accountable, workers and their unions are building power from below and developing international strategies and structures to confront the behaviour of corporations. ■

Keith Jacobs is Regional Secretary of UNI Africa.

Reclaiming Pan-Africanism for social emancipation

By Issa Shivji

This was a presentation at the Southern African People's Solidarity Network (SAPSN) People's Summit, followed by an interview.

ARE WE FOR PAN-AFRICANISM or for member states? In which tradition or tendency does SADC fall? In the Political Pan-African or in the Economic Integrationist tradition?

These are some of the questions we should be asking ourselves to understand the role of civil society in promoting and advocating progressive Pan-Africanist unity. In this process of interpreting and changing our reality (as Marx said), we must be fully cognisant of the ideology which guides us. Because ideology does matter, whether you are explicit about it or follow it without knowing. Ideology determines the language you use, the people you mobilise, the demands you make, the slogans you craft and the goals you set.

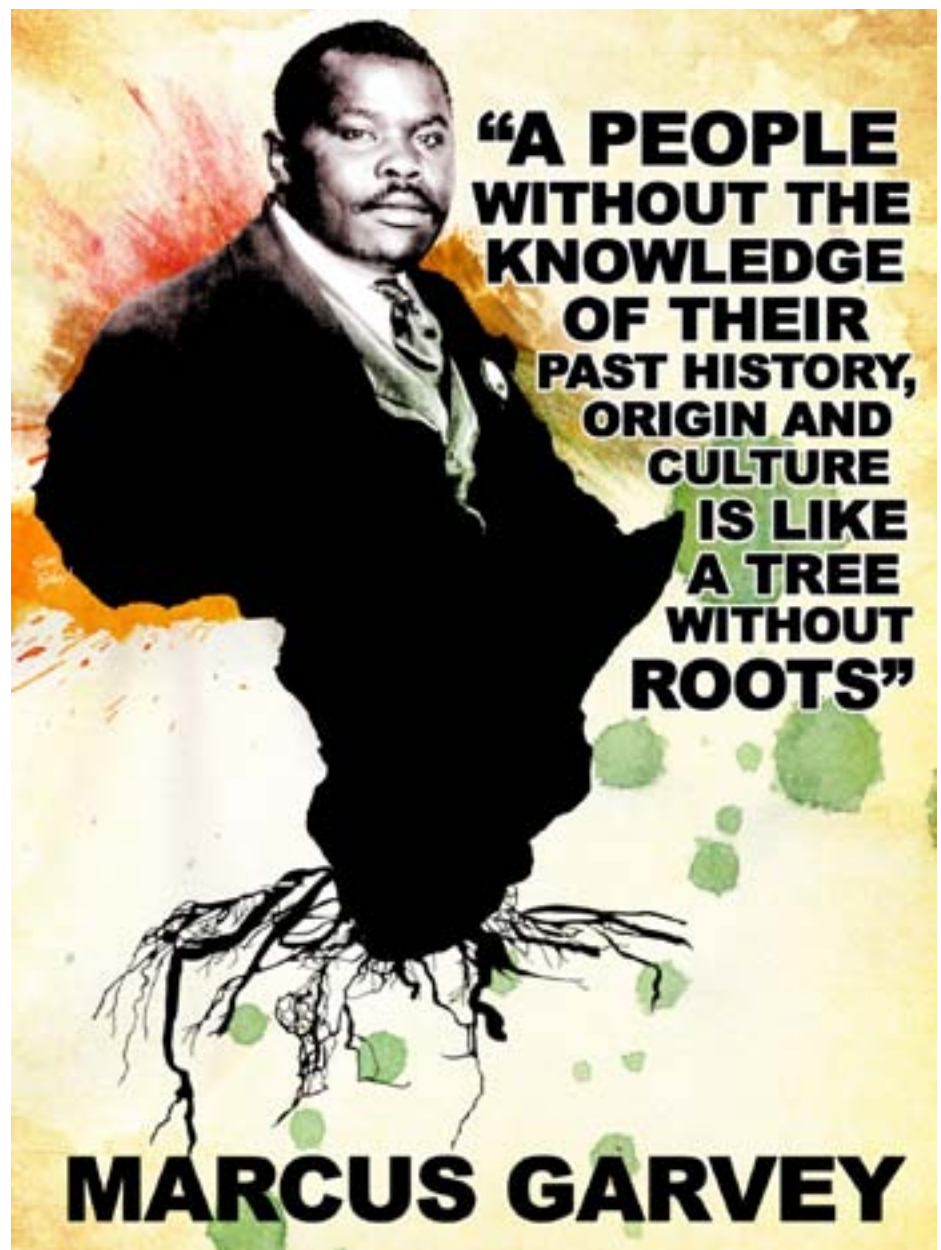
Without ideological guidance you are inevitably, without even realising, accommodated, co-opted and compromised. And the language used does matter. It tells what you are advocating, in whose interests and what you stand for. Language is not just words. Language arises from certain outlooks and perspectives. The central question is: what do you stand for – the politics of Pan-Africanism or the Economics of Integrationism?

What is the Pan-Africanist tradition?

THE PAN-AFRICANIST TRADITION CAN BE divided into three phases:

Phase 1:

THE FIRST PHASE WAS EMBEDDED IN A kind of anti-racist, racist ideology. The period is roughly from the late 19th to the middle of the 20th century. Born in the Caribbean and the US, the demand was to be treated as equal human beings and against racial discrimination. Within this struggle for equality and non-discrimination, there were two tendencies: one represented by WEB Du Bois and the other by Marcus Garvey. Du Bois stood for people of African descent to be integrated in the mainstream on equal



Marcus Garvey led the "Back-to-Africa movement" because he believed that Black Africans had no future in the US and the Caribbean.

terms. Garveyism stood for separation from, as opposed to integration in, the mainstream. He led the "Back-to-Africa movement" because he believed that Black Africans had no future in the US and the Caribbean.

Phase 2:

THE SECOND PHASE IS THE LIBERATION phase. It was led by a liberation ideology. The liberation ideology was best articulated at the 5th Pan-African Conference (PAC) held in Manchester in

1945. It included delegates like CLR James, Jomo Kenyatta, Kwame Nkrumah, WEB Du Bois, George Padmore and others. The 5th PAC was an important turning point in the Pan-African ideology because it opened up a larger landscape of struggle for the African people all over the globe. It had four very clear demands:

- Independence and liberation for Africa;
- Social democracy, including public ownership of the means of production;
- Uncompromising anti-imperialism; and
- An African federalism

Phase 3:

THE THIRD PHASE NEVER HAPPENED, because it was aborted and taken over by Integrationism. However, it should have happened, both logically and historically. Logically, because national liberation should have dovetailed into social emancipation. And historically because social emancipation was and continues to be on the historical agenda and the demand of the time.

I talk about national liberation and social emancipation not in the stage-ist sense, but as a process, in the sense of Cabral. Amilcar Cabral said “So long as imperialism exists, independence can only mean national liberation in power”, before he was assassinated by the Portuguese. This is because independence of the country itself does not ensure social emancipation of the people from exploitation and imperialist control. In short, imperialism is built on the underlying structure and social relations of capitalism; it does not end with independence. So the struggle for liberation from imperialism has to be waged simultaneously with the struggle against capitalism for emancipation.

Summing up the important characteristics of Pan-Africanist ideology, I would say:

- First and foremost it is a political ideology. Politics cannot be separated from economics. In our universities, politics is separated from economics. This is in line with the bourgeois outlook where the whole is broken up into compartments; where knowledge is disintegrated, thus losing vital connections; and where the bigger picture is lost in a myriad of details. Indeed, politics must take precedence over economics. This is what is meant by saying politics takes command. In this perspective, politics is seen as a concentration of economics, in the Leninist sense.
- Second in the Pan-Africanist ideology is its consistent anti-imperialism. And the anti-imperialist struggle goes beyond colonialism and national liberation. If

today there are people – African people – who think that imperialism does not exist and that it is passé, then they need to re-examine their intellectual source of knowledge and understanding.

- Thirdly, and this is my proposition, the modern Pan-Africanist ideology needs to combine the national and the social questions theoretically, politically and organisationally. How this is done in practice will depend on actually existing conditions of our own terrains of struggles. There is no blueprint nor a text book answer to “how we do it”. We can only show “why we should do it”, but not “how”. Because “why” is a question of theory and partly politics, while “how” is a question of organisation and partly of real life politics.



The question of African unity presents itself as a political question. If we don't unite politically, we cannot overcome our economic divisions.

THUS CONCEIVED, I SEE A GREAT potential for the Pan-Africanist ideology to become the ideology of the African working people. I see working people as the harbinger and agency of transformation and revolution in the current phase of neoliberal capitalism.

Against this background, the question of African unity presents itself as a **political** question. If we don't unite politically, we cannot overcome our economic divisions. Economics promotes competition; politics enables solidarity. After our independence, progressive Pan-Africanist politics was abandoned in favour of integrationist economic policies and its concurrent petty bourgeois politics.

Interview

Amandla!: What do you mean by a political Pan-Africanism?

Issa Shivji: MORE THAN EVER BEFORE there's a need for us to revisit and resurrect Pan-Africanism. Otherwise, in the neoliberal stage that we are in, we will sink into narrow and parochial nationalism. Today, narrow nationalism and parochial chauvinism, propagated under the guise of patriotism, are becoming rampant. This is not in the interests of the working masses of Africa – it only serves the interests of comprador classes and imperialism. “For my God and country” is its slogan. But patriotism is only a fig leaf for narrow class interests.

Secondly, there's no way that we can grapple either with imperialist hegemony or with our own reactionary states without an ideology which goes beyond our borders and subordinates narrow patriotisms. On our own, as separate countries, it will be virtually impossible to do that. Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere realised that there is no way that we can take on this challenge without unity and therefore they were ardent Pan-Africanists.

At the moment, we find that nationalism, presented as patriotism, has been co-opted by reactionary classes and social groups. In the colonial phase, in the times of the national liberation movements – in what I refer to as the Liberation Phase – nationalism was progressive then. But not now. Now it is becoming increasingly parochial. What we have is some kind of chauvinist patriotism (sometimes verging on xenophobia). Under these circumstances, we need an ideology that transcends this.

A!: How do we take power today?

IS: IN THE GRAMSCIAN SENSE IT IS important to win hegemony in civil society before you can win hegemony at the level of the state. That is where much of the progressive left has failed. Traditionally we always thought of getting power and then once you have power then you can do things. But that is not how things work, because capitalism is not simply rule by power. One of capitalism's greatest strengths is its hegemony – ideological hegemony, intellectual hegemony and cultural hegemony. Its ideology has become common sense, giving the feeling that there is no alternative. It is hegemonic.

We need to break that. We have to show that there is an alternative. Not only is there an alternative, but the alternative is not utopian – it's feasible, it's do-able. Until you arrive at a stage where your perspective becomes the common sense of people, or at least a critical mass of people, you cannot go very far. And that is where the progressive left has failed.

A: Where do you think national liberation movements failed in Africa?

IS: WHEN YOU LOOK BACK AT THE left, it had an amazing vision. The failure of the left is not a failure of vision. It is a failure to correctly characterise the state and various forces aligned against it. When these national liberation movements came into power, the link with the people, with the masses, broke, because they became a part of the state. When the organic link with the masses breaks, you become a prisoner of the state, however progressive you may be.

A: Are there major contradictions between Marxism and Pan-Africanism?

IS: THERE ARE STRONG LINKS between Pan-Africanism and Marxism. Nkrumah had a basic Marxist outlook too. Marxism is not a theology. There's no bible of Marxism. It is a method of understanding and a question of struggle among social forces. Other people may deny struggle, class struggle, but you can see it happening every day. There is no problem between Marxism and Pan-Africanism. Some Pan-Africanists may reject Marxism and vice-versa, but this is not a problem either.

In a struggle, you cannot be a purist; not everyone will be on the bus journey the whole way. Some will get off along the way, others may join and so on. I'd paraphrase Lenin and say: if you are a Pan-Africanist and say you *believe* in Marxism, it is good. But if you are a Marxist, and say you *believe* in Pan-Africanism, it is bad because Pan-Africanism is not a theology; it is a political ideology.

A: African socialism or socialism for Africa?

IS: NKROMAH DIDN'T WANT TO develop an African socialism. Yes, he may have been critical of Marxism, but this is not an issue. If you read his works like *Neocolonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism*, for example, it is in a

Marxist framework. Later on, after he was overthrown, Nkrumah wrote *Class Struggles in Africa*. It's a bit schematic but still the Marxist sentiment is there. For me, I'm not interested in African socialism. But socialism in Africa, yes.

A: Who are the agents of change today?

IS: INSPIRED BY AMILCAR CABRAL AND Walter Rodney, I have tried to develop the thesis of *working people*, rather than the working class, as the agent of change. Because when you hear of the working class there is a focus on the proletariat.



There are strong links between Pan-Africanism and Marxism. Nkrumah had a basic Marxist outlook too. Marxism is not a theology. There's no bible of Marxism. It is a method of understanding and a question of struggle among social forces.

But where is the proletariat in Africa? The concept of the working people is potent. It includes all those groups who we wouldn't strictly describe as working class. But they fall into the same category because they are exploited by capital. Capital doesn't only exploit at the factory. Informal workers are among the most exploited, and they are exploited by capital because they are subsidising capital.

The working people include the unemployed, the peasantry, small producers, small service providers and so on. We are past the stage where we refer to the peasantry and the unemployed

as fickle. In fact, the most fickle are the intelligentsia and the petty-bourgeoisie.

Even there, we have to be more concrete. For example, many of my former students are unemployed. They take on any job they come across. So what do they have to gain from the system? Some will classify them as petty-bourgeois, but they are not. This is where a concrete analysis comes in: concrete analysis of concrete conditions, that is important. That is why it is so important to have tools of analysis and an ideological framework within which to understand concretely actually existing classes and social groups in our societies.

A: What should a new phase of Pan-Africanism look like?

IS: IN MY VIEW, A NEW PHASE of Pan-Africanism ought to be rooted and located among the people, and the working people in particular; in movements, beyond NGOs. Initiatives have to be taken and it should not be left to the states or follow from the states.

Of course, we have to revisit Pan-Africanism, reformulate it and develop it not only in relation to national liberation. We also need to include a socially emancipatory agenda within it. I feel that we are in a stage where we have to combine the two processes, both national liberation and social emancipation, and not think of them as stages. We cannot say liberation first and then social emancipation second. We have a concrete situation with a potential for a Pan-Africanist revolution in the medium term. But we have to start with an insurrection of Pan-Africanist ideas and thought, for thought precedes action.

We can struggle for reforms while having a revolutionary outlook. If the state gives workers an eight hour work day, then it's a reformist reform. But if the state gives workers an 8 hour day because the workers have fought for it in the streets, then it is a revolutionary reform. That is important, because struggles are schools for the working people. We cannot stay away from reformist struggles, provided always that we are led by a revolutionary ideology and struggle for revolutionary reform as I characterise it here. Don't forget, struggles – even reformist struggles – are schools of socialism. ■

Professor Issa Shivji is the Director of the Nyerere Resource Centre.



There is no lesson that could have protected Uyinene from the brutality that awaited her on 24th August. But perhaps if Uyinene Mrwetyana had been able to grow up in a society that spoke openly about sex, consent and what it means to respect human dignity, her “no” would have been respected.

The need for comprehensive sex education

By Rehana Thembeka Odendaal

ON 28TH OCTOBER, CITY PRESS reported that “Teachers are threatening to boycott a new school curriculum” of sex education. It has also been attacked by the religious right. This article is a response.

Two months ago, South Africans across the political and religious spectrum were up in arms against gender-based violence, as the brutal killing of 19-year old Uyinene Mrwetyana shook the nation. We prayed, we march to parliament, we demanded that President Ramaphosa take action, and school children around the country begged us to STOP, while they wondered #AmINext? There is no lesson that could have protected Uyinene from the brutality that awaited her on 24th August. But perhaps if she had been able to grow up in a society that spoke openly about sex, consent and what it means to respect human dignity, her “no” would have been respected.

One of the basic responsibilities of our schooling system is to create a common basis for understanding the society that we live in. The reality is that we live in a society where 35% of South Africans under 18 report having experienced sexual

abuse; where it is okay to rape and kill queer people to “fix” them; where only one in four children live in what looks like a traditional nuclear family. We need to prepare our young people for the world that we are actually living in. Comprehensive Sex Education (CSE), which has been part of the South African curriculum since 2008, is one very important way for us to do this. In a study of 48 countries, CSE was shown to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS, delay when young people start having sex and reduce unwanted pregnancies.

Whatever our personal or religious beliefs are about sex, gender and sexuality, it is the government’s responsibility to protect all its citizen’s rights to non-discrimination. It must ensure that the approaches we take to reducing crisis issues like HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence are informed by scientifically sound information.

Education to combat abuse

THE DISCOMFORT THAT THE SEX education curriculum poses for some parents and teachers should not be greater than the discomfort that we

feel about sexual abuse and violence in this country. Frank and factually accurate conversations about puberty, sexuality and sex education have been pushed under the rug in South Africa for too long. That has clearly not led to a society that is able to keep its most vulnerable members safe. Allowing comprehensive sex education is one of the only tools that we have to try and educate young people about how to protect themselves and respect the diversity that South Africans so proudly claim makes us stronger.

Grade 4 learners need to be able to point out private parts on a line drawing. This is so they can feel empowered to say no when someone, who they might have been brought up to trust, tries to molest them and tells them that it’s okay because they are their dad/uncle/aunt/sibling. Teaching a Grade 7 learner that if they masturbate they are not a pervert or going to go blind, reduces confusion about hormonal changes that happen for many young people at that age. The Grade 10 differentiation between gender and biological sex isn’t “highly laden with liberal sexual ideology”, as has been claimed by critics. It’s what science tells us is fact. Grade 11s need a Life Orientation curriculum

that includes 4 out of five “heroes and role models” that are HIV positive and/or LGBTQI, not as propaganda, but to counter the massive social stigma that millions of South Africans still face in their everyday lives. Including same-sex cases as an example of the kind of abuse that young people might need to report is not homosexual propaganda. It teaches learners that sexual abuse isn’t always between a man and a woman.

Yes, education and teaching should be sensitive to the society they are based in. Yes, parents and teachers need to be engaged with what their children are learning. But parents and teachers also need to be sensitive to the fact that our children are growing up in a society where they don’t get to “opt out” of collective consequences of discrimination, violence and HIV/AIDS. Classrooms are an important tool for us to create a new normal where womxn and children don’t need to wonder #AmINext? ■

Rehana Thembeka Odendaal, from Cape Town, is currently doing a PhD in Education, Culture and Society at the University of Pennsylvania, USA.

The fourth industrial revolution

Job creation – a conceptual contradiction

By Fazila Farouk



A 3D printer. 4IR technologies include artificial intelligence (AI), advanced robotics, automatisisation, machine learning, big data, cloud computing, augmented reality, virtual reality, 3D printing, intelligent agents, block chains and sensors.

TO STATE THE OBVIOUS, GLOBAL society is undergoing profound changes due to sweeping technological changes in the world's economy. A new term, the "Fourth Industrial Revolution", has entered our discourse to describe these revolutionary technological changes. The term "Fourth Industrial Revolution" (commonly abbreviated to 4IR), was coined by Professor Klaus Schwab, Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum (WEF). Fuelled by the influential policy machinery of the WEF, the 4IR has become a defining policy theme of our era.

The concept and definition of the 4IR are contested. There remains much debate about whether or not we are indeed experiencing a so-called "fourth" such revolution. For example, US academics Erik Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) refer to this era as "The Second Machine Age". Fellow American economic and social theorist, Jeremy Rifkin, contends that we are merely experiencing a paradigm shift in "The Third Industrial Revolution". While Venezuelan-British scholar Carlota Perez refers to this

new era as the "Fifth Technological Revolution".

Be that as it may, the 4IR is the most common description of the changes we are experiencing. It has become an agenda-setting concept that grabs media headlines and dominates policy conferences all over the world.

The global dimension

THERE IS CURRENTLY A PROLIFERATION of new and unusual technologies applied in increasingly innovative and complex ways. In many ways, this justifies the noise and interest in the 4IR. Indeed the WEF's Schwab is correct to argue that the defining characteristic of this industrial revolution is its complexity and scale. Its technologies include artificial intelligence (AI), advanced robotics, automatisisation, machine learning, big data, cloud computing, augmented reality, virtual reality, 3D printing, intelligent agents, block chains and sensors.

The impact of these technologies is described by Perez as a surge of development that "propagates across the economy, leading to structural changes in production, distribution, communication and consumption as well as to profound

and qualitative changes in society".

Very few can argue with the fact that we are experiencing a tectonic shift in how economies work and society functions. Technological disruption is nothing new in our history and past developments have always led to progress linked to human sustainability. But this time there's a sense of foreboding that the current onslaught is different. Robots and AI are moving into factories, offices, stores and homes to perform an increasing number of tasks traditionally performed by humans. As this happens, the fear of technological unemployment is growing.

This time, automation is linked to an existential threat for human beings, as there is also growth in the number of machines taking decisions on our behalf.

People have always resisted the idea of robots invading factory floors to displace workers. Workers have challenged it through industrial action. Nevertheless, robots on factory floors were never really perceived as an existential threat to society. Workforces have always had the option to develop their skills and transition into more advanced sectors of the economy. Current anxieties, however, stem from the fact that, beyond the factory floor, many professions in advanced and seemingly secure sectors of the economy are now exposed to the threat of technological unemployment. This is due to spectacular advances in AI, integrated with advanced robotics.

Some years ago already, The Wall Street Journal reported that robotic anaesthesia is threatening to remove anaesthesiologists (among the highest paid doctors) from participating in routine procedures in operating rooms. That would significantly reduce their incomes. Overnight, the threat of technological unemployment has become a reality for the secure medical profession. This is supported by the International

Federation of Robotics (IFR) which reported in 2018 that “sales of medical robots rank ahead of agricultural and logistics robots”.

Without doubt, 4IR technologies are set to radically transform future livelihoods across the social and economic spectrum.

Impact in South Africa

HERE IN SOUTH AFRICA (SA), the 4IR has been greeted with mixed feelings. People marvel at its advances. But they also harbour deep anxiety about the prospect of joblessness, combined with our existing unemployment crisis, including record levels of youth unemployment.

Sadly, the South African situation is a toxic mix of economic and social inequality facing further catastrophe, as job opportunities for people shrink. This, unfortunately, is borne out by local studies conducted by academics.

For example, a 2018 workshop discussed the preliminary findings of a study that examines specific job categories in SA to determine their risk. In that workshop, economists at the University of Cape Town’s (UCT’s) Development Policy Research Unit (DPRU) argued that “39% of formal employees in SA are at high risk of losing their jobs, with a further 42% at medium risk”.

Another 2018 study sought to determine the impact of automation specifically on low and medium skilled workers. In it, the University of Stellenbosch’s Daniel Le Roux found that “the occupations performed by almost 35% of South African workers (roughly 4.5 million people) are potentially automatable in the near future”. This study predicts that black South Africans are most at risk of job losses as a result of automation, while white South Africans will be minimally impacted.

The manufacturing sector is a frontline industry for automation, where the use of robots is growing. The IFR estimates that globally “the stock of operational industrial robots will increase...to 3,053,000 units at the end of 2020”. The car manufacturing sector will lead demand in both advanced and emerging economies. The global trend in industrial robot sales is evident in SA’s car manufacturing sector. For example, industrial robots in VWSA’s Uitenhage plant increased from 320 in 2016 to 600 in 2018.

Upskilling not the answer

SA’S RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGE OF growing automation in the workplace is to



Robots in a VW assembly plant. Industrial robots in VWSA’s Uitenhage plant increased from 320 in 2016 to 600 in 2018.

call for the upskilling of workers for jobs higher up the value chain. However, the notion of upskilling workers for higher order jobs is problematic on two fronts.

Firstly, the evidence that value chain interventions can create and protect jobs is weak. A 2014 study was conducted on behalf of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to measure pro-poor changes based on value chain interventions. It examined 53 studies, with an emphasis on developing nations, including South Africa, and found “highly variable and generally scarce” evidence that these interventions led to job creation or better-quality and long-term jobs. Early results from a local study also support this global finding. A preliminary report from a UCT multi-sector case study of the impact of automation in 2018 found that “automation does not lead to upskilling in the workforce and that workers are often re-deployed to manual routine jobs on the production line”.

Secondly, and in general, workforces of the 4IR are becoming smaller and smarter, especially high up in the value chain. This can be seen from this famous global example. When Facebook acquired Whatsapp at the staggering price of US\$19 billion in 2014, the messaging service only employed 55 people.

There’s no question that workforces of the future will be smaller. Policy responses that seek to address this challenge with further job creation strategies are simply shortsighted. This is where SA repeatedly fails. A WEF survey has found that one of the main barriers to planning for the future of work in South Africa is “insufficient understanding of disruptive changes”.

The automation challenge, as most South Africans perceive it, is about

how to expand new job opportunities as well as protect existing jobs, while actively engaging in the 4IR. There’s a dangerous conceptual contradiction in this way of looking at the issue. Embracing automation requires accepting the idea of fewer possibilities for job creation and scarcer jobs all round. No amount of teaching coding and entrepreneurialism at schools is going to address this problem.

Future distribution

WHAT ARE REQUIRED ARE CREATIVE policy responses that break the mould. In the South African context, they must also address historical injustices that perpetuate current social and economic inequalities. For example, German labour lawyer, Dr Ruediger Helm, argues that South Africans should take advantage of the 4IR to address the vertical pay gap in our country. Meanwhile tech billionaires, such as Elon Musk, are at the forefront of championing the universal basic income as an important social safety net.

Futurist and author, William Gibson, famously wrote, “The future is already here. It’s just not evenly distributed”. In the context of apartheid’s legacy, South Africa’s inequality and increasing joblessness in the 4IR, the most important contribution South Africans can make to future generations is to transition away from the ideology of the survival of the fittest. It will not serve us well in a future where robots have taken most of our jobs...and perhaps also, a great deal of our decision-making. ■

Fazila Farouk is the former publisher of the South African Civil Society Information Service (SACSIS). She is currently doing a PhD at UCT on the intersection of automation, unemployment and inequality in South Africa.

Radical resistance to authoritarian democracy in Nigeria

By Baba Aye



Police drag an @SaharaReporters journalist into a detention truck. Attacks on press freedom, disregard for court orders and the crushing of peaceful demonstrations have become the order of the day.

OUR ARTICLE FOR *AMANDLA!* 64 analysed the February/March elections and related developments. We pointed out “the hollowness of liberal democracy in Nigeria”. In the months since then, the regime, represented primarily by the ruling All Progressive Congress, has become more authoritarian, whilst clinging to the shell of liberal democracy in form. The Coalition for Revolution (CORE) in Nigeria further exposed the repressive essence of the regime. The state has violently tried to suppress the #RevolutionNow campaign launched by CORE in August without much success. This marks a renewal of radical politics.

In the wake of his re-election, President Buhari declared that working-class people should brace themselves for tougher times ahead. Turns to authoritarianism are often taken by the ruling class to push through unpopular policies and programmes in the service of capital accumulation (or to maintain the stability of the capitalist system).

The Argentine political scientist, Guillermo O’Donnell, for example, theorised on how military regimes that emerged in the 1960s and early 1970s

in Latin America created “Bureaucratic Authoritarian States” to push through modernisation of countries in the region.

Attacks on press freedom, disregard for court orders and the crushing of peaceful demonstrations have become the order of the day. This slide towards a quasi-fascist order is likely to go further unless it is curbed by struggle from below, as it is hinged on pushing through unpopular neoliberal policies.

In the 1960s to the 1990s, when military dictatorship was somewhat in fashion, authoritarian rule took the shape of a series of military juntas in Nigeria. Buhari himself first appeared as a head of state, in 1983, as General Muhammadu Buhari, with a coup.

Of the half a dozen juntas that wielded power for all but four years from 1966 to 1999, his regime was the most autocratic, despite not being as murderous as that of General Sani Abacha. He whipped Nigerians in line with a national “War Against Indiscipline (WAI)”. He retroactively effected laws which carried the death sentence. He issued decrees for detention without trial and for the most repressive press gag law in the country’s history. He purged the civil service and selectively prosecuted civilian politicians,

apparently targeting those from the southern parts of the country.

When running for his first term in office, four years ago, Buhari claimed to have become a “converted democrat”, but “dictatorial habits have proved hard to give up”. However, it is the dynamics of the world, as well as the nature and balance of class forces in struggle, that are much more important.

Increasing impunity and repression

AUTOCRATIC REGIMES HAVE A propensity for constricting freedom of expression, including the mass media, and increasingly social media. Since the 29th May inauguration of its second term, the APC regime has taken its tyrannical attacks on the mass media a notch or two higher.

It immediately unleashed an avalanche of repressive measures in the first week of June. The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), a supposedly neutral regulator of the broadcast industry, headed by a stalwart of the ruling party, suspended the license of DAAR Communications.

DAAR Communications is owned by Mr Raymond Dokpesi, a chieftain of the Peoples Democratic Party. The company’s African Independent Television and RayPower FM radio (the largest private broadcast network) were both shut down. The reasons proffered for the shutdown were “inciting broadcasts and media propaganda against the government” and failure to meet financial obligations to the regulatory body.

The same week, Koffi Bartels, a journalist of the Nigeria Info FM radio, was beaten black and blue by police officers after he tried filming Special Anti-Robbery Squad police officers beating a young man. The policemen said he had “been giving them problem for a long time” in his coverage of police activities in Rivers state, which had been a violent battle ground between APC and PDP during the elections. The US-based

Committee to Protect Journalists called on the Nigerian authorities to “investigate and hold accountable the police officers”, to no avail.

No less than 36 Nigerian journalists were attacked between January and July. Thirty of these were during the general elections in February and March. This was just a foretaste of what was to come, making an earlier wave of attacks on press freedom last year (as captured in the Amnesty International report *Endangered Voices: Attack on Freedom of Expression in Nigeria*) appear like child's play.

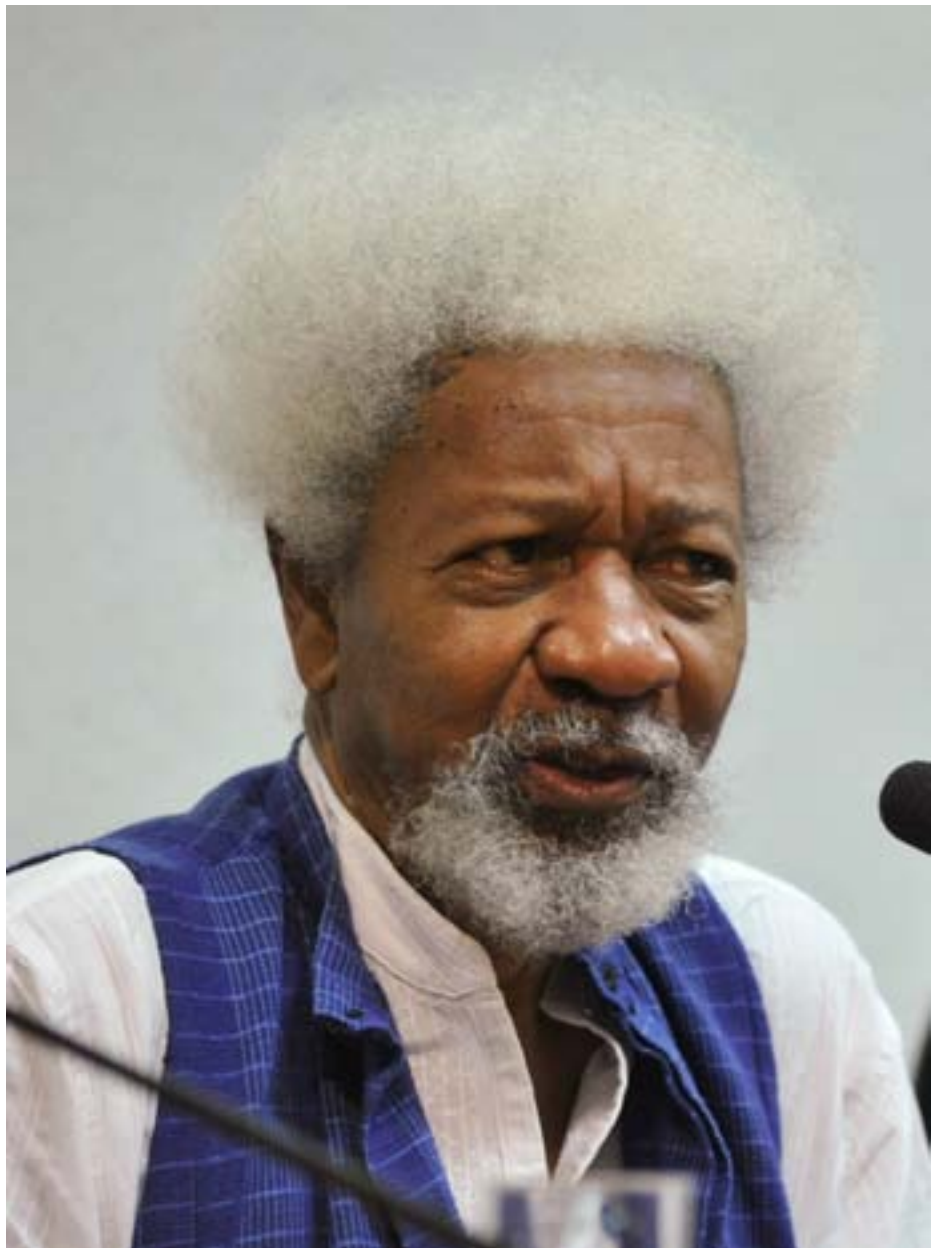
The government's reign of impunity includes the killing of 11 members of the Shi'ite minority Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN), as well as a police officer and a journalist felled by stray bullets of security personnel on 28th July. Members of IMN were protesting the continued incarceration of their leader, Sheikh Ibrahim El-Zakzakky, in contempt of a 2016 court ruling.

Zakzakky and one of his wives have been detained since 2015. This was after at least 348 of his followers, including one of his wives and three of his sons, were killed and secretly buried in mass graves. This has been described as an operation of the Army with a “pre-determined mandate” to attack the Shi'ites during one of their ritual processions. IMN members have mounted a series of peaceful protests in Abuja to demand the release of Zakzakky. Dozens of IMN members were brutally killed on 29 October 2018 during one of these demonstrations.

After the July 2019 killings, the IMN was banned. The government claimed that it had only “outlawed the criminality of the group”, but members of IMN were not being banned from practicing their religion. But 12 members of the group were again murdered by security personnel in a nationwide crackdown on 10 September, while marking the Ashura, an annual Shi'ite mourning ritual.

Political consolidation of powers across the arms of government into one warhead of the executive is an often under-problematised aspect of the emerging post-fascist regime. Friction between the leaderships of the two national legislative houses and the executive was the norm under earlier administrations, even when all sides were from the same party. This included Mr Buhari during his first term. But he now has allies as the Senate President and Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Just weeks before the elections, Buhari removed Mr Walter Onnoghen the Chief Justice for corrupt practices in a deft political masterstroke. The role of the Chief Justice in constituting election tribunals, as well as the interpretation of laws, cannot be overemphasised. Mr Ibrahim Tanko Mohammed was sworn in as Chief Justice in April. Despite verbal commitments to respect for the



Professor Wole Soyinka, the renowned Nobel Laureat, saluted #RevolutionNow activists and called on civil society organisations to “come together” to fight the increasingly authoritarian regime.

rule of law, his (in)actions present a picture of a chief judge who is not keen to rock the boat.

It is probably within this context that the government believes no criticism can stop the enactment of a social media gag bill presently before the Senate. It has been described by a former radical Senator, Mr Shehu Sani, as a move towards totalitarianism. An earlier attempt to pass such a law in 2016 failed under the then embattled Senate President, Mr Bukola Saraki, due to mass mobilisation against it.

As if the intent to gag criticism on social media were not enough, APC Senators also re-introduced an anti-hate speech bill in November. If passed, the death penalty could be imposed on anyone found guilty of hate speech that incites the death of another person. There is however widespread concern that the law could be used to hound opposition forces.

But resistance has been alive. These draconian bills, the regime presenting them and the system this regime represents can be defeated through struggle. The embers were stoked on 5th August. They continue to blaze in the face of the state's oppressive weight.

#RevolutionNow and the radical left

ON 5TH AUGUST, THE #REVOLUTIONNOW campaign was set in motion by the Coalition for Revolution (CORE). It has five core demands:

- an economy for the masses
- an effective and democratic end to insecurity
- an end to systemic corruption
- immediate implementation of the N30,000 minimum wage, and
- free quality education for all.

IT HAS RECEIVED MASSIVE SUPPORT from working class people and youth.



Occupy Nigeria rally in 2012. With the genie of #RevolutionNow out of the bottle, it is unlikely that the battles ahead for working-class people will remain on the defensive economic level or be easily called off, as happened to the #OccupyNigeria revolts of January 2012.

The regime tried its best to snuff life out of the campaign, even before it began. On 3rd August, it arrested Omoyele Sowore, publisher of Sahara Reporters, the leading online source of exposés on political corruption and impunity in Nigeria. Mr Sowore is Chair of the African Action Congress (AAC) and was the party's presidential candidate during the general elections. He was central to the formation of CORE.

The revolutionary coalition brings together these organisations: Take It Back (the movement which gave birth to AAC) and a number of radical and revolutionary left groups such as the Socialist Workers & Youth League (SWL), Socialist Vanguard Tendency (SVT), Nigeria Resistance Movement (NRM), Committee for the Defence of Human Rights, as well as the Federation of Informal Workers of Nigeria (FIWON) and the Alliance of Nigerian Students Against Neoliberal Attacks (ANSA). This is the mass platform of students (including a number of their unions) which has arisen as a radical alternative to the bankrupt official structures of the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS).

Demonstrations had been planned for 23 out of the 36 states of the federation on 5th August. But before dawn, combined teams of the army, air force, special units of the police and paramilitary forces took over the streets in all state capitals of the country. Despite this unprecedented show of coercive strength by the state, #RevolutionNow activists organised protests in 14 of the states and 9 other cities across the world. The nationwide action was, however, limited in most of the locations as the protesters were

constrained by having to circumvent the massive dragnet.

Their dexterous organising was not sufficient to stave off a crackdown. Not less than 57 protesters, including some journalists, were arrested in seven states. 32 of the peaceful demonstrators were also brutalised, beaten and injured. One suffered a gunshot wound when the security personnel shot at them in Lagos, the epicentre of action.

Attempts to quash #RevolutionNow activities did not stop with the failure of the 5th August repressive offensive. There was a standoff on 18th August as police cordoned off the venue of a national symposium to discuss the current political situation, but the state failed to stop the movement. In yet another failed attempt to stop further #RevolutionNow demonstrations, police barricaded the offices of the CDHR and the Sahara Reporters studio/civic media centre in the second week of September.

The movement represents a major turning point of resistance, fanning the embers of revolt. Apart from the trade unions with their ready-made structures, no other social force has been able to mobilise nationwide protest of any sort in the 21st century. And it took the explosion of mass anger, after the military junta of General Ibrahim Babangida annulled the "June 12" presidential elections, for the pro-democracy movement, led by the radical and revolutionary left, to rise up to such a level in the mid-1990s.

The CORE-led movement has thus far demonstrated its building of a national infrastructure necessary for prosecuting radical struggle. It has also inspired mass awareness-raising, without which

revolutionary class consciousness cannot be forged. For example, apart from #RevolutionNow trending on social media for days on the eve of the start of the campaign, on 5th August, more than 5 million Nigerians searched for "revolution" on google.

Omoyele Sowore remains incarcerated, as does Olawale "Mandate" Bakare, a 22-year old leader of the TIB arrested in the heat of the 5th August demonstrations. This incarceration continues despite an order for their release. It has also elicited widespread condemnation. This increased after a series of demonstrations by #RevolutionNow activists in front of the offices of the secret police, the self-styled Department of State Services (DSS).

On 12th November, demonstrations of #RevolutionNow activists and other supporters #OccupyDSS were dispersed with live ammunition and pepper spray. Professor Wole Soyinka, the renowned Nobel Laureate, saluted them and called on civil society organisations to "come together" to fight the increasingly authoritarian regime. The response of the radical and revolutionary left has however not been as unambiguous as that of the liberal democratic professor.

The working class is roused

THE NEAR FUTURE IS PREGNANT AND something has to give. Worsening living standards are sowing seeds of anger on the soil of resistance, which #RevolutionNow is ploughing. The ignition point for a revolutionary upheaval could be arrived at spontaneously, and/or through the deepening of economic mass strikes, as the working-class is roused in the coming period.

After much prevarication, the trade unions reached an agreement with government in October on increments based on the miserly minimum wage of N30,000 which was passed into law in April. However, the state governors have made it clear that they are unlikely to respect this. Meanwhile, the federal government has increased VAT by 50%, supposedly to fund payment of the new minimum wage and consequential wage increments.

Rank and file demands will force the trade union bureaucracy to take action to achieve meaningful implementation of the wage rise. With the genie of #RevolutionNow out of the bottle, it is unlikely that the battles ahead for working-class people will remain on the defensive economic level or be easily called off, as happened to the #OccupyNigeria revolts of January 2012. ■

Baba Aye, a Co-Convener of CORE, is a contributing editor of Review of African Political Economy [RoAPE] and author of *Era of Crisis & Revolts* (2012). He works as policy officer with a global union federation in Geneva.



Women's Protection Unit fighters. On the ground and in the legal-political sphere, the Democratic Self-Administration has institutionalised gender equality in all its mechanisms.

Turkey's war for occupation

By Dilar Dirik

FOLLOWING A PHONE CALL WITH US president Donald Trump, the Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan launched the so-called "Peace Spring" operation in the majority Kurdish region of North and East Syria on October 9th, 2019. Since then, hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced and hundreds of civilians have been murdered. Chaos and instability has erupted in the once relatively stable region. The Turkish state's plan for a "safe zone" is in reality a war of occupation. It has created a humanitarian disaster for millions of peaceful people, with the support of the European Union, Nato, the US and Russia.

This is not the first time that Turkey has conducted a cross-border military operation in Syria. For years, Turkey has been occupying large stretches of land in the region of al-Bab and Jarablus, mainly

with the aim of isolating majority Kurdish areas. In January 2018, Turkey launched its so-called "Olive Branch" operation in the majority Kurdish region of Afrin. Since March 2018, Afrin has been occupied by the Turkish state, leading to fundamental demographic change, war crimes and human rights abuses.

Kumi Naidoo, Secretary General of Amnesty International, stated that: "The Turkish military offensive into northeast Syria has wreaked havoc on the lives of Syrian civilians who once again have been forced to flee their homes and are living in constant fear of indiscriminate bombardment, abductions and summary killings. Turkish military forces and their allies have displayed an utterly callous disregard for civilian lives, launching unlawful deadly attacks in residential areas that have killed and injured civilians."

In the first days of the operation, the Turkish state and its proxies were shelling nearly all of the major cities and towns on the border, well aware that these areas are inhabited by hundreds of thousands of civilians. These attacks have allowed ISIS to regroup and reorganise. Hundreds of captives are reported to have escaped as a result of the Turkish airstrikes. ISIS has already claimed dozens of attacks in North and East Syria since the beginning of Turkey's war.

Since 2012, the majority Kurdish areas in Syria (referred to as Rojava) have been administering themselves. The administration has been based on ideas for a democratic, federal, decentralised, multi-ethnic and gender-egalitarian future Syria, which would enable communities to govern themselves autonomously. These structures are currently organised in the form of the Autonomous Administration



Journalists and activists hold pictures of jailed journalists during a demonstration in front of an Istanbul courthouse. According to Reporters without Borders, Turkey has been the largest jailer of journalists for several years now.

of North and East Syria. They never planned to secede, but actively sought to be part of international efforts to negotiate peace in Syria.

Turkey did not plan any cross-border military interventions when parts of its border to Syria were held by ISIS. For the Kurdish people, it is evident that the aim of Turkey is to undermine the autonomous self-governance structures that have been built up in the region since the early years of the Syrian war.

The self-ruled region hosts millions of internally displaced people from Syria, as well as a number of refugees from Iraq. Until the current military invasion, it was a safe haven for ethnic and religious communities. When ISIS committed genocide against the Yezidis in neighbouring Iraq in 2014, fighters of the YPG (People's Defence Units) and YPJ (Women's Defence Units) from Rojava, as well as the guerrillas of the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), came to their rescue. They fought for a corridor to enable tens of thousands of Yezidis to find refuge in Northern Syria.

Currently, the region is secured by the Syrian Democratic Forces, which is a large, multi-ethnic alliance of peoples from the region. The SDF lost 11,000 lives in the fight against ISIS. Yet Turkey considers these forces, who have been the backbone of the war against ISIS, as terrorists and repeatedly emphasises that they are no different from ISIS. This position is held only by the Turkish state.

The US-led coalition against ISIS repeatedly characterised the SDF as their ally in the war against ISIS. The tactical alliance of the regional Kurdish-led forces with the US began in 2014 with the ISIS siege of the Kurdish city of Kobane. They resisted ISIS singlehandedly for months, before the global anti-ISIS coalition was formed. Capitalising on this resistance,

the US under Obama began launching air strikes against ISIS in support of the resistance on the ground in Kobane. This laid the foundations of a by now five-year long military cooperation.

It was evident from the beginning that this mutually-beneficial military cooperation against ISIS was only tactical and temporary. The Autonomous Administration, as a self-government body, currently makes up around one third of the country. But, due to pressure from Turkey, this Administration, as well as the Syrian Kurds as an ethnic group, have been consistently excluded from talks, including UN-led efforts.

The fight against ISIS was not a guarantee for political recognition. Nevertheless, Trump's decision to pull out the US troops at a time of immediate threat by the Turkish army has been interpreted widely as "greenlighting" an ethnic cleansing operation.

Turkey's track record in Syria

BY USING PROXIES, TURKEY NOT ONLY tries to evade accountability for crimes and abuses. It also seeks to legitimise its occupation policies by claiming that the proxies are Syrian, and thus indigenous to the region. The "Syrian National Army", often also called the "Turkish-backed Free Syrian Army" (TFSA), is a coalition of battalions that are recruited, trained and paid by the Turkish army, which is the second largest army in Nato. Some of their methods, slogans and aesthetics clearly demonstrate a commitment to extremist ideologies. Reporters suspect that some of the individuals in emerging pictures and videos are former members of ISIS or Al Qaeda. These proxies proudly document and share their brutal war crimes on social media, as if unafraid of accountability. Meanwhile, the Turkish

media circulates photographs of the army distributing humanitarian aid to villagers, after having displaced hundreds of thousands of people as a result of its war. As the Turkish president said: "What is important is to prepare a controlled life in this enormous area, and the most suitable people for it are Arabs. These areas are not suitable for the lifestyle of Kurds... because they are virtually desert". As many people have pointed out, this is the language of ethnic cleansing.

The people of the region now resort to throwing rocks at the Turkish military convoys to protest what is in their eyes a colonial presence. They are well aware of the implications of a Turkish "safe zone" – the occupation of Afrin since last year has drawn an accurate picture. The Turkish state's Afrin offensive has displaced 300,000 people, the majority of whom are still in a self-organised refugee camp in the Shehba region. There is no effort by the Turkish state to allow the native people of that land to return home. Instead, people from other regions have been settled in Afrin, fundamentally altering the demographic make-up of the region. As part of its occupation, the Turkish state has initiated what some call a "Turkification" of Afrin. This involves, among other things, the imposition of Turkish education on children, the use of Turkish-language signs for public services, the renaming of places and the systematic destruction and erasure of all references to the region's majority Kurdish identity.

Yezidi and Christian communities and organisations in Northern Syria have issued several statements in recent weeks, drawing parallels. These include the Ottoman genocides and pogroms, ISIS and the methods employed by the Turkish state's extremist allies, who use Islamist language as they document their own war crimes. Every achievement of the autonomous women's movement has been destroyed in Afrin. And there are widespread reports of the systematic abduction of women and girls, looting of property and torture and harassment of civilians.

The YPJ gained global attention for their fight against the so-called Islamic State. Moreover, on the ground and in the legal-political sphere, the Democratic Self-Administration has institutionalised gender equality in all its mechanisms. Last year, during the battle for Afrin, pictures emerged of the mutilated and stripped body of YPJ fighter Barin Kobane. This caused outrage, especially in the women's movement on the ground. Similarly, among the first videos of the current Peace Spring offensive were the brutal close-range assassination of Kurdish women's rights activist and politician Hevrin Khalaf, leader of the Syrian future party. Government-loyal media in Turkey has called the execution of Khalaf, a civilian woman, a successful anti-terror

operation. The dead body of Amara Renas, a YPJ fighter, was mutilated and stepped on by the Turkish state's allies, filming themselves insulting her in misogynist ways.

Drawing on its decades-old sexist propaganda methods against Kurdish women fighters, the Turkish state-aligned media has been mobilising its channels to attack the feminist reputation of the social and political struggles in Rojava. These patriarchal attacks have been analysed by the women's movement on the ground as a war on women, motivated by a desire to punish the women that defeated ISIS and to eradicate the historic gains of women that initiated a "women's revolution" in the region since 2012.

In the meantime, an Amnesty International report published in November 2019 outlines the systematic criminalisation of people inside Turkey, who make use of their democratic right to oppose the war. Surveillance of social media has led to hundreds of people being jailed for their dissent. Meanwhile, protesters are faced with riot police and their indiscriminate use of violence. According to Reporters without Borders, Turkey has been the largest jailer of journalists for several years now. With the current operation, another round of journalists, elected officers, human rights defenders, and academics have been sacked or imprisoned.

Weaponising refugees and global complicity

TURKEY IS ABLE TO GET AWAY WITH WAR crimes and human rights abuses. This is partly because of its repeated success in blackmailing the European Union by weaponising the 3.6 million Syrian refugees it currently hosts. In a deal in 2016, the EU agreed to pay Turkey 6 billion Euros to help the country cope with the refugees. Political actors and media outlets often credit Turkey for its hospitality towards Syrian refugees. But these narratives often leave out the fact that the Turkish state's military operations have been responsible for the forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of mainly Kurdish people, within Turkey and in Syria, over the past 4 years. At the beginning of the current operation, Erdogan criticised EU leaders for calling his war an "invasion", threatening to "open the gates" and "send 3.6 million refugees" their way.



The people of Rojava have started boycott campaigns against Turkey and mobilised progressive and democratic forces around the world.

A video of Mohamed Hamed went viral – a 13-year old boy, crying, in agony and horror, "Dad, my body is burning" This has been one reason for experts to suspect the use of unconventional weapons by the Turkish operation. It has led to widespread comparisons with the use of chemical weapons against the Kurds by Saddam Hussein. The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), initially expressed concern and started an investigation. But it later stated that it will discontinue its investigation, seemingly due to pressure from governments. Despite what Amnesty International recorded as "damning evidence" of war crimes by the Turkish army's proxies, upon meeting Erdogan, the UN secretary general Antonio Guterres stated that he is willing to form a group to study Turkey's project in the region.

What's next for Rojava?

WESTERN JOURNALISTS HAVE MADE problematic claims about the "end of Rojava", echoing the militaristic media narratives from Turkey. Given the international complicity in the current war, it is not hard to see why people are quick to draw a grim picture. The reality is however that the people of Rojava, who now have seven years of experience

with autonomous self-organisation, are continuing to mobilise all their efforts to resist the occupation. In particular, women continue to insist that they will not allow their history to be erased by powers that use the same methods as the femicidal ISIS forces. The people of Rojava maintain military self-defence against the second largest NATO army. They have thrown rocks at Turkish military vehicles. They have started boycott campaigns against Turkey and mobilised progressive and democratic forces around the world. They show no sign of hopelessness. Among the demands raised by organisations and institutions in Rojava are: a closure of the airspace over the region to prevent airstrikes on civilians and vital infrastructure; political recognition of the Autonomous Administration; assistance with the thousands of foreign ISIS fighters held captive by the SDF; and the trial of the Turkish state and its proxies for war crimes.

Governments, armies and states, with their arms trades and military, political and economic agreements

may be united in their desire to suppress democratic and pluralistic alternatives of peoples. But individuals, organisations and movements around the world have also come together to demand an end to this assault on Rojava. It is seen as an assault on people's democratic alternatives to patriarchal and capitalist nation states. Women have joined the "Women Defend Rojava" campaigns, alongside global actions by civil society, educational institutions, human rights organisations and women's rights groups to stop the war and put pressure on their governments and the UN.

Only international solidarity, through concrete political action, can defend Rojava's women-led democracy struggle. South Africans can draw on their historic resistance and victory against the Apartheid regime to help these efforts by joining the actions to boycott Turkey, put political pressure on the Turkish government, and work towards a political recognition of North and East Syria. ■

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Bolivia: Evo's fall, the fascist right, and the power of memory

By Raúl Zibechi



"Why did you have the Chiquitani burned?" asks a manifesto of Indigenous people to Evo Morales. Indigenous forest has been burned to convert it into farmland.

This article is an edited version of one that was first published online, in Spanish, in Brecha. It was translated and published in English by Toward Freedom.

AFTER NEARLY 14 YEARS IN power, the government of Evo Morales fell in a little less than a month, due to allegations of fraud and the desire to remain in power. Previously, Morales was a campesino leader. However, this time, in the face of the rise of a racist and opportunist right wing, he could not appeal for support from Bolivian popular organisations. They have been weakened after years of cooptation and repression.

Between efforts towards restoration and the progress of a coup, the Bolivian people are preparing, again, to resist. On November 7th, members of the Qhara Qhara nation participated with a sector of the Indigenous movement in actions against electoral fraud in Bolivia. Its manifesto reads:

"Mr President, from the bottom of our hearts and with great sadness we ask: Where did you get lost? Why don't you live within the ancestral beliefs that say we should respect the *muyu* (circle): that we

should govern only once? Why have you sold off our *Pachamama*? Why did you have the Chiquitania burned? Why did you so mistreat our Indigenous brothers in Chaparina and Tariquía?"

- **Burning of the Chiquitania:** this refers to the burning of Indigenous forest to convert it into farmland.
- **Chaparina:** this refers to the harsh repression by federal police of Indigenous marchers protesting against the TIPNIS highway.
- **Tariquia:** this is a nature reserve in which subsistence farmers live. In 2015, the MAS government allocated more than 50% of the reserve to Shell and Petrobras for extraction.

THIS MANIFESTO IS ONE OF THE MOST damning documents against Evo Morales, perhaps because it comes from the same forces which brought him to power.

"Respect our cultures, stop spreading hate between our brothers from the country and those in the cities, stop dividing the people; you already abused

their free choice. Stop sending Indigenous people as cannon fodder to back up your interests and the interests of those around you, which are no longer ours, stop sending killers to abuse our people, let us live according to our law, stop speaking in the name of Indigenous people, as you have lost your identity," it reads.

There is a marked contrast between what is taking place today and what took place in October of 2003, during the first Gas War.

The first Gas War comprised mass strikes and protests against the intention of the Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada government (the one before Morales) to sell the country's natural gas reserves to the US.

BACK THEN, THE SOCIAL MOVEMENTS fought the government of Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada. And they paid a very high price: more than 60 dead, and hundreds of people wounded and mutilated. Regardless of the repression – the army shot at demonstrators from helicopters – the population beat back the government, forcing the president to resign.



The flag of the Indigenous people (the wiphala). Supporters of the right wing Santa Cruz businessman, Luis Fernando Camacho, have burned the wiphala.

Mood turned against Morales

BUT THIS TIME, THERE WERE expressions of hatred toward the government from the leaders and supporters of social organisations. This came after three weeks of opposition protests and accusations of fraud during the October 20th elections, in which Evo Morales proclaimed himself re-elected. By late afternoon on Sunday November 10th, many, including the Bolivian Workers Central (COB), the mining federation and Indigenous organisations, demanded the president resign. That is why the most extreme right was able to enter into the government offices without any trouble, and why no one was immediately in the streets to defend Morales when the army suggested he resign.

Over the last 14 years of rule by the official Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) party, there are things the government did that social movements can't forget. Between 2002 and 2006, a Unity Pact between the main campesino and indigenous organisations created the foundations for Evo Morales' government. By the end of 2011, two of these organisations had decided to leave the Unity Pact, because "the executive branch has factionalised Indigenous organisations, and values those closest to the MAS above others." They said this directly affected "our territories, cultures and our natural resources."

In June of 2012, one of those organisations, the Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Eastern Bolivia (CIDOB), denounced "the interference of the government, with the sole aim of manipulating, dividing, and affecting the organic and representative organisations of Indigenous peoples (pueblos) in Bolivia." A group of dissidents from the Confederation, with the support of the government, refused to recognise the authorities and convened an "expanded commission" to elect new authorities.

In December of 2013, dissidents from the National Council of Ayllus and Markas of the Qullasuyu (CONAMAQ), who were "close to the MAS", took over the organisation's offices. They beat and ejected those who were present with the help of police, who remained to guard and ensure that the legitimate authorities could not take it back. The communiqué of the CONAMAQ that followed these events said the attack on them took place so that "all of the policies against the Indigenous movement and the Bolivian people would be approved, without anyone saying anything."

Into the Void

ON WEDNESDAY 13TH, AN unprecedented series of events occurred, in a turn as important as the resignation of Morales three days earlier. Jeanine Áñez was named President in a parliament that had no quorum. The representatives

of the MAS, which holds an absolute majority, as well as MAS senator Adriana Salvatierra, were unable to enter the building. Salvatierra had publicly resigned her position as President of the Senate on the same day as Evo Morales and Vice President Álvaro García Linera did, but she did not give up her seat. When she and others from her party tried to enter parliament, they were kept out by security forces.

For her part, Áñez was Vice President of the second chamber. She was able to become President of the republic because all the others in the line of succession, who were from the MAS, had resigned as part of the government's policy of denouncing a coup. Áñez is a member of the Democratic Union, an opposition alliance. She is an unconditional ally of the racist elites from the Department of Santa Cruz (in Bolivia, Provinces or Regions are called Departments). This is how, three days after the resignation of Evo, a true coup was consolidated, though in reality a combination of interests led to this situation.

The chronology of these events begins with the elections on October 20th, but especially with the interruption of the vote count and its re-starting, 24 hours later, with data that contradicted what was released the day before. This raised suspicions of a repetition of a very obvious fraud. It is a pattern long-established in Latin America. It could not



There were expressions of hatred toward the government from the leaders and supporters of social organisations. This came after three weeks of opposition protests and accusations of fraud during the October 20th elections.

be ignored. It led to protests, led by civic groups made up of middle class sectors that are well established in eastern Bolivia. These protests grew slowly until Friday, November 8th.

It appears that the Morales government underestimated the magnitude of the protests. The MAS had maintained an alliance with the Civic Committee of Santa Cruz, after having defeated a separatist movement spearheaded from Santa Cruz in 2008. Initially, the circumstances appeared to continue to favour the MAS. It had a good relationship with the Organisation of American States (OAS), and especially with its General Secretary Luis Almagro, to the point that the opposition candidate, Carlos Mesa, had initially rejected the audit of the vote agreed to between the OAS and the government.

The situation changed abruptly on Friday 8th, when a police mutiny that began in Santa Cruz and La Paz began to spread across the country. Claims that the police had been “bought” with money from a company with its headquarters in Santa Cruz began to circulate on social networks. What is known is that the police mutiny was a turning point, and one that will be important to study so we can better understand what took place.

The government couldn't count on the police. Nor could it send the armed forces against demonstrators. This created an unsustainable situation. Even worse, they couldn't count on strong popular organisations to defend them. These organisations had been purged and many of their leaders had been removed and condemned, some ostracised and others jailed. At this point, the President and Vice President decided to take a risk. Last Sunday, they left La Paz, which was full of barricades and protests, with the

intention of returning later in better conditions.

Meanwhile, the right continued to operate, and as is common in these cases, probably did so with the support of the US embassy. A sinister man came to the forefront: Santa Cruz businessman Luis Fernando Camacho. Employing radical and ultraconservative discourse, with a clear racist and colonial content, Camacho rose as a leader of the white middle classes of eastern Bolivia, and a representative of the land-owning elites in the richest part of the country. He called a town hall meeting (cabildo) in which the results of the election were annulled. His incendiary language went beyond the position of the “civicos” from Santa Cruz, who had previously co-existed perfectly well with the MAS. It also went beyond the position of Mesa, who Camacho eclipsed as the face of the opposition within a few days. Camacho is an opportunist ultra-rightist, who should have asked for forgiveness after his supporters burned the flag of the Indigenous people (the wiphala).

Women and War

THE SANTA CRUZ OLIGARCHY EXPRESSED its extremism through Camacho. As tensions built in the run up to November 10th, Juan Ramón Quintana, Minister in the Presidency of Bolivia, told the online news site *Sputnik* “Bolivia is going to be converted into a great battlefield, a modern Vietnam.”

As one of the highest officials in the government of Evo Morales, Quintana showed how cut off he was from reality, when he said that “there is a political accumulation of social movements that are ready to fight.” He proposed a strategy that consisted of “a pitched battle in the face of the virulent lies of the media.” This media, in his opinion, is part of “a

war that is very complex, with unknown dimensions, that is going to demand that we sharpen our thinking, our strategy of self-defence.”

It was women who responded with the most clarity and transparency, working to undo the mechanisms of war. In La Paz, the *Mujeres Creando* collective convened a Women's Parliament (a handful of men attended), where they worked to build “collective voices” to challenge the polarisation underway. Meanwhile, in the city of El Alto, thousands of youth chanted “Yes, it is time for civil war,” while flying the wiphala.

Many women expressed a double outrage: against Morales' fraud and against the racist right. In general, defence of the advances of the last 15 years was the dominant sentiment, even if not all of them could be attributed to the MAS. In fact, they were attributable to the creative potential of the movements, which the authorities were never able to ignore.

I'd like to highlight the words of Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, a historian and sociologist:

“I don't believe in the two hypotheses that are being pushed. The triumphalism that with the fall of Evo we have recovered democracy seems to me an excess, an analysis that is out of focus... The second wrong hypothesis, which seems to me to be extremely dangerous, is that of the coup d'état, which simply legitimises in a complete package, wrapped in cellophane, the entire Evo Morales government at the moment when it has most deteriorated. To legitimise this entire deterioration with the idea of a coup d'état is criminal. So, how this deterioration began must be considered.”

Along the same lines, María Galindo, the spokesperson for *Mujeres Creando*, wrote this in her column in *Página Siete*: “The feeling of abandonment and orphanhood that comes with seeing Evo Morales take off towards Mexico can be felt in the streets. People are calling the radio, and they are broken, sobbing and unable to speak. Their feeling of weakness and abandonment means that the memories of the violence and arbitrariness of Morales (el caudillo – the strongman) are forgotten. The people miss him as a protective father and benefactor.”

An Uncertain Future

MORALES AND GARCÍA LINERA'S PLAN TO return as “pacifiers” failed and gave way to a complex situation. The fascist and racist ultra right has momentum. It also has a huge amount of material resources and media support, which has allowed it to assume power, though it lacks the legitimacy to maintain it.

Long-term memory teaches us that the racist elites can stay in power for an extended period through blood and fire, even without social support, because they possess the means to do so. However,

recent memory, at least since 2000, points towards something different in Bolivia: power from below obstructs racist and patriarchal regimes from enjoying stability and longevity. Women and Indigenous people don't let themselves get walked on. We have learned this from the people in the streets of Santiago de Chile and Quito, where new alliances are emerging on the ground and through actions. These are best shown when the flag of the indigenous Mapuche people was raised by non-Indigenous Chileans, and by women, who were able to open a sliver of hope in the heat of the conflict in Ecuador.

A way out of the tremendous situation that Bolivia is currently living in could be

found through general elections, which the usurper government of Añez ought to convene immediately. As sociologist Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar notes, the choices appear to be "general elections or civil war." If the ballot boxes speak, it is probable that the next president would be Carlos Mesa. But the MAS would retain an important number of legislators, and it could even be the party that gets the most votes.

Sooner rather than later, the diverse alliance that the MAS used to represent will return to the Palacio Quemado (the official residence of the president). It is the social and cultural majority. It would be best if it was not a copy of the current MAS, which has deteriorated in the same

way that water becomes stagnant when it is left standing.

To avoid a repeat, a new political culture would need to take shape, among leaders and members of organisations and movements. A culture that is capable of nourishing itself from the waters of Andean traditions of rotating leadership and complementarity between genders, ages and world views. A culture that is permeated by the feminist rejection of the patriarchy, as they work to undo caudillo (strongman) leadership and hierarchical organisation. ■

Raúl Zibechi is a journalist and popular educator who accompanies grassroots processes in Latin America.

The Debt Delusion

by John F Weeks

Reviewed by [Patti Mckenna-Jones](#)



We are presented with fallacious but commonly held beliefs. These include: "We must live within our means"; "Austerity, there is no alternative"; "Taxes are a burden". Each is debunked with concision and wit.

This review first appeared in [Socialist Review](#)

JOHAN F WEEKS SETS OUT TO demonstrate how there is an alternative to austerity, effectively exposing the Machiavellian machinations of Conservative policies along the way.

Austerity myths were constructed carefully over time and the author is at pains to systematically demolish the lot. His sleuthing is done with relish and enthusiasm as he urges us to "change the rules and drive ourselves".

The author does not presume any prior knowledge of his readers and from the start explains deficits, debts

and propaganda techniques. Of the latter, repetition of any myth is shown to lend credence, converting it to – in the words of economist JK Galbraith – "conventional wisdom". We are reminded that ill-informed citizens provide the precondition to being duped by governments wishing to undermine democracy and serve their special interests.

We are then presented with fallacious but commonly held beliefs. These include: "We must live within our means"; "Austerity, there is no alternative"; "Taxes are a burden". Each is debunked with concision and wit.

For instance, we are led to think that our government has a particular budget which we cannot afford to overrun. He

explains that governments who manage their own currencies (such as the UK) do not confront fixed budgets. They create their "means" either through borrowing or enhanced tax.

The misuse of the idea of "affordability" is here shown using the example of the ageing population. We are often told that the young must shoulder the burden when the income-earning capacity of older people ends and is replaced by either public or private pensions. The shift of adults from taxpayer to pension recipient inevitably affects tax revenue and this latter factor dovetails with pensioners needing more health and care services. This is what places the "burden on the young".

The author points out that this is a choice made by undemocratic governments, and that it is only a sociopath who would stigmatise the fundamental characteristic of all societies to want to care for their elderly. Many have described this as a "Demographic Bomb" but, the author insists, there are no explosives in it. He points out that in obvious "demographic bomb" countries (France, Germany, Great Britain, US and Japan) the labour force participation rate (what determines whether youngsters bear an increasing weight of oldsters) has hardly changed over the last 25 years.

It's difficult to point to the most salient parts of this book; I can only urge you to read it, revel in its wisdom and take whatever action you can to defuse government lies. As the author insists: "There is an alternative: Democracy." ■

Activists and the surveillance state

By Aziz Choudry (editor)

WHAT CAN STATE surveillance, political policing, and the criminalisation of activists and communities tell us about the nature of democracy and the power of the state and capital in liberal democracies? What can activists learn from each other across generations, communities, struggles and countries about state security practices, about the interests that they protect, and from the resistance of activists and movements being spied upon?

Not just bad apples

SURVEILLANCE AND infiltration which targets dissidents, and the construction of enemies of the state have long been fundamental to liberal democracies, as elsewhere. They are not merely unfortunate aberrations or exceptions. The FBI's Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) is one example of the extent to which state security agents, informants and their political masters have worked to sabotage, smear, undermine and neutralise domestic opposition movements.

These and other experiences, across many countries and different historical periods, suggest that such operations are much more than an afterthought. They cannot simply be explained away in terms of bad apples, rogue units and overzealous agents overstepping their powers. They will not be reined in by better checks and balances or oversight of police and intelligence agencies, without deeper systemic change. Rather, they point to the need to confront a fundamentally more intentional state security apparatus which is politically and economically driven, sanctioned from the top down. But history also tells us that state (and corporate) spying, infiltration, the use of informants

ACTIVISTS AND THE SURVEILLANCE STATE



Activists and the Surveillance State aims to contextualise and understand security practices and their role in maintaining the dominant social, political and economic order.

and agent provocateurs, and political policing does not necessarily produce compliant subjects.

Security and the dominant order

ACTIVISTS AND THE SURVEILLANCE STATE aims to contextualise and understand these security practices and their role in maintaining the dominant social, political and economic order. Combining contemporary and historical contributions, it connects reflections on earlier experiences with those today. It also highlights the imperial and colonial origins of many state security agencies

and practices. Many chapters (including one by South African professor and activist Jane Duncan), build on knowledge and analysis grounded in experiences of state surveillance and infiltration, along with examples of resistance.

Some writings on surveillance reproduce an overdetermined sense that state repression inevitably only chills and crushes dissent. Yet this is a partial understanding. There are, and have always been, people for whom state surveillance is an everyday part of life. There are also those who have resisted it in the course of struggles for liberation and social, economic political and environmental justice. Key features in resistance to state spying and repression have been collective organising, activist research and political education. This can break the isolation, fear and alienation, divide and rule strategies exercised by state power.

Fighting back

THIS BOOK CENTRES ON experiences and resistance of activists targeted by state security agencies and political policing. We have yet to come to terms with the consequences of the state's covert, sustained attacks on the left in many western

liberal democracies. This repression has also meant the erasure, forgetting or hiding of many radical histories and politics, attempts to disrupt and destroy organisations from within, to smear and spread fear and paranoia, to manufacture consent, and crush and cripple dissent. But often lost in these accounts is the organising against state surveillance, the understanding that people directly affected are not just passive targets or victims, and the political education work that remains to be done.

Activists in the US uncovered COINTELPRO in 1971 after a daring break-in at an FBI field office. More recently, in

the UK, activists have collaborated with investigative journalists and academic allies to investigate, research and expose extensive, longstanding British undercover police spying operations against activist groups. And in South Africa, activists and journalists have highlighted the widespread infiltration of #FeesMustFall, although there remains much to be done regarding the policing and surveillance of dissent.

I'm often struck by the cycles of learning in action that can occur in the course of long-term campaigns, short-term mobilisations, and daily struggles. Richard Johnson wrote about the "really useful knowledge" produced when people reflect on their experience with each other in ways that generate further insight and understanding into the causes of their conditions, common problems and struggles. This also enables people to develop theories that are linked to strategies to bring about change.

But there are both lessons learned and lessons lost. Activist learning that informs and fuels effective organising to fight the power is not inevitable. Insights drawn from previous experiences of state repression, monitoring and criminalisation are all too easily lost, ignored or forgotten. There is a global transmission belt of state security doctrines, ideologies, strategies, technology and personnel. State security and intelligence agencies, civil and military – and their private sector counterparts – learn from and train each other about disrupting, surveilling and monitoring dissent. Governments learn how to spin, distract, cover up, justify and make excuses whenever they are caught engaging in dirty tricks against communities and movements, and in economic intelligence-gathering. How can we educate and learn across struggles, and intergenerationally?

Personal experiences

LIKE MANY OTHERS TARGETED BY STATE security intelligence agencies, I was sidetracked into doing this work. In July 2017, I felt a strong sense of déjà vu in London at a Centre for Crime and Justice Studies workshop on undercover policing, in the context of sustained organising by a range of progressive organisations and activists infiltrated and spied on by undercover police in Britain.

A number of core participants in the ongoing Undercover Policing Inquiry participated. Speaking with British activist Helen Steel, I remembered that I had seen her almost 20 years earlier in Christchurch, Aotearoa/New Zealand at an activist conference on transnational corporate power that I co-organised.



Activists and journalists have highlighted the widespread infiltration of #FeesMustFall.

At that time, she was searching for her former partner who had suddenly disappeared. He was later confirmed to be one of several British undercover police who had relationships with women activists while infiltrating and spying on the groups they were part of.

Back then, I was in the middle of suing the New Zealand government, after two NZ Security Intelligence Service officers were caught after breaking into my home in July 1996. I was organising an activist forum opposed to free trade and investment agreements at the time of an APEC Trade Ministers Meeting in Christchurch. In 1998, shortly after the activist groups I was part of made public our plans to organise against the 1999 Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation meetings in New Zealand, a police informant, Rob Gilchrist, immediately raised our suspicions. He had latched himself onto various activist groups. He immediately made a beeline for the anti-APEC organising without being able to explain his motivation for doing so, and often behaving like a provocateur. Several of us raised concerns about him and warned others not to trust him. He nonetheless moved into various organisations and groups over the next decade until his then partner, an activist, discovered emails to his police intelligence bosses about the groups and individuals he had been tasked to spy on.

The tenacity, courage and focus of activists in the UK targeted by the state is inspiring. In this era, doctrines of "deradicalisation" and "countering violent extremism" disproportionately target Muslim communities in many countries, as [Arun Kundnani](#) has so powerfully documented. As they spread globally, these also serve as useful concepts for political and economic elites to legitimise draconian surveillance and other policies that clamp down on and

criminalise all kinds of dissent. As with other examples, rather than distancing themselves from those facing the sharp end of state power, those not directly affected by these measures might learn from the experiences and resistance of those who are.

Surveillance fundamental to "liberal" democracy

DOCUMENTING CASES OF POLITICAL spying, infiltration and disruption of political activism is crucial. But the historical continuities in the ideology and practices of the security state, alongside vastly expanded technologies for mass surveillance and data-gathering (and profits for the companies that produce them), should serve to raise profound questions about the supposed divide between democracies and authoritarian states. It is important to understand the political economy and implications of technologies employed for mass surveillance and data gathering, but we must guard against a preoccupation with technology that can feed social amnesia and ahistorical understandings about state power. Beyond the outrage and surprise that seems to follow every time cases of mass surveillance, political spying and infiltration of activist groups and social movements are exposed, we need deeper, historically-informed analysis, to better understand how these operations are intrinsic to (neo)liberal democracy and serve the interests of the dominant economic and political order. ■

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Joker isn't an ode to the far right – it's a warning against austerity

By [Micah Uetricht](#)



Credit: Niko Tavernise/Associated Press

Rosa Luxemburg once famously framed the choice for our future as that of socialism or barbarism. *Joker* is a portrait of a society that has chosen barbarism.

This review appeared first in the UK newspaper The Guardian

HOW HAVE MAINSTREAM commentators missed the most obvious takeaway of the film?

Midway through a screening of *Joker* this weekend at a Chicago theatre, I leaned over to a friend seated next to me and whispered: “Is this the same movie that everyone has been talking about?”

I asked because what I was witnessing on-screen bore little resemblance to the ode to angry, young, white, “incel” men that I had heard so much about in media coverage of *Joker* leading up to its release. Instead, we got a fairly straightforward condemnation of American austerity: how it leaves the vulnerable to suffer without the resources they need, and the horrific consequences for the rest of society that can result.

This message is so blunt that even I, a Marxist and philistine, found its message a bit too clobbering. How mainstream commentators have missed it and drawn the exact opposite conclusion is baffling.

Arthur Fleck, the protagonist and eventual Joker, is a poor, young, white, mentally ill man who works as a clown and seems to enjoy it. In the film’s opening scene, he is beaten up by a rowdy group of teenagers, some of whom appear to be teens of colour.

Watching this opening, I thought, here it is: in the very first scene, teenagers running wild on the streets of New York City, a classic rightwing trope in American cinema depicting a society (and its racialised underclass, in particular) that is out of control. We’ll soon be told it needs to be reined in by some old-fashioned law and order and cracking of skulls.

Yet in the locker room of the clown agency, when a co-worker calls the teens “animals” and “savages”, Arthur explicitly rejects dehumanising them. “They’re just kids,” he responds. Bruises visible on his body – a body for which Joaquin Phoenix lost 52 pounds ahead of filming, with a disturbingly protruding spine and ribs, that is physically ravaged by the austerity-racked society Arthur lives in, wasting away in front of our eyes – he defends

his assailants and rejects his co-worker’s racist epithets.

Since critics depicted this as a film for the far right, whose overtly racist views are well-known, I expected the depictions of characters of colour to be bigoted. But interestingly, almost all of the violence he eventually metes out as he sinks deeper and deeper into a full breakdown – save for the movie’s final scene, at which point *Joker*’s nihilistic brutality has fully blossomed, now wanton and indiscriminate – is against white men, many of them wealthy.

A passing interaction with a neighbour, a single black mother who lives on his floor, leads to a disturbing and delusional romantic obsession with her. This culminates in a tense scene in which – on the verge of a full breakdown and after we realise the previous scenes of the two of them on a date and sitting at the hospital bedside of Arthur’s mother were completely imagined by him – he walks into her open apartment.

The viewer expects an act of violence against her, perhaps even a horrific scene

of sexual assault, by the lonely man who wants the beautiful woman but can't have her. In other words, the ultimate incel revenge fantasy. Instead, startled, she asks him to leave. And he does.

Likewise, in a scene whose political message was so blunt that it could have appeared in a mid-century Stalinist propaganda film, his social worker and counsellor – another black woman – with whom he has a tense but clearly significant relationship, is forced to tell him that due to recent budget cuts, their office will be shutting down. Arthur asks her where he's going to get his medication; she has no answer for him.

"They don't give a shit about people like you, Arthur," she tells him, referring to those who cut the budget. "And they don't give a shit about people like me either."

The black, female public-sector worker is telling the white, male public-service user that their interests are intertwined against the wealthy billionaire class and their political lackeys who are slashing public services. Across racial and gender boundaries, the two have a common class enemy.

You can't get much less subtle, or much more diametrically opposed to the right's worldview, than this.

It is those budget cuts that drive Arthur deeper into madness. Similar attempted cuts likely drove sanitation workers to strike, resulting in the piled-up garbage constantly visible on Gotham's streets. These are clear allusions to New York City's 1975 fiscal crisis and the austerity it produced, which soon spread to the rest of the country.

Elites' condescending responses to the widespread suffering make things worse. Billionaire Thomas Wayne condemns Arthur's murder of his three employees (representing young, arrogant, rich Wall Street types) on the subway by calling the average person seething in the streets "clowns". Don't they know that he wants to help them, the ultra-rich mayoral candidate asks. He is irritated he even has to explain this. His comments merely stoke the already burning fires of resentment, with Wayne's obliviousness at their misery rubbing salt in the wounds of average Gotham residents and driving them to the streets to protest Wayne and elites like him in clown masks.

And, of course, when Arthur sneaks into a high-class theatre and confronts Wayne about what Arthur has been led to believe by his ailing mother – that



With Joker we got a fairly straightforward condemnation of American austerity: how it leaves the vulnerable to suffer without the resources they need, and the horrific consequences for the rest of society that can result.

Wayne, her former employer, is Arthur's father – the genteel billionaire, dressed in a full tuxedo, literally punches Arthur in the face. Again, political subtlety is not this film's stock and trade. How could reviewers miss this?

What Arthur – and scores of others like him in Gotham and our own society – needs is a fully-funded Medicare for All or NHS-style health system that includes robust mental health services that provide him with the counselling and medication that can save him (and others around him) from his unceasingly "negative thoughts" and violent impulses.

He needs public programs that can provide a warm, encouraging environment for his creative impulses, allowing him to perform standup comedy or perform as a clown without becoming a laughingstock on national television or getting canned by an uncaring boss. He needs wages for his care work for his infirm mother or a robust elder care system that can respectfully take her under its care. He needs high-quality housing he can afford.

Arthur has more than his share of problems, but a few of them would have been solved, or at least adequately and humanely managed, in a society whose budgets were oriented more towards people like him than Wayne. But he does not live in that society, and neither do we. Instead of public services and dignity, he gets that most American of consolation prizes: a gun, and the sense of respect that, while ultimately hollow, has long eluded him.

Joker's ending is bleak and one whose general thrust we knew going into the

film: in addition to the three Wall Street types, an old mother, a co-worker, a talkshow host and a billionaire couple have been murdered in cold blood; rioters in clown masks are running wild in the streets, cheering Joker on the hood of a cop car. In the final scene, Arthur is again speaking to a social worker, but now in handcuffs in an asylum. But it's too late to reach him, because he's no longer Arthur – he's the Joker, and the Joker has no qualms about killing her, too.

Rosa Luxemburg once famously framed the choice for our future as that of socialism or barbarism. Joker is a portrait of a society that has chosen barbarism. No one wants to see violence erupt in such a situation, but we shouldn't be surprised when it does.

In the real world, we aren't yet at that breaking point. And unlike Gotham, we have alternate paths on offer – represented best by the Vermont senator Bernie Sanders, whose presidential campaign speaks to that roiling anger but channels it into humane and egalitarian directions. If we don't take it, and that anger continues to find a home in reactionary outlets, the barbarities we see in Joker might start looking horrifyingly familiar. ■

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both of them

*'I'm just a red nigger who love the sea,
I had a sound colonial education,
I have Dutch, nigger and English in me,
And either I'm nobody, or I am a nation,'*

"The Schooner Flight" Derek Walcott

My father came on a ship
to my mother's land
my mother met him on the shore
My father with his
white, civilized, civilized?, civilised skin
My mother with her
Black earthy skin

My father raped my mother
on that beach
My mother was raped by my father
on that beach,
On that beach
I was conceived

white and Black battle
battle within me,
within my BROWN skin

And I love the ocean
and I love that beach,
For if I am not
both of them
then
I am nothing

Capitalism and my body – like clenched jaw and tensed shoulders and a headache always waiting
Like the purgatory of waiting for the sickness to end and for the feeling of worth that begins with being
healthy and capable and productive
And the brief periods of health that make the sickness feel all the more like a cage
My mind like a thousand ants scurrying over synapses. Like a hurricane of ghosts screaming at me.
And my body a desert with nothing to offer

The voice of capitalism speaking to me in my own voice, saying "you'll be worth something when..."
The unanswered emails
The distrust of stillness because there must be something I've forgotten to do
The weight of my future captured by calendars and schedules and deadlines
The strung-out-in-tatters emptiness that can be numbed but not filled
The sleep that isn't sleep
The tears that sit in my eyes and do not spill over
The defeated anger. The defeated anger. The defeated anger

The institutions my body belongs to looming over me with open, hungry mouths and dripping teeth
The fear that my body cannot keep up with their hunger
The fear that I am the defective thing that people turn away from
– The underachiever, the drop-out, the invalid
The desire to be thin and well-behaved to keep the monsters of oppression at bay
The knowledge that when they are not eating me, it is because they are eating someone else
The knowledge that I am the monster too

The grasping, clumsy attempts to answer the call to resistance
The desperation for hope
The profound gratitude to the activists that walk in front of me whose words are an oasis
Who made "chronic illness" and "mental illness" mean something other than pathology
Who began creating a map to resistance as healing, resistance as embodied.

Capitalism and my body

by Danielle Alheit

21 October 2015, Parliament

by Qondiswa James

both of them

"white womening"

by Jacana Joy Redcliffe

The other day
I walked into a
cramped, musty-smelling
bookshop in Claremont
the white old(ish) women
asked me
from behind the counter
what books I liked reading
“poetry”, I replied
by young womxn of colour
her response reeked of
white women –
“Oh, they’re all angry, aren’t they?”

And I replied,
much to my own
shame &
frustration
“well not all of them,
some of them are
love poems”
I said.

But I only said that
to appease, placate
her fragile white womaness

Actually their poems;
Koleka Putuma’s Yrsa
Daley-Ward’s
&
Nayyirah Waheed’s
poems
are infused with
anger

That righteous,
passionate,
about-fucking-time-
kinda anger

and I was reminded of what Koleka said;
*‘all they are interested in is our pain,
as if the joy-parts were accidental*

*I write love poems,
too But
You only want to see my mouth
torn open in protest,’*

I pondered on the time Yrsa said;
*‘4. Love is not a safe word
But it is the safe things that kill you
in the end,*

*6. There are parts of you
that want the sadness.
Find them out. Ask them why.’*

Or the time Nayyirah said;
*‘if we
wanted
to
people of color
could
burn the world down
for what
we
have experienced
are experiencing
but
we don’t*

*– how stunningly beautiful that our
sacred respect for the earth. for life
is deeper than our rage.’*

And
that should
That
have been
my answer.

21 October 2015, Parliament

I remember that day at parliament just before the chaos. I remember eating chips drenched in delicious vinegar from the fishery on Plein Street. I remember beautiful blacks helping themselves to deep fried chicken at the KFC on the corner looking at Church Street. I remember the thick black smoke of burning dustbins rising mightily to the sky. I remember I remember the femmes just beyond the frame. I remember laughing together, fighting together, crying together, holding together. I remember the movement. I remember the weight of what must have felt like revolution, and wasn’t. I remember the soft creak of the gates and the moment of suspended shock realising we had forced the gate to open. Realising they were never going to open the gate, that we must do it ourselves. I remember the tall man next to me like a rugby player crushing my face to his chest telling the police that he was ashamed that they would treat a femme with such violence, and me thinking ‘but here I am standing next to you having walked in freely, my choice in my fists and the soles of my feet, needing no protection, no leader, no well-meaning suffocation’. I remember the white people with their criss-crossed arms and the tear gas being thrown further out into the circle of blacks. I remember the lazy cigarette smoke of the riot police curling dangerously over their lips, their manner so easy. I remember the countdown. I remember the running. I remember the falling. I remember ducking in the doorways of corner stores and office buildings. I remember losing my friends (before I knew there was a difference between a comrade and a friend). I remember running. I remember falling. I remember the sound of stun grenades like distant thunder falling over CPUT. I remember running. I remember the treason charge. I remember you. I remember you by the pink of skies like that day the stun grenades smoked pink. We remember you, enemy. And we will never forget.

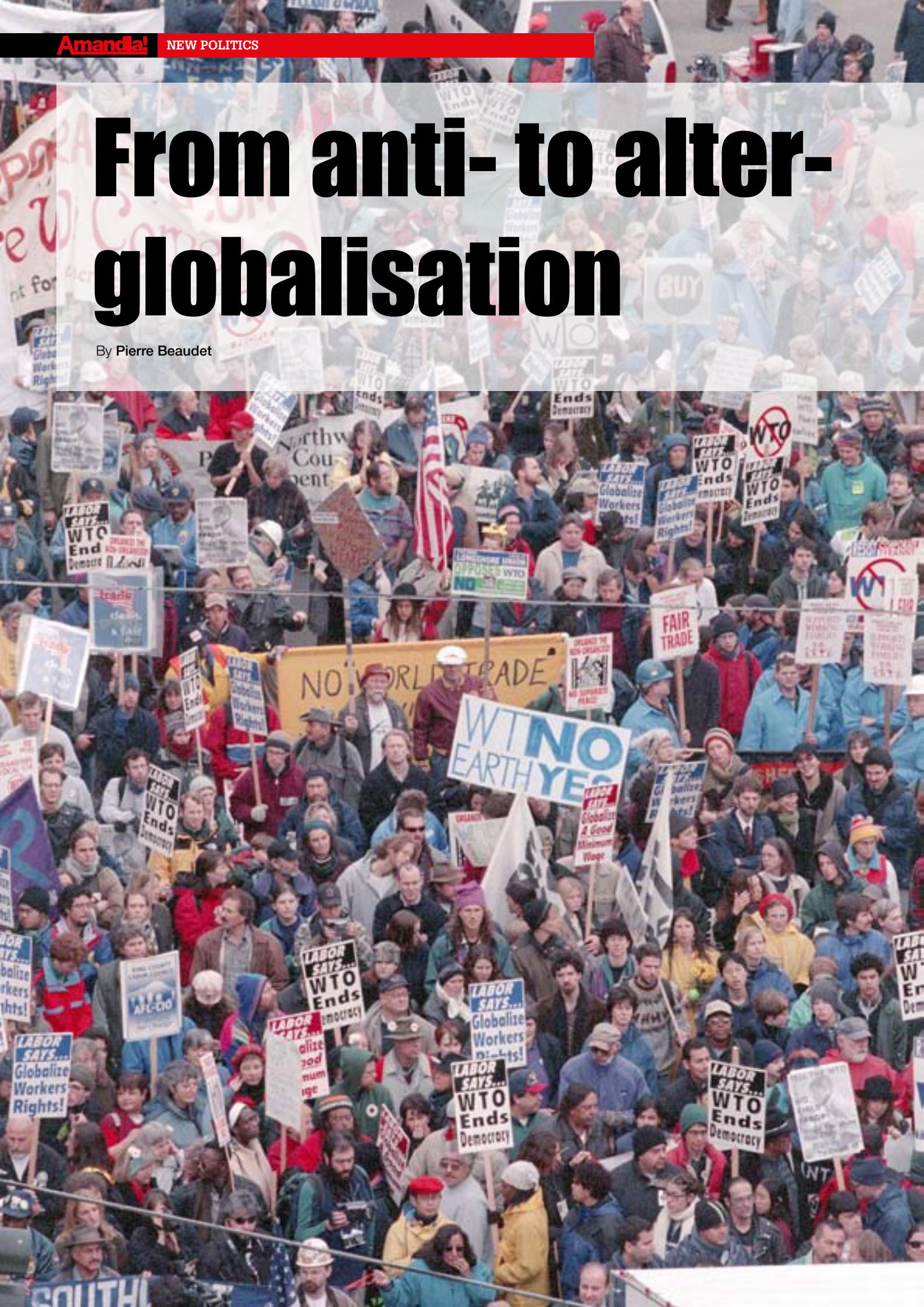
Disentangling from the law to find ourselves still chained to our collective unfreedom.

Our comrades are in prison for fees that have not fallen, the movement must not forget that.

#everythingmustfall

From anti- to alter-globalisation

By Pierre Beaudet



BY THE END OF THE 1980s, various cracks began to appear in the global neoliberal edifice. Partially, they were triggered by early crises that erupted in Mexico, Brazil, Thailand, and Russia, among other countries. The impact of the so-called Washington consensus was making itself felt in the form of massive cuts to public services and jobs. There were financial shifts that allowed big finance to siphon off huge amounts of debt, in addition to privatisation and deregulation, that put trade unions and other social movements on the defensive. The various fragmented revolts in the 80s were a harbinger of what was to come.

Origins

AT THE BEGINNING OF 1994, THE LITTLE-known southern province of Mexico gained international attention. In Chiapas, the peasant-indigenous population took to the streets under the banner of the Zapatista Liberation Army (EZLN). It was a big surprise, even to the Mexican state, which was taken aback by the scale of the protest and the fact that it was widely supported, even outside Chiapas. The EZLN adopted a new language that distinguished it from earlier liberation movements, emphasising a non-statist view, local autonomy and non-hierarchical structures. This discourse gained currency worldwide through emerging social media and annual conferences held in the jungles of Chiapas.

At the same time, huge protest marches were organised all over Europe and North America against the World Bank, the IMF and WTO. They encountered an exceptionally large gathering of angry protestors at their meeting in Seattle in the fall of 1999. The “Battle of Seattle” was unique in the sense that it brought together a wide variety of social movements, from teamsters (trade unions) to “turtles” (environmental campaigns). In the Americas, north and south, this inaugurated a series of struggles that led to the massive People’s Summit in Québec City in 2001.

The growth phase

THIS WAS NOT YET A MOVEMENT, BUT rather a vast tapestry of initiatives in opposition to neoliberal globalisation. These struggles revitalised a number of left-wing think-tanks, publications and organisations in the North. In South America, meanwhile, mass pro-democracy movements were offering real resistance to authoritarian regimes. Coalitions in Brazil, Venezuela, Argentina and later Bolivia and Ecuador came together with a strong grass-roots push. By the beginning of the new millennium, Pink Tide governments were established in many countries.

It was during this turbulent phase that movements globally conceived the idea



Movements globally conceived the idea of creating a platform to recharge policy debates and explore the contours of new visions of social transformation. This laid the groundwork for the World Social Forum.

of creating a platform to recharge policy debates and explore the contours of new visions of social transformation. This laid the groundwork for the World Social Forum. Brazilian-led, the wsf had no clear and explicit strategy, but there was a consensus around the need to build a new framework of analysis. For several years after the founding event, hundreds of thousands of movements and people met in Brazil, and later in India, Mali, Tunisia, Kenya and many other countries, with the aim of developing an alter-globalisation perspective.

The wsf process was original because it was an open space where participants themselves were to define the agenda through self-organised political and cultural activities. Much of the work involved drafting an alternative economic program based on the revitalisation of the public sector, the decommodification of basic goods and services, new fiscal and financial mechanisms to push back inequalities, local non-market enterprises and the like. At the same time, there was much

discussion of how to “democratise democracy,” how to struggle against gender, generational and ethnic discrimination, and how to change the rules of the game to wrest space and opportunities for meaningful citizen participation within the framework of liberal democracy.

These immense brainstorming sessions were carried out by many social movements that also took advantage of the wsf to create new international and action-oriented networks, such as Via Campesina and the World March of Women. The wsf methodology was also adopted by hundreds of national and municipal forums in which citizens had a chance to act, play, speak out and express their hopes. It thus helped to bring movements together, create new dynamics and give rise to new projects. One such successful forum was organised in Ottawa in 2012. The Peoples’ Social Forum brought together a critical mass of movements from Canada, Québec and Indigenous communities for the first time in Canadian history.



The dark clouds of militarism, racism and fascism are looming everywhere, as evidenced most recently in Bolivia.

In its growth phase, alter-globalisation was at once a rallying point for social movements, a political program for the most advanced progressive parties and a living laboratory involving millions of professors, students, intellectuals and artists. It also benefited from concrete support by Pink Tide governments, particularly Brazil and Venezuela.

Uncertain times

IN 2008, GLOBAL CAPITALISM SUFFERED its most severe crisis since 1929. It shook the Global North first. Within a few years mass mobilisations erupted under the banner of Occupy Wall Street (in Canada and the United States), and the Indignados (in Spain and other southern European countries) before crossing the Mediterranean in a historic movement that led to the implosion of long-standing dictatorships, mainly in Egypt and Tunisia.

In many ways, these diverse movements all travelled the paths opened up in South America and through the wsf. Unlike in South America, however, they did not have a political counterpart, and in the absence of either a European or Maghreb-Mackrek pink tide, the revolts did not succeed in reversing the trends. The countries of the Global North were thus able to steady themselves without too much effort, and the countries of the Global South fell into the grip of resuscitated dictatorship (with the exception of Tunisia). Even where social movements grew strong (in Spain and Greece, for example), the edifice of power was able to withstand the challenge by a combination of local/national reactionary offensives, on the one

hand, and international intervention by undemocratic neoliberal institutions, on the other. This counteroffensive also led to the demise of many pink-tide countries – Brazil and Venezuela in particular – which were unable to resist the reactionary assaults, in addition to being weakened by their own limitations and contradictions.

The World Social Forum was deeply affected by this new and debilitating correlation of forces. The traditional South American leadership of the wsf was blindsided by growing divisions between movements, and between movements and pink-tide governments. The wsf in Tunis (2015), Montreal (2016) and Salvador de Bahia (2018) were interesting events, but they lacked the energy and enthusiasm of the past, falling into a bit of a rut rather than innovating and exploring new avenues.

Looking ahead

THE ALTER-GLOBALISATION MOMENT IS now being redefined. In many countries, popular movements are on the defensive and social-democratic reforms are being reversed, while new forms of authoritarianism or “austeritarism” are being imposed. Yet if we look at the situation through a wide-angle lens, we can see the cracks in the system widening, with uprisings multiplying as in China (Hong Kong), Chile, Sudan, Lebanon, Iraq, Argentina, and Algeria. In many more countries, we are seeing ripples that portend big transformative waves. Social movements in many places have become more astute, employing new decentralised strategies. Many have taken the battle for Pachamama to the next level, announcing loudly and clearly that the problem, as

Naomi Klein stresses, is not the climate but capitalism.

At the same time, an international conversation continues via new forms of networking, such as the Great Transition conference (Montreal, May 2020), the World Social Forum on Transformative Economics (Barcelona, June 2020), the Global Forum on Migration and Development (Quito, January 2020), among many other events and developments. It is still too early, however, to hail the rise of an Alter-globalisation 2.0.

Who is reinventing the left?

IN THE MEANTIME, MANY LEFT-WING political parties are evolving, scrapping the legacy of past sectarianism. We see this here and there – in the United States (Democratic Socialists of America), Quebec (Québec Solidaire), Chile (Frente Amplio), and England (Momentum). The dark clouds of militarism, racism and fascism are looming everywhere, as evidenced most recently in Bolivia. But in all these places, the power struggles are complex, not predetermined. They allow creative movements to regroup, transcend their past experiences and invent new forms of political and social mobilisation. Much more than in the past, women, youth and marginalised communities are taking the lead. It is most probably an “interregnum,” to use Gramsci’s phrase, between the black hole of mass destruction and the hope for emancipation. ■

Pierre Beaudet is a founder and editor of the *Nouveaux Cahiers du socialisme*.

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