



# Agrarian South Network Research Bulletin

August — September 2021

*"A New World View"*

1. An Interview with Prof. Issa Shivji On the Peasantry, Neoliberalism and Alternatives

2. Mazibuko Kanyiso Jara: *South Africa – unequal, unstable and unsustainable*

3. Paris Yeros: *Elements of a New Bandung: Towards an International Solidarity Front*

**Editorial Board:**

Lyn Ossome (Chief), Damián Lobos, Freedom Mazwi, Manish Kumar

**EDITORIAL***‘A New World View’*

This tenth issue of the ASN Research Bulletin returns to foundational liberation questions regarding concrete analysis of where we are, and what is to be done. It brings together three prominent voices for liberation in far-reaching reflections on the condition of peasants, workers and marginalised peoples of the Third World. In a far-reaching interview with Issa Shivji, we are confronted with the implications of the failure of the project of capitalist development in the image of the historical European development, where neoliberalism is the means through which imperialism has now assumed an offensive and brought back primitive accumulation as the dominant tendency. There are now new forms of primitive accumulation with which we have to reckon, and that include the privatisation and commodification of the commons, and the privatisation and commodification of public goods such as education, water, health, energy, finance – in essence, an attack on the production of public goods whose production was not subjected wholly to the market. Shivji cautions that now more than ever, alongside the National Question, we must return to a discussion of the Social Question that is not reducible to an all-inclusive democracy. In a searing critique of

the post-apartheid regime, Mazibuko Jara elaborates the elements of the deep social and political crisis in South Africa today, arguing with clarity that what the present state of affairs requires is a coherent perspective, strategy and programme of the long-term, that can deepen organisational, political and geographic depth, sophistication, sustainability, impact, solidarity and unity in action. In a similar grain and expounding the dimensions of a world transition to socialism, Paris Yeros is emphatic that the likely persistence of imperialism in a neocolonial stalemate can only be broken by coherent ideology, organization, and solidarity on an international level. What is required is a New Bandung movement of Peasants, Workers and Peoples, an international solidarity front rooted in the Third World with a socialist and anti-imperialist perspective. Not so much intended as a blueprint than a clarion call to action, this issue is necessary reading for progressives everywhere as we deepen our collective understanding of the scale and nature of the crisis against which we must direct and intensify our resistance. As Yeros cautions, it is necessary to draw the correct conclusions about what solidarity is required if the world revolutionary situation is to fulfill its potential, especially since an international

solidarity front from the Third World with a revolutionary and anti-imperialist perspective remains an open question.

Enquiries and responses may be submitted to the editors at: [agrariansouthresearchbulletin@gmail.com](mailto:agrariansouthresearchbulletin@gmail.com).

**Freedom Mazwi in Conversation with Prof. Issa Shivji  
On the  
Peasantry, Neoliberalism and Alternatives.**

**Interviewer: Freedom Mazwi (FM)**

**Interviewee: Issa Shivji (IS)**

**Date: August 23<sup>rd</sup> 2021 09:00hrs**

**FM** - Good Morning. Welcome to this conversation with Mwalimu Professor Issa Shivji, a development and law expert. He has worked quite a lot in Africa, in places that include the University of Dar es Salaam, Zimbabwe and South Africa. He is one of the leading lights at CODESRIA, one of the leading research institutions in Africa. Welcome Professor.

**IS** – Thank you, Freedom. It is a pleasure to have this conversation. I am very much looking forward to it because such platforms allow us necessary freedom to explore very pertinent ideas more informally and more deeply. So, thank you Freedom for organizing this.

**FM** – Thank you Professor. The theme of our conversation today is the “Peasantry, Neoliberalism and the Alternatives.” As we might be aware, the peasantry is under massive attack not only in Africa but the Global South broadly. This is why we considered this to be an important conversation. We will discuss the peasantry and its challenges, with extended consideration of what the alternatives may be.

Let me start by asking you to define the peasantry. We know that it is a debated concept. There are various views on the peasantry, its characteristics and why is it important.

**IS**– Thank you Freedom. I think you have raised a very important issue. I would like to briefly start with the traditional Marxist take on the peasantry. Karl Marx himself, based on the European experience, thought that with the development of capitalism, the peasant – basically meaning the small holder who survives on land, produces on land - will disappear, and a large mass of people will become the industrial proletariat. It was in this regard that when it came to politics, we have Marx on record calling peasants a ‘sack of potatoes’ because he did not see a lot of potential in the peasantry for a revolutionary change. Although that was based on the European experience, Marx did talk about countries of the South, particularly those in Africa. He however talked about them in relation to primitive accumulation of capital. But that was for him, the original condition in

developing his model of capitalism. Since then, we have had some theoretical and political developments. In this regard we must mention Rosa Luxemburg who disagreed with Marx. She argued that capitalist accumulation is not simply self-contained. Her position was that for capitalism to continue reproducing itself, it always needs non-capitalist sectors on which to feed for accumulation. She saw many of our countries as feeding capitalism through primitive accumulation.

That was the initial argument during those debates. The second point that I think Rosa Luxemburg made, which is also very important for us, was that Marx's formulae saw primitive accumulation as the original condition and once capitalism has developed, we get what is called capitalist accumulation. It is based on labor and capital. The former is exploited to produce the surplus value and part of that surplus value is accumulated for the second cycle of expanded reproduction. Rosa Luxemburg's argument was that primitive accumulation does not actually come to an end with capitalist development, but rather continues because exploitation of the non-capitalist sector based on primitive accumulation is essential for capitalist reproduction.

Subsequently we had other developments starting with Lenin, going on to

Mao and so on. And contrary to the predictions of the earlier Marxists, the socialist revolution happened not in the center but in the semi-periphery i.e., Russia.

Russia of the time still had pre-capitalist relations in the countryside and also a mass of peasantry. That is where Lenin politically located his thesis of worker-peasant alliance. Previously, the peasantry had been seen as a conservative force but for Lenin, the working class could rely on the peasantry and lead the peasantry for revolutionary transformations and changes. This thesis was developed much more in the periphery, particularly in China. The Chinese argument about the role of the peasantry makes a very important contribution to Marxist theory and politics. It has been pretty prominent in discussions of Marxism in many countries of the Global South. But Mao still worked within the Marxist paradigm, and we should not forget that initially at least, he saw the revolution happening in stages. First the national democratic revolution and then the socialist revolution. Later on, Mao developed a thesis of some kind of continuous revolution thus more or less abandoning the stageist thesis. That is where I will end my introductory remarks.

Now let me come to the question you raised in the context of the debates in the South. More recently, I would say in the last

two or three decades, we have developed a thesis in the South, particularly in Africa, that exploitation by, and accumulation of capital, which is dominated by the capital from the center, is primarily based on the extraction of surplus from the peasantry. The dominant producers of surplus are the peasantry. As a matter of fact, the history of capital destroying the peasantry by turning them into a proletariat has to be modified when applied to many countries in Africa. Here, capital preserves the peasant form – the form of petty commodity production – but integrates it in the web of world-wide capital circuits. The dominant form of accumulation is primitive accumulation in which the peasant producer cedes to capital a part of his/her necessary consumption. Within this context, exploitation cuts into the producer's necessary consumption. In effect, therefore, labour subsidises capital by taking on the burden of reproduction.

This thesis has increasingly been debated among African intellectuals and more recently within our own Agrarian South Network. Dramatically, this has proven to be so under neoliberalism. My argument has been that many of the efforts that were made by independent governments essentially tried to move away from the dominant tendency of primitive accumulation of the colonial period. This was for the purposes of attempting to

install some kind of capitalist accumulation by, for instance, abolishing migrant labour, raising wages and initiating some social services like education, health etc. This contributed to social wage and the adoption of some or other form of industrialisation, albeit in many cases, import substitution industrialisation. This was justified, rationalized and presented in a variety of nationalist and developmental ideologies. Regardless of what these countries called themselves, capitalist or socialist, the underlying driving force of their policies was to move away from primitive accumulation as the dominant tendency of accumulation. This was done to try and install some kind of expanded reproduction of capitalist accumulation. That project of capitalist development in the image of the historical European development, for various reasons, which I am not going to get into, did not succeed. It failed. And neoliberalism, through which imperialism has now assumed an offensive, in my view, has brought back primitive accumulation as the dominant tendency. It is not the same kind of primitive accumulation that we have witnessed classically, like for example, the tendency of evicting the peasantry from land, although that too exists. There are now new forms of primitive accumulation which I think we need to reckon with.

Before I proceed, you asked me the question of how we define the peasantry. For me, when we say the peasantry, I am thinking of smallholder producers on land. This includes not only those who cultivate and produce crops but also pastoralists. I will include them because very often we forget that pastoralists are a section of small producers on land. Pastoralists and the peasantry, directly or indirectly, derive their subsistence and incomes from land. That is where the center of the agrarian question lies. Now having defined so, a number of our scholars and intellectuals have tried to understand small producers within the specific political economy of our concrete situations. I also wrote an article in the '80s arguing that capital, in this case monopoly capital, does not only destroy the so-called pre-capitalist relations but also preserves them. The so-called pre-capitalist sector is in essence capitalist in the sense that it is integrated in the world-wide accumulation of capital. For this reason, the so called precapitalist is only in form.

Under neoliberalism, we are witnessing new forms of primitive accumulation that include the privatisation and commodification of the commons. This also includes privatisation and commodification of public goods such as education, water, health, energy, finance etc. In essence, this is an attack on the

production of public goods whose production was not subjected wholly to the market. That does not mean the classical type of primitive accumulation, such as enclosures, has not continued. More recently we have witnessed, for example, a new wave of land grabbing. An important point to keep in mind is that when the land grabs occur, the smallholders who are thrown off the land do not become the proletariat since the expansion of industrial production and manufacturing is not happening. What happens is that they become landless and unemployed slum dwellers in the ghettos, as well as street hawkers and vendors. Large numbers of our youth between the ages of 14 and 25 buy goods from merchants and hawk them in African cities and towns. They practically subsidise merchant capital and thus are subjected to a kind of primitive accumulation

In the countryside, the peasant is exploited. Based on this, I developed the thesis that the peasant is subjected to primitive accumulation in that the peasant producer cedes part of the necessary consumption to capital. Consequently, capital is subsidised because the reproduction of a peasant household/family is on the shoulders of the peasant household itself, largely women and children. The peasant, therefore, does not only produce surplus for capital, but also

reproduces the peasant household by cutting into its own consumption and exerting super-human labor to be able to live sub-human lives. These are the processes which have intensified under neoliberalism. You will notice that all the programs of land or agricultural reform put forward are meant to further entangle and integrate peasant production in the capitalist circuits and therefore reproduce the exploitative relationship I have talked about.

Now coming to politics, in our Agrarian South Network (ASN) and the Sam Moyo African Institute for Agrarian Studies (SMAIAS) summer schools, we have argued that peasants, instead of being characterized as backward, have the potential to play a central role in revolutionary transformation. Several books produced by the ASN on social and peasant movements have shown recurrent struggles of the peasantry for land and livelihoods.

Politically, in recent times, there has been a big shift on the issue of revolutionary agency. That is one tendency. There is another tendency which actually talks about de-peasantisation; that in the so-called South, particularly in Africa, the peasantry is disappearing. I think Deborah Bryceson, among others, subscribes to this position. We also find this view in Henry Bernstein, in a more nuanced form. There has been a debate

based on these two tendencies – the tendency showing peasant potential and even advocating a kind of re-peasantisation and the tendency to belittle the peasantry as a transformative force, a social category which is in fact disappearing - and that is where we stand. The debate continues. If you were to ask my opinion, using the Marxist method, the way Marx derived the revolutionary potential of the working class, similarly my analysis of the current financial capitalism which manifests itself as neo-liberalism, I think we can derive the revolutionary potential of the peasant, small producers, small entrepreneurs, street hawkers and a whole group of people including those sometimes known as the lower-middle class. And I have tried to amalgamate these groups in the concept of “The Working People”. Therefore, the agency of transformation is “The Working People.” This has a different political nuance than the traditional ‘working class’ (proletariat) concept but derived using the same method of Marxism. Of course, the concept of the ‘working people’ is still in its putative form and sounds somewhat abstract. We have to do a concrete analysis of each of our social formations and see what social classes and groups in our societies have a revolutionary potential of transforming our societies away from capitalism. Such analysis and empirical study should help us theorize the



concept of ‘working people’ in a more rigorous fashion.

On developing the so-called alternatives, my position has been that you cannot develop alternatives in the abstract. The life struggles of the working people in our countries are a school from which we can learn, theorize and develop the so-called alternatives.

In the interim period, Samir Amin, for example, has argued for a national popular sovereign project. That is a kind of transitional analysis that allows you to make certain demands of the existing state, while recognizing its limitations. The longer-term period of transformation, however, argues for a socialist transformation of the capitalist system. That is where we stand as far as intellectual debates are concerned. Meanwhile, real life situations and the struggles of the working people continue. ASN and SMAIAS, generally, have been at the forefront of producing empirical studies to show the forms of struggles of the working people in our various countries. I think I will end there as far as the first question is concerned. Let us develop the conversation further, Freedom.

**FM** – Indeed many scholars like you, Samir Amin and Paris Yeros, have taken the capitalist crisis into consideration and have indicated that we have reached a point where we can take this struggle from capitalism and

progress towards a socialist future. In your view, what would it take to reach that socialist stage, and how many decades would it take? What should progressive activists do to ensure that we achieve that?

**IS** –I think that is an interesting question. This is a kind of question you are frequently asked. When you give a response about socialism as a possible alternative, you are immediately confronted with a follow-up rhetorical question - where has socialism ever succeeded? All the countries which tried socialism failed. The problem is that our interrogators cannot even imagine what Samir Amin called the Long Road to Socialism. When we are talking about socialism, we are talking about an epochal change. We are not talking about years and decades because we are talking about overthrowing a system that has lasted for five centuries. So, to answer the second question about the failure of socialism, I would say this. The socialist revolutions that took place in countries like Russia, China, Cuba, Vietnam etc. were what one might call ‘revolutionary advances.’ No doubt, these countries did make revolutionary advances. That is undeniable. These however, were only glimpses into the socialist future, not fully-fledged socialist societies. The fact that these advances failed in the countries that we

described as socialist is nothing new in human history.

Take the analogy of the development of capitalism, and the transition from various pre-capitalist modes of production - like feudalism and other forms of tributary systems - to capitalism. Those countries like Venice and Portugal etc. in which capitalism first appeared are not the countries where capitalism ultimately succeeded. It succeeded in Britain. So, long transitions with a zig-zag trajectory, from one epoch to another, are nothing new in human history. Compared to the development of capitalism, revolutionary socialist advances had a shorter period. The Soviet Union lasted for only seventy years. China, from which we can derive lessons, despite many internal changes and struggles that have taken place, cannot be fully described as capitalist. The jury is still out. We have seen a small country like Cuba surviving all these years, despite the ups and downs. We have also seen initiatives taken in Venezuela, as well as initiatives of major land reforms in countries like Zimbabwe, etc. We have also seen bitter struggles in South Africa on the question of land which remains unresolved, yet it was a central question of the liberation movements. Based on these examples, I would say the era of revolutionary advances and struggles towards socialism is not over. It will, of course, take long, not just

decades, yet we are witnessing major shifts and changes in the world. Those who predicted the end of history, and that capitalism was here to stay have been proven woefully wrong. Capitalism is in deep crisis. Its very mode of existence is wars - from one war to another. Increasingly, and for the first time since the post-war period of the golden age of capitalism, people in both the South and the North are openly using the ideas and slogans of socialism, even though different people mean different things by socialism. Why not? 'Let hundred socialist flowers bloom!

The second point I would like to make in this regard is that in the last ten to fifteen years we have witnessed major crises of capitalism. Neo-liberalism, for example, which made its entry in the '70s, and became politically significant in the '80s, is already discredited. Its triumphalism has whittled down. It is almost in its last lag of existence. For how long did neo-liberalism last, 30 years? We then witnessed a major crisis in 2008, which of course, took different forms in different countries. The crisis is not only economic. It is also a political one of political legitimacy in both the North and the South. One of the backlashes to neo-liberalism is right-wing in the form of fascist tendencies that have been witnessed in countries like Brazil, India and some countries in Africa. But that is

one tendency. Broadly, there also is a progressive left tendency. Youth all over the world are exploring and revisiting socialist ideas and developing new forms of struggle like the ‘Occupy movement’ or the upsurge of the Black Lives Matter movement or the farmers’ movement in India. All in all, there are rays of hope all over.

In Africa, we have progressive tendencies emerging. Our problem is that our progressive forces, particularly the Left, remain largely unorganized. Organisation is the foremost task before us. For many years we have been talking about World Social Forums at the international level and civil society organisations (CSOs) at the local level. The impact of the latter has been marginal at best, and diversionary at worst. Theoretically infected by the liberal virus, and socially constructed by the middle classes, CSOs have failed to make a break through. They have failed to resonate with the hearts, minds and real-life struggles of the Working People.

How do you organize the working people and how do working people get organized themselves? What kind of alternatives do you pose, what demands do you make and what are the sites of mass politics, for politics are where the masses are? In my view, those are the burning issues before the African Left.

More recently I have been arguing that one of the important demands of the working people that can be put forward, and around which the working masses could rally, is reclaiming the commons. And not only the commons as traditionally understood to mean land and its resources, but commons in new sense. By the new commons, I mean strategic sectors of the economy like education, health, finance, energy. These should also be considered the commons. They should be taken out of the realm of the law of value, that is, the market. These are the commons which we must struggle to reclaim. Why am I putting this forward? It is because it will sound feasible and doable by the working people. Thinking of land and its resources as the commons, not subject to private ownership, would not be new to many societies in Africa. The concept of ownership of land was introduced by colonialism. I recently argued this point in a foreword of a book published by the Sam Moyo African Institute for Agrarian Studies (SMAIAS) – so that would not be new. Secondly, arguing for health, education, water, finance and energy as commons not subject to private ownership, but essentially producing public goods, cannot also be considered new because privatisation of these sectors has caused devastation to the working people. It has polarized our societies into small classes of a few who are filthy rich, and large masses of

the poor who cannot afford paid education, health, water, electricity etc. This can be the basis of organizing the working people and it could be a political demand to the existing states. That is where I think the struggle stands. As I said, this is only a suggestion which requires further discussion and theorizing. It is only after theorizing that we can develop ideologies based on those demands and also understand how we can then learn from the experiences of the people to mobilise and take the struggles forward.

**FM** –Moving on to another question that is almost linked to the previous one on alternatives, I would like us to spotlight Tanzania's *Ujamaa*, a collectivization project that was implemented by Mwalimu Julius Nyerere. This project has been vilified by a number of people who have argued that they had previously expressed that socializing does not work and therefore had discouraged developments that take that kind of path. As someone who went through this experience and followed it closely, what would you say was the major undoing of Ujamaa? I still think at some point people can try to relook and redefine it to make it work, but that can only be after a process of analyzing its pitfalls. Did it really fail, and if so, why?

**IS** - That indeed is an important initiative that we should table and discuss

further. You will remember, Freedom, that the *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy* produced a special issue that looked at both, 100 years of the Russian revolution and the 50 years of the Arusha Declaration. In the publication, we tried to revisit both issues. I would like to say, first and foremost, that Ujamaa was undoubtedly a very progressive initiative in Africa. Secondly, both in its conception and implementation, it was a nationalist project, not a socialist one. The architect of the project himself often said that for him nation building was primary, socialism secondary. If I were to put it in some kind of Marxist language, in Ujamaa social emancipation and class emancipation were subordinated to national building, which in turn meant giving primacy to national unity. The social question was subordinated to the National Question. The (national) unity of all classes trumped (social) class struggles. And politically speaking, as we have argued in our biography\* of Mwalimu Nyerere in book 3, that partly explains the so-called undoing of Ujamaa, because it was not seen as a social question. The national question was privileged. Within Ujamaa and within the political class, we ended up accommodating all kinds of tendencies including rightist tendencies which had no interest whatsoever in Ujamaa, and even went as far as to sabotage it. When the crunch came, this proto bourgeoisie turned

against Ujamaa. That is the thesis of book 3 of the biography. Of course, we can say a lot about the shortcomings at the policy level, referring to failures of implementation etc., but that discourse does not take us far. Inevitably, it becomes tautological. For example, although the Arusha Declaration talks a lot about workers and peasants as the movers of the project, the truth is, it was a top-down project. The agency to carry out this project was the state bourgeoisie which developed on the heels of Ujamaa. Ironically, the Arusha Declaration ended up creating a new class in its wings, so to speak; a kind of bureaucratic state bourgeoisie. It was this class that was supposed to drive Ujamaa!

Secondly, although we kept singing that agriculture was the backbone of our economy, we did not transform agriculture. It remained the same agriculture of peasants using the same age-old instruments and implements. It is also important to point out that the peasants continued to be exploited to the maximum and without any support going back to the farmers. This issue has been analysed in the context of the land question and the truth and reality is that we failed to transform agriculture and we failed to address the agrarian question. The peasant was sucked dry.

You are right when you say there was a time when Ujamaa was very much demonized as a “titanic failure” (to use late Mazrui’s hyperbole). The truth is, like many other African countries, whether capitalist or socialist, Tanzania found itself in deep a crisis in the late 1970s to the 1980s. All these countries had to submit to the so-called Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) to survive. I will not get deeper into this because we all know what happened. What I can say is that the consequences of adopting SAPs and neo-liberal policies are now being dramatically seen and felt, and people (not only the masses but the so-called educated classes too) are revisiting the Arusha Declaration with nostalgia. If you read the Arusha Declaration today, you will realize that it was a pretty revolutionary document during its time, in spite of what happened in its implementation. There is a lot to learn from it.

**FM:** - That is a very interesting point. In the interest of time, let us move to another important issue which you and many others have raised. When we started this conversation, we talked about how an imperialist system somewhat disadvantages the South. In your writings you have gone further and postulated that the solution is to *delink*. May you please provide clarity on this concept of delinking because some might interpret it to

mean that we should not have any links with the outside world.

**IS** - Firstly, delinking does not mean that there should not be any relations. Not only that it is impossible, but it is even undesirable. Delinking means subjecting your policies to the logic of national development not to the logic of imperialist and capitalist development. That is what you are delinking from. Simply put, you may say the kind of decisions you make and the policies you implement are meant to subject your development to the internal logic and not that of world capitalism. That is the meaning of delinking. How you do it is a different matter. Is it possible to do it? Yes, it is possible to do it and that is a political question. It does not happen mechanistically but depends on how well the popular classes are organized and mobilised to sustain the project of delinking.

To answer your question more specifically, it is important to keep in mind that in this debate and discourse, all of us who subscribe to the delinking project must emphasize and audaciously put it forward that imperialism exists. It continues to dominate the world system. Secondly, anti-imperialist struggles are extremely important. The third question is – and that is where the debate is right now: does anti-imperialist struggle mean that you privilege the National Question and subordinate the Social Question? Does it mean

that you move in stages, first resolve the National Question and then proceed to the Social Question? Or does it mean that in the current conjuncture you must privilege the Social Question and subordinate to it the National Question? I would say that this is what we are currently debating and that is where we have differences. To all these three questions, we cannot have ready-made answers but it is important to identify the burning questions of the day. At the abstract level of theory, these are the three most important questions and they all have empirical and practical manifestations. We have historic experiences of national liberation struggles. We also have historic experiences of those countries that gained national liberation which was not sustained after independence. It was squandered and we once again became the surrogates of imperialism.

We have the experiences of some emancipatory tendencies which were nipped in the bud. For example, Amicab Cabral did not see national liberation as a stage but rather, a continuous process. If I may paraphrase him, he said ‘as long as imperialism exists, independence can only mean the national liberation movement in power.’ This is a very profound statement. What are its implications? Take the example of South Africa and the stageist theory of some of its proponents. On

the other hand, we had someone like Chris Hani who had a different vision of South Africa. He was killed. Amilcar Cabral was killed. These were strategic killings. Let us not forget them because in such struggles, individuals do matter. While we know that individuals do not make history, they do matter and play a critical role in certain circumstances. The turn that history takes does depend on the role of individual leaders. If you examine, and that is what we need to do, our history of national liberation, you'll find that at very strategic moments, strategic people who had a different view of liberation were bumped off. Cabral and Chris Hani are examples. Would these countries have taken a different path had they lived, one cannot say.

There is a point of view which is arising now which totally rejects the "National Question." It views the National Question as the colonial question. That is also problematic. I do not think that the National Question has exhausted itself but I will go along the line that in our present state of the struggle and politics of the left, the National Question needs to be subordinated to the Social Question. If we do not do that, we are likely to be identified with right-wing nationalisms and that is problematic. Today in South Africa, for example, you cannot simply continue harping on the National Question. The question which

is very much on the table is the social one. There are people who have argued that the South African moment is a very advanced one because it subordinated the National Question to democracy by being all-inclusive. The question is, did it? It never addressed the Social Question. Capital, "white-capital," stayed with its privileges. In that situation, it is now important to discuss the Social Question and not simply stick to the National Question or pontificate on some woolly idea about all-inclusive democracy. So, the National Question exists, it has a role, yes, but where do we place it.

Before we end Freedom, I would like to make a couple of remarks. First, I want to suggest, I am of course thinking aloud, that we need to shift away from some of the dominant vocabulary. Of course, we are all agreed that the dominant discourse is that of the capitalists. We need to shift away from it. But there is also an NGO vocabulary which many of us, unconsciously or unintentionally, tend to adopt. That too is problematic. Here I am opening up myself to criticism. Is the term "alternatives," for example, not very much part of the NGO discourse? I ask because in Marxist ideology, we talk of a "new world view." In this ideology we do not talk about alternatives but we talk about building a better world with a new world view. I know it sounds

abstract and utopian but the world's history was made by utopias.

The second point I would like to make is this: maybe we cannot explore this a lot here, but it is relevant when we are discussing the land question. There is a lot of debate about private individual ownership versus communal ownership and many of us think that the latter is progressive. I would actually want to suggest that we should move away from the concept of ownership altogether. That is why I am trying to develop, and maybe we can debate it, the concept of the “commons.” The commons are not “communally **owned.**” They are only managed by the community through its democratic organs.

Finally, there is the question of the classes which I would want to address to my fellow comrades from the Marxist tradition. Many of us think that the radical political economy and the analysis of classes is a Marxist method. It is not. Marxism was a critique of political economy, not its affirmation. The concept of class was developed by the classical political economists before Marx. What was specific to Marxism was the concept of historical materialism and the central problematic of historical materialism is class struggle. The question of class struggle has been discarded in our discussions. I would therefore like to suggest that we need to dig

deeper in our summer school, workshops and in our work to understand better the question of historical materialism because, if we disregard it, we open ourselves to a very common criticism that Marxists are reductionists who only talk about economics and not politics. We also become susceptible to the criticism that Marxists talk about the “rule of capital” but not “how capital rules.” That is inaccurate but it is a critique that is at times addressed to us, and on many occasions justified. So, Freedom, that is all from me, unless you have another question you may wish to add.

**FM:** - Thank you so much Professor. We unfortunately have run out of time, but we can always find time and discuss other issues. There indeed are some issues which we need to discuss in depth even towards the summer school. These especially relate to land: private ownership vs. communal ownership. I think we need to dig deeper into these issues, theorize and come up with some practical solution instead of always continuing with those binaries of privatisation and communal ownership. As history and experience have shown, communal ownership is not the solution and private ownership has some weaknesses as well. Other issues that you raised on Marxism and class also need to have time



dedicated to them. I think for today we can end here. Thank you very much for joining us.

**IS:** Thank you Freedom for this discussion. I hope it will stimulate further discussions.

---

<sup>i</sup> Henceforth not italicized.

\* Issa G. Shivji et al, (2020) *Development as Rebellion: A Biography of Julius Nyerere*, Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota.

## South Africa – unequal, unstable and unsustainable

Mazibuko Kanyiso Jara<sup>1</sup>

*“We have apparently gone astray from the path of liberation. Having lost our way, we are helplessly floundering in the desert, misled by the unprincipled, the unscrupulous, the self-centred and narrow-minded. The essential attributes of honesty, uprightness, integrity and a sense of honour are missing in our public life... The country has been brought to its knees and is desperately struggling to keep its head above water.” – Mda (2019)*

An overview of the current political-economic-social situation in contemporary South Africa points to the following key features:

- A **stagnating economy** where mass unemployment is now well over 32% of the labour force and at more than 46,3% for the youth – this translates to at least 7,2 million people (Statistics South Africa, 2021);
- The **collapsing social fabric** in poor and working class communities, which is, and has been the breeding ground for the kind of social unrest we saw after the incarceration of former President Jacob Zuma in July as well as extreme forms of violence and brutality against women and children, rising crime, gangsterism and substance abuse, xenophobic violence and pogroms;
- A **collapsing state and deteriorating services**, as government departments and state owned enterprises become more dysfunctional as a result of corruption and cronyism;
- **Super-exploitation** of employed workers in contrast to sustained profits by the very top of capitalists, and **precarity** for a large number of vulnerable workers, informal workers and a permanently unemployed mass;
- **Intersecting ecological and climate crises** subjecting vast parts of the country to extreme weather events such as devastating droughts, destructive storms and floods as well as eroding air quality, soil fertility and declining fresh water resources with resulting impacts for food sovereignty and quality of health;
- **Collapsing energy (especially electricity) and transport systems**,

---

<sup>1</sup> Jara (mazibuko@amandla.org.za) is a Marxist activist based in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa

which exacerbate pre-existing inequalities, deepening spatial Apartheid geographies and demographics.

These multiple and intersecting crises have worked to give rise to a **crisis of politics**, at the heart of which is the erosion of popular progressive consciousness and widespread disillusionment and lack of hope amongst the impoverished majority. Under these pressures, South Africa's rich tradition of popular social movements and working class solidarity have declined. Existing trade unions and social movements are fragmenting and struggling to effectively represent the interests of their constituencies. Yet these popular forces are key in turning the situation around. For this to happen, what is required is a coherent perspective, strategy and programme of the long-term, that can deepen organisational, political and geographic depth, sophistication, sustainability, impact, solidarity and unity in action. With such a strategy and programme, there can be real opportunities for the recomposition of a progressive broad mass movement, possibilities for the re-emergence of united workplace and community struggles and the potential for these to create a political dynamic that can challenge the ANC's hold over the black working class.

### Stagnation and rising public debt

The National Income Dynamics Study of 2017 estimated that approximately 18 million people (which equals at least 30% of the total population of more than 59 million) live in the poorest 20 per cent of households (with almost half of these households being in rural areas) (Francis et al, 2020). The poorest 50 per cent of South Africans have do not have any wealth at all, instead they have on average more liabilities worth R16 000 than assets (Francis et al, 2020). By comparison, the richest 10 per cent have an average net wealth of R2.8 million per person with the top 1 per cent has an average net wealth of R17.8 million per person (Francis et al, 2020). In moments of economic crisis (such as those that pertain under the lockdown), it is not income, but wealth, which sustains households (Francis et al, 2020).

South Africa's public finances are in a perilous state due to the combination of four crucial factors: low economic growth, lethargy in tax revenue collection, a rise in public debt levels and the refinancing of poorly performing and often corrupted state-owned enterprises. The budget deficit for 2020–2021 has shifted from 6.8 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) to 14.6 per cent with government revenue for the 2020/21 financial year was estimated to have suffered a shortfall of almost R300 billion,

leading to a total budget deficit above R700 billion (Francis, Valodia and Webster, 2021). The country has a serious public debt challenge.

Compounding this picture are the extreme levels of concentrated economic power, ownership and control (including vertical integration within sectors) which have actually increased since 1994. This has been confirmed by a Competition Commission study of merger reports which found that unilateral dominance (at least 45% dominance by a single firm) existed in 294 distinct product markets in ICT, energy, financial services, food and agro-processing, infrastructure and construction, intermediate industrial products, mining, pharmaceuticals, and transport. The exclusion of smaller participants from key economic sectors contradicts the need to deracialise the economic thereby fuelling the logic of using the state as a key leverage to accumulate and appropriate rents by new economic players.

With its prioritisation of export-led growth, commitment to free markets, conservative macro-economic policies such as inflation targeting, fiscal austerity, low taxes on high incomes and privatisation, Ramaphosa's policy positions reinforce the failed path that has been followed over the last 26 years. In addition to missed growth

and employment targets, this neo-liberal path weakened the public health system, compromised the immunity of the poor, limited access to clean running water – thereby exposing society to the killer Covid-19 virus.

Mainstream neo-liberal economists and others have called for what they refer to as structural reforms in order to grow the economy and thereby create jobs. The key reforms they call for include privatisation of ESKOM and other public entities, a further weakening of the labour regime, reduction of public spending, reduction of the public sector wage, as well tax incentives and reduced taxes for investors. All these measures are counter to overwhelming global evidence that measures such as public goods (including widely accessible education, health, electricity and public transport), social transfers, redistributive tax, a living wage and labour rights are critical to reducing the inequality gap.

In order to achieve these reforms, there have also been calls for a social pact where labour and poor people are expected to moderate their wage and other redistributive demands in order to allow space for capital to increase its liquidity and thereby be better positioned to invest. Not much has been said about what will be the concession from capital regarding redistributive benefits that poor and working

people would gain from such a pact. Even the initially pro-poor National Health Insurance which could have become a major part of such a social pact has been captured by private interests. Overall, the hoarding of profits away from productive investment make such a social pact unlikely to be redistributive. What further weakens the redistributive thrust of the punted social pact is the weak state of trade unions and social movements – meaning that there is not much that they can win on the negotiating table given that they do not have the required social and political weight to win it on the streets and broader hegemony in society. Further, the state is increasingly discredited and disabled from playing an appropriate leadership and investment role to facilitate such a social pact. In other words, South Africa is stagnating into a strategic stalemate. In such a context, the Treasury has been free to continue with austerity largely unchallenged by organised social forces and also redistributive poles within the state.

This means that the prospects for South Africa to emerge from the pandemic with a more equal and fair society and a more resilient economy are rather dim.

### **Deepening social crisis**

Working class communities are already battered by the pandemic of violence, with women and children bearing the brunt of an extremely stressed society, where nearly

60 people are killed violently in our streets each day. Women, including the aged, live in fear in their homes and streets. We have also witnessed rising xenophobia, inter-ethnic strife, criminality, warlordism (often violent local competition over the remaining crumbs in the economic pie – parcelling out of small municipal tenders, control of land occupied by homeless people, taxi routes, informal trading sites). While seemingly meagre, the R350 Covid-19 unemployment grant has proved important to many without work or assets, or have to face a collapsed rail or health or education system. These day-to-day social costs — to answer the call of nature, to access work, to move, to live — may split our social fabric sooner than any political splits based on power and greed. The zones of reproduction occupied by poor and working people are zones of rot and decay. The Gift of the Givers Foundation reports that they've never before seen the kind of hunger they've witnessed in recent times in places such as the Eastern Cape (Cawe, 2020). The hard reality is that people remain poor, and they are dying, not just from Covid-19, but also from hunger (Cawe, 2020). Many of these features have been worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown.

This entrenched social crisis further fragments progressive popular self-organisation. With such fragmentation has opened up space for the rising legitimacy of conservative social discourses as we can see

in conservative churches and traditionalists using religion, culture and identity as explanations for the social ills we face. Given how the socio-economic conditions are pregnant with possibilities for a massive social upheaval, the rise of conservative social forces is a cause for worry.

Despite the largely negative prognosis above, the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown has also produced interesting seeds of hope – the nascent mutual aid initiatives, food gardens, soup kitchens, community action networks, broad coalitions, self-organisation of vulnerable sectors such as ECD workers, community health workers and outsourced workers; and initial signals for worker-community solidarity and action amongst progressive sections of the labour movement. It is these seeds that must bud and grow further for a renewed mass-based strategy to reclaim South Africa towards democratic social justice.

### **Strategic incapacity of a comprador ruling elite**

In essence, we have a weak ruling elite characterised by fratricide, strategic incapacity, and a limited agenda for change which still retorts to an exhausted and less attractive liberation legacy. This ruling elite struck a historic compromise with a tiny white monopoly capitalist class (WMC). Over the last 25 years WMC has grown more and more powerful, and the black elite less

and less powerful. Both the black elite and the majority of the new black middle class are drowning in debt whilst WMC has repositioned itself outside the country, and disciplines the elite through limited fixed investment, capital flight, poor investment ratings by rating agencies and the roles played by international financial institutions. Through its hegemony over the ANC and other parliamentary parties, WMC has felt no need to offer compromises for redistribution or socio-economic equality. The primary role of the post-1994 state is to defend capital accumulation on the basis of winning the legitimate consent of poor and working people through a democratic semblance and limited socio-economic reforms which have achieved effective social and political control over the impoverished majority to date.

The black middle class has risen through state employment, and also business tenders from the state. The economic decline of this middle class and its exclusion by large firms from key sectors of the economy has driven it into a situation where it has to accumulate and protect its newly acquired life-style through corruption. As a direct consequence of ANC actions and omissions, the ANC has effectively become a system aiding and abetting corruption. This explains why Ramaphosa will remain structurally unable to address corruption.

What we have not yet seen is sustained, systemic repression as the Ramaphosa government runs out of options in managing the ripening contradictions. But we have already established evidence that points to the state arming itself in this regard – in the 2016 fiscal year 70% of the salary budget of the state was allocated to repressive arms of the state (defence, the police and prisons). The instability of this state form is going to come to a head with the socio-economic fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic as the democratic shell is tested to its limits. The July social unrest was already a demonstration of this.

### **Weak social movements**

South Africa does not have viable mass organisations that can provide the strategic and political leadership capable of matching formidable challenges facing humanity today. Structurally, we have the old working class that came out of the period of apartheid and led the struggle for liberation (Covid-19 Working Class Campaign, 2019). Up until the onset of the Covid-19 lockdown, this diminishing section enjoyed permanent but precarious employment and is continuously been thrown into the streets, into the ranks of the unemployed (Covid-19 Working Class Campaign, 2019). The second section (the ‘post-apartheid working class’) is a large and growing section of the unemployed, casual workers, workers who

hustle daily at the side of the road, a large part of which is feminised, ‘self-employed’ and does anything to earn a living (Covid-19 Working Class Campaign, 2019).. This section of the working class, led mainly by women as they bear the brunt of social reproduction, forms the bedrock of the survival of the entire working class.

According to the Covid-19 Working Class Campaign (2019), the section of the working class coming out of the anti-apartheid struggle was severely weakened (if not defeated) in the battles against neoliberalism which reached a peak under the Mbeki Presidency. Another important section of the working class are the casualised, unemployed and feminised workers that led the resistance to neoliberalism from the mid-1990s but it did not lead to the constitution of a new historic moment in working class organisation. The third segment of arise from the second section which began to organise again after Marikana, and can be seen in many continuing protests in the country. While these two sections of the working class share the same social base, their political and organisational experience differs in that the “new social movements” (from Gear to Marikana), developed a broad political consciousness grounded in an anti-neoliberal and anti-globalisation politics (Covid-19 Working Class Campaign, 2019). This is where we stand as we consider how the

Covid-19 context presents new questions about working class organisation.

According to the Covid-19 Working Class Campaign, the factory closures, the collapse of whole industries that promised some kind of permanent employment in the private sector, and lastly, the impact of this collapse on state revenues in a neoliberal framework has led the largest number of jobs lost in the shortest period of time since 1994 (some 3 million jobs lost over some 9 months from March 2020). The Covid-19 Working Class Campaign believes that this bloodbath breaks down the social isolation of the anti-apartheid working class from the precarious post-apartheid working class. This is likely to shift the terrain of organising from the factories to the townships: struggles for survival, livelihoods and political change are more likely to be driven from the townships than factories given (Covid-19 Working Class Campaign, 2020). Both progressive and regressive elements of working class self-organisation in the township already co-exist with their contradictory logics in how the marginalised in South Africa often survive – by occupying land illegally, connecting to electricity illicitly, and entering into clientelistic relations with slumlords, political brokers, and even criminal syndicates. Both the progressive and the regressive confirm that even the most marginalised people exercise some degree of individual and

collective agency, and this is increasingly outside the factory floor.

Despite thousands of protests and some impressive social movements, ultimately South African popular movements are weak. The actions and strategies of popular movements are still shaped in terms of failed promises, and not yet in structural and systemic terms. In other words, the struggles and demands posed by these popular movements are not shaped by a rigorous analysis and understanding of the structural and systemic roots of the social, economic and political problems faced by the unemployed and workers. They have only inadequately realised elements of the tools of analysis required.

The second major weakness of most popular movements is the absence of theories and strategies of change beyond winning immediate demands. There is no conscious effort to think about the transition from the immediate to long-term visions of a changed society. There is the absence of a generalised and shared strategy to win immediate demands whilst also pushing the limits of the given framework and fashioning out long-term changes. There is no connection of immediate reforms with systemic transformation. There is generalised absence of anti-systemic transformative logics/alternatives/ ‘liberated zones’/‘occupied spaces’ from below.



The third major weakness is organisational: the thin activist base which the popular movements rely on. There is not a big enough layer with the strategic, political and programmatic capacity required to mobilise, organise and win. Generally, the majority of popular formulations have weak organisational capacity. There is no critical mass of a capacitated activist layer that can carry through and sustain the diverse organisational, political and programmatic tasks.

These weaknesses are shaped and reproduced by several factors: the disorganising impacts of capitalism and neo-liberalism and the delegation of change to the state means the weakening of self-agency from below. The daily struggles to eke out a living from limited livelihood options impose severe stresses and strains on atomised individuals, families, households and communities. These do not leave much room for political self-agency. Whilst little understood, the demobilising effects of the emboldened religious and traditionalist outlooks should not be underestimated as they entrench social conservatism and right-wing consciousness. Part of this demobilising dynamic are how the working class is turning on itself as can be seen in xenophobia, tribalism, ‘Coloured’ vs. ‘African’ tensions, crime, violence and so on. All of these mean the dispossessed classes are simply not yet a

counterpoint from which to challenge the power of capital and the state.

Outside of popular movements, there is a significant sprinkling of powerful organisations with features that combine movement and NGO features. These are normally well-funded organisations with a national profile. They have skilled activists, leaders and a professional core. They normally focus on a single issue and mobilise around that in effective ways that win defined demands. These NGO-movement hybrids also work alongside similarly well-resourced NGOs. This collaboration has often proved effective in successful litigation, public campaigns, lobbying and advocacy. Their strategy has been based on optimising the progressive rights and transformative mandate in the country’s Constitution. This is what the December 2014 Preparatory Assembly envisioned when it argued that the UF has “to mobilise for the advancement, deepening and realisation of the progressive and transformative content of the Constitution of the country from below in order that the mass of the oppressed and exploited people may meaningfully and substantively claim their democratic, political, socio-economic and other rights enshrined therein whilst also creating space for informed public debate and progressive review of the Constitution from below.” However, it is not clear whether this sub-set of organisations may be able to survive

without the resource base they have. They have also been critiqued as having a limited strategy that focuses on a narrow conception of social justice that is seen as insufficiently taking into account systemic and structural questions of political economy. Linked to this critique is also the critique that this sub-set of organisations do not go beyond immediate reforms. Despite all these critiques, this sub-set of organisations has won important victories, has built a significant social base and serves as a strong pillar in defence of democratic rights and claiming of constitutional rights. However, their collective impact has not yet been broadened and extended to help build a broader popular movement.

### **A weakened labour movement**

In contrast to its political heights from the late 1980s to the early 2000s, trade unions today are characterised by disorganization, fragmentation and paralysis. The trade union movement has been fragmented by the combined impact of the neo-liberal restructuring of work, limited resistance by official trade unions to the impact of neo-liberalism, outmoded organisational forms and organising strategies, political compromises arising out of COSATU's political alliance with the SACP and ANC, failure to connect with the unemployed, the decline of democratic worker control and the bureaucratisation of

unions, with many of them also feeding on the trough of corruption. Much like the state, trade unions have become a stepping-stone for self-advancement and the consolidation of a bureaucratic elite. This layer is often characterised by higher pay and better conditions than the workers they represent, the separation of their conditions from those of their members, a working life where he/she spends more time talking to management than to the shop floor, a tendency to view disputes not as struggles to build workers' power and win, but as problems within the given skewed workplace power system. It is this bureaucratic elite, entrenched in the labour movement, that finds it difficult and often counter-productive to seek common cause with the unemployed, under-employed, marginalised and impoverished sections of the proletariat or working class majority.

Although formal membership of trade unions remain one of the highest in the world, the reality is that it has been in decline. The levels of representation plummeted from around 40% in 1997 to around 24% today. Many workplace struggles increasingly bypass the trade unions with the emergence of the very active and propagandistic EFF's Labour Desk also being an additional discrediting factor. Although in September 2020, the new trade union federation (SAFTU) filed a Section 77 formal application for a general strike in February

2021, there has been no clear organising strategy and programme for this important political action – despite progressive political rhetoric, there is a lack of cohesion in organising for the stay-away, with no indication of any real resource mobilisation even up to the last two days before the action.

The last two major strikes (in 2018 and 2019 – one by SAFTU and one by COSATU) and the government’s dishonouring of the public sector wage agreement all show how both the bosses and government are able to sit out one-day actions which they know workers cannot sustain for long. Employers are now more emboldened to ignore strikes and court actions by trade unions.

Boardroom-based labour politics shaped by the regime of managed labour flexibility remains the fundamental strategic orientation of trade union strategy. This strategic orientation trumps strong shopfloor-based worker organisation and struggles.

Already it is obvious how the ruling elite is taking advantage of the paralysis of the trade union movement in pushing through further neoliberal and anti-worker reforms which have been accelerated during the Covid-19 lockdown.

### **The end of the beginning**

Some 27 years since the end of apartheid and the advent of democracy, there is a deep rupturing of the post-apartheid social consensus and the setting in of the long-term decomposition of ANC hegemony. Contemporary explanations for this point to the failure of the Ramaphosa government to engineer a break with the Zuma government’s neoliberalism and its complicity in corruption and cronyism. There have also been key moments that have educated the population – the Marikana massacre of 2012, the subsequent great mineworkers’ strike and farm workers’ rebellion of 2012/13, the 2015 to 2017 Fees Must Fall rebellion, the emergence of a non-ANC trade union federation, declining electoral performance of the ANC in the 2016 municipal elections and the 2019 national elections, the sustained public outcry about government corruption and failures, the ongoing service delivery revolts, strategic litigation in defence of constitutional rights, and organised citizen action exploring pathways towards self-provisioning and self-governance since the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March 2020. All these point to a changing political situation in the country whose medium- to long- term results are not yet discernible. At best, popular classes are likely to undergo a long process of crisis, strife, reorientation and rebuilding. At worst, social strife may result in the rise of

conservative right-wing politics amongst the broad black working class. But all these

reaffirm that the ANC is no longer the glue that holds society together.

## REFERENCES

- Cawe, A. 2021. 'Poverty and hardship costing too many South Africans too much'. In *Business Day* newspaper, 07 February 2021.
- Covid-19 Working Class Campaign Statement on SAFTU General Strike. February 2021. Received on email.
- Covid-19 Working Class Campaign. 2020. *Movement building in the shadow of COVID19*. Campaign Position Paper, 14 May 2020. From <https://karibu.org.za/movement-building-in-the-shadow-of-covid19/>
- Francis, V. & E. Webster. 2020. Politics, Policy, and Inequality in South Africa Under COVID-19. *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy: A triannual Journal of Agrarian South Network and CARES*, Volume 9 issue 3.
- Mda, M. 2019. Struggle and Hope: Reflections on the Recent History of the 'Transkeian People. African Sun Media
- Paton, C.2021. 'Job numbers bounced back in last quarter of 2020'. In *Business Day* newspaper, 17 February 2021.
- Statistics South Africa. 2021. *Quarterly Labour Force Survey Quarter 1: 2021*. ([http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0211/P02111stQuarter2021.pdf?\\_ga=2.128774476.1114676419.1623378412-1583862470.1623378411](http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0211/P02111stQuarter2021.pdf?_ga=2.128774476.1114676419.1623378412-1583862470.1623378411))

## Elements of a New Bandung: Towards an International Solidarity Front

Paris Yeros

### The World Pre-revolutionary Situation

We stand at the threshold of a world revolutionary situation. We can be certain now that mass mobilizations and serial insurrectional outbreaks will occur throughout this decade and that they will amount to much more than a passing phase of social unrest. Polarization is far advanced in the peripheries of the world economy and it has also made a leap in the centres since 2008. Faith in neoliberal tenets has been shaken by protracted crisis and the continuing rise of China. The pandemic tragedy has further shifted subjective conditions worldwide. The decisive historical moment that will define the twenty-first century and beyond is upon us.

But the fissures in the architecture of monopoly capitalism will not by themselves deliver a world transition to socialism. Imperialism will persist in a neocolonial stalemate. *This can only be broken by coherent ideology, organization, and solidarity on an international level. What is required is a New Bandung movement of Peasants, Workers and Peoples, an international solidarity front rooted in the Third World with a socialist and anti-imperialist perspective.*

After half a century of neoliberal assault, the contradictions have accumulated

beyond containment. Imperialism has waged war against the liberation aspirations of the peoples of the Third World in an attempt to turn back the clock of decolonization. It has deployed its full arsenal of monopoly, financial, and military power, unleashed sanctions and surveillance, and carried out invasions, coups, proxy wars, and systematic destabilization. By containing most of the Third World, imperialism has also prevailed over the Soviet system in the East and undermined the welfare state in the West. But the contradictions have continued to accumulate and imperialism has been unable to resolve its economic crisis, which is a permanent crisis of monopoly capitalism.

The pandemic shock has compressed and accelerated the course of contradictions. In 2020, the capitalist economy once again ground to a halt and thrust upon the world the true image of itself. This is a world of giant corporations that play the planet on their fingertips, where billionaires derive great wealth from misery and destruction. A world whose ecological rifts cause serial public health catastrophes. A world in which race, caste, and patriarchy are operating principles of crisis management and segregation. A world in which hundreds of millions of

lives among the most vulnerable are wiped out with impunity. A world whose essential labour in production, distribution, and reproduction is grossly undervalued or entirely unpaid. A world in which the bulk of basic needs – food and basic supplies, vaccines, health services, internet, schooling, transport, housing – is at the mercy of monopolies with insatiable accumulation needs. This is a world in which the peripheries still serve at the behest of the centres, as shock absorbers of crisis and as civilizational scapegoats.

The end of the Cold War shifted the parameters of struggle, but the principal contradiction between imperialism and the peoples of the Third World has remained in place. Neither the end of empire, nor the collapse of the Soviet Union, nor the rise of China has displaced the centrality of this contradiction. What has changed is the character of the two aspects of this contradiction: monopoly capital has accelerated on the path of centralization and financialization, absorbing peripheral bourgeoisies into its global strategy, while the peoples of the Third World have entered the phase of generalized semi-proletarianization. The motive force of historical change thus remains essentially the same: the peasants, workers and marginalized peoples of the Third World. And it is here that the flame has been kept

alight in the struggle against imperialist assault and deepening polarization.

No sooner had the ink dried on the accords that dissolved the Soviet Union, an indigenous people's uprising in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas punctured imperialist designs and heralded a new epoch of struggle. The Zapatistas carved an autonomous revolutionary territory, defended by arms to this day. Since then we have witnessed two robust revolutionary situations, in Venezuela and Zimbabwe, whose radicalism shifted the relation of forces internally and in whole regions, galvanizing anti-imperialist resistance. And we have witnessed relentless mass mobilizations, armed struggles, and insurrectional pressures in all regions of the Third World: a decade-long People's War in Nepal until 2006; the Arab Spring from 2010; the ongoing protests in Haiti since 2018; the social explosion in South America in 2019; a sustained mass mobilization by farmers and other movements in India since the end of 2020; the list goes on.

The North has not been spared either. Indeed, hope has been raised by the new struggles especially in the United States, the organizing centre of the imperialist system. The intensification of struggles in the midst of pandemic catastrophe has had a singular effect on levels of political consciousness worldwide. In May 2020, a courageous

popular uprising against racist police brutality emboldened movements against racism, casteism, and police violence across North and South, from France and Britain to Brazil, Nigeria, and India. This sequence of events demonstrated the latent power of international solidarity among oppressed peoples. It fully vindicated Angela Davis' affirmation, made after the Ferguson protests in 2014, that 'people are ready for a movement.' Yet, the relentless NGO cooption of Northern protests continues to weigh heavily on national politics and international solidarity.

What is really at stake now? The starkest answers have come from Palestine, one of the remaining colonial situations, and Afghanistan, the archetype of modern semi-colonialism. In May 2021, a new groundswell of rebellion across historic Palestine was answered with genocidal violence by the Zionist state with the full support of imperialism. Bombs rained down on the densely populated Gaza enclave killing 260 people in just two weeks, one-fourth of them children, and injuring over 2,000. Meanwhile, in Afghanistan, imperialism has shown how far it is still willing to go to obtain direct control over strategic positions: twenty years of military occupation, one trillion dollars spent, over 100,000 troops mobilized at its peak, and possibly a total of 200,000 dead or injured combined

among military, police and the civilian population in the twenty-year period. These leave no doubt as to what awaits the peoples of the Third World in the twenty-first century: *imperialism will continue to perpetrate and sponsor genocide, without any moral restraint.*

The peoples under neocolonial and other semi-colonial situations are in the same line of fire. This is a fact known too well by indigenous and black peoples subject to ongoing genocide in the white-settler states of the Americas; or the peoples invaded anew by the imperialist war machine and its proxies in the Caribbean, North Africa, the Sahel, the Horn, and Western Asia; or the peoples targeted by racial, caste, communal, and religious bigotry in countries in thrall to ascendant neo-fascist forces; or indeed the peoples subject to endless imperialist sanctions and destabilization, in Cuba, Venezuela, Zimbabwe, Iran, and North Korea. Hundreds of US military bases persist in all corners of the earth, stirring up conflicts and pouncing on the frailties of peripheral countries.

It is necessary to draw the correct conclusions about what solidarity is required if the world revolutionary situation is to fulfill its potential. The risk is that the potential of the present be squandered and humanity delivered to barbarism, once and for all. New calls for

international unity and organization are being made; and diverse organizations with a claim to internationalism already exist, or are in the making. But an international solidarity front *from* the Third World with a *revolutionary* and *anti-imperialist* perspective remains an open question.

The risk also is that a *pro-imperialist* ‘left’ prevails with Eurocentric and social-reformist sensibilities, to pay lip-service to the liberation aspirations of the peoples of the Third World. Already an eleventh-hour reform effort is underway to save monopoly capitalism from its obsolescence, promising a ‘green economy’ and material benefits for the top end of the salaried working classes concentrated in imperialist centres. This, too, will fail and the scapegoats will again be the same. Lenin’s century-old condemnation of social reformism is more pertinent now than ever. A full-blown existential crisis is unfolding for the majority of the world’s population, the peasants, workers and peoples of the Third World.

### **Peasants, Workers & Peoples**

The capitalist world economy is fulfilling its essential logic perceived long ago by Karl Marx with regards to the inexorable growth of a relative surplus population not directly or regularly employed and paid by capital. By the contemporary distribution of labour

regimes around the world, one might be excused for mistaking this obsolescent monopoly capitalism for a post-capitalist system!

Well over half of the world’s economically active population is not engaged in waged or salaried employment; it is engaged in self-employment, or unpaid family labour, or is unemployed. And while proletarianization has advanced under neoliberalism by the proportion of waged labour that has increased relative to the unwaged, the growth of the self-employed has trailed closely behind. Global unemployment also continues to grow in absolute terms, while unemployment especially among the youth between 15 and 24 years of age is ravaging the South.

If we further weigh in the large and growing contingents of *under-15* youth populations dependent on the economically active in Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean, these differences gain a qualitatively new dimension. Perhaps as much as two-thirds of the world’s population lives in households that lead an existence with a tenuous, irregular, and sporadic relationship to wage labour. This situation will only intensify as another two billion youths come onboard by mid-century, mainly in the labour reserves of the peripheries. *We thus cannot properly speak of the proletarian condition as a universal feature of*



*really existing monopoly capitalism in this late phase of neocolonialism.*

We must first recognize that imperialism maintains two distinct labour reserves in centres and peripheries. In the imperialist centres, prior to the pandemic, the proletariat consisted of, approximately, 86 percent of the working-age population, followed by 78 percent in Central and Southeastern Europe, 65 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean, 50 percent in North Africa and East Asia, and as low as 21 percent in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, according to data provided by the International Labour Organization. Conversely, the unwaged working population (the self-employed or unpaid family labour) was lowest in the imperialist centres, around 10 percent, followed by 20 percent in Central and Southeastern Europe, 32 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean, 26–31 percent in North Africa and East Asia, and as high as 78 percent in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, where, in fact, population growth is highest. The size of the two labour reserves differs dramatically; those in the imperialist centres also have closer interaction with the world's active army of labour – the proletariat proper – which is concentrated in the centres. Very different conditions, of massive and permanent marginality, prevail in peripheral social formations.

If we further consider the intrinsic relationship between productive and reproductive labour across labour regimes, and that reproductive labour is undertaken preponderantly by women, it is evident that well over two-thirds of the world's labour reserves consists of women. This massive contingent of women in the labour reserves is again situated mainly in the peripheries of the world economy, spanning diverse economic activities that branch out from household and care work. *The generalized semi-proletarian condition of peripheral social formations is structurally gendered and reliant on sexually segmented labour regimes and the unpaid reproductive labour especially of women, on a mass scale.* This is where the largest burden of the permanent crisis of monopoly capitalism is systematically deposited, a fact which routinely appears in grim statistics on women's illiteracy and malnutrition, child mortality, and gender based violence against women and girls, as well as against people of non-conformist, non-binary sexual and gender orientations.

The weight of the different economic sectors across the world economy is of further significance: in the imperialist centres, prior to the pandemic, as little as 4 percent of the working-age population was in agriculture, alongside 23 percent in industry and 74 percent in services. This was followed by 19, 26 and 55 percent in agriculture, industry, and services,

respectively, in Central and Southeastern Europe; 16, 22 and 62 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean; 28, 23, and 49 percent in North Africa; 34, 29, and 37 percent in East Asia; 51, 20, 28 percent in South Asia; and 62, 9, and 29 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa. *The world's agricultural population is almost entirely located in the peripheries, and this is, by and large, a poor, semi-proletarianized peasantry.*

It is also the case that, where a strong rural exodus has already occurred in the peripheries, the migrating population has been steered into service provision and petty production where self-employment and informality also prevail. *The service sectors, at the lowest rungs of global values systems, have increasingly become the depository of the world's relative surplus population.* This is the case most starkly in Latin America and Caribbean, but it is the case of most regions where the rural-urban balance was tipped in the twentieth century without the creation of secure employment in urban areas, whether in services or industry.

There is one further dimension of this reality. *The world's industrial workforce is also concentrated in the peripheries of the world economy, possibly as much as 80 percent of it!* It is no longer the case that the imperialist centres detain most of the industrial workforce; they have shifted to high-end services in global value systems. In the peripheries, even where the exodus has

flowed to industrial employment, this has by no means implied formal contracts and large organized factory settings; under contemporary global value systems, industrial activity strongly tends to fragmentation and informalization. This holds true for major industrial employers such as India where informality is extreme; and China, the factory of the world, where a floating rural-urban population has been mobilized to serve export-oriented growth.

The overall conclusion to be drawn is this: *the late neocolonial situation is characterized by a generalized condition of semi-proleterianization in the peripheral labour reserves of the world economy.* Social formations in the peripheries obtain particular characteristics from one region to the next, but they are all permanently trapped in a decadent relationship between paid and unpaid labour regimes, straddling countrysides, cities, coastlines, economic sectors, and international borders, among households that spread over great distances in their struggle for wages, petty accumulation, and social reproduction.

Semi-proletarianisation is not a new condition. Lenin had identified it in the countrysides of imperial Russia and drew attention to the political importance of *non-proletarian working people*; Mao carefully noted the *semi-proletariat* in the specific conditions of semi-colonial China alongside other classes. In today's late

neocolonial situation, semi-proletarianisation is neither incipient nor conjunctural, it is a generalized and permanently installed condition in the labour reserves of the peripheries. This is also to say that urbanization itself does not complete the process of proletarianization; it yields a massive population of a semi-proletarianized peoples in *both* cities and countrysides, and in flux between the two.

The further conclusion is that, *regardless of the distribution of inter-sectoral relations around the world, the agrarian question under imperialism remains unresolved on a world scale.* Semi-proletarianisation has not resolved the agrarian question; illusions regarding ‘depeasantisation’ or the end of the agrarian question, or even its relegation to a ‘Third World’ problem, must be confronted outright. The agrarian question is a global question, while the burden of its non-resolution is carried mainly by the semi-proletarianised peasants, workers and marginalized peoples that are trapped in degraded countrysides and urban slums, or otherwise risk their lives to migrate abroad. This, after all, is the essential logic of imperialism: to appropriate the labour power, natural resources, and agricultures of the tropical and sub-tropical peripheries, while degrading Third World people’s capacities to enjoy the wealth produced by their own labour and natural endowments, and not least expelling the social and

environmental costs of this appropriation to the Third World itself.

The semi-proletariat occupies a large range of positions despite its common fate. It includes poor peasants and contract farmers, seasonal agricultural workers, fisherfolk, indigenous, quilombola, pastoral and other traditional peoples, informal urban workers, own-account workers, service delivery workers, home-based workers, homeworkers, and domestic workers. This generalized semi-proletarian condition occupies centre stage in a social formation which includes other class segments and proximate classes, namely: the *lumpen-proletariat* of the permanently excluded and indigent mired in hopelessness, recruited into crime or trapped in sexual exploitation, corralled into fundamentalist organizations or mobilized by predatory social media campaigns, such as against ‘corruption’; the *proletariat*, composed of the more securely salaried workers in the private and public sectors, who can be engaged in strike action but cannot by themselves overcome the corporatist perspective; and the *petty-bourgeoisies*, the small capitalist enterprises in urban and rural areas subject to varied politics and accumulation prospects – and to which not a small part of the semi-proletariat aspires.

The semi-proletariat, in all its heterogeneity, constitutes a workforce

whose range of socio-political demands is clear: first and foremost, access to land and territory, which is the most concrete element of production, residence and social reproduction; access to markets for petty production and distribution with adequate price structures; access to dignified wages, working conditions, and pensions; access to quality, free basic social services, pre-school, education, health, water, sewage, and public transport; enjoyment of peace and protection from violence, domestic, racial, caste, communal, drug-related, parastatal, and not least the state apparatus itself. These are pressing needs for the majority of rural and urban households in the semi-proletarianized condition.

The range of demands is only surpassed by the diversity of political parties, trade unions, urban social movements, rural social movements, non-governmental organizations, religious organizations, criminal organizations, and charities that seek and find a footing in the social vulnerability and political disorganization of semi-proletarianized social formations. Northern political penetration via the funding of Southern NGOs, trade unions, social movements, charities, and religious orders remains endemic. Fundamentalist religious organizations have also thrived in the late neocolonial situation, whether of Christian, Islamic, or Hindu traditions, across Africa, Asia, Latin America and the

Caribbean, to propagate the ideological lumpenization of society. And there is also a galloping social media activism which feeds on and amplifies all tendencies, but remains in the control of corporate monopolies.

The pitfalls of the semi-proletarianized condition also extend to progressive forces. If half a century ago Frantz Fanon had sounded alarm with regards to the role of the petty bourgeoisies in the liberation struggle, the alarm is no less valid today in relation to the petty bourgeois ideologies that consume whole movements and are even nurtured by imperialism. Especially the focus on single issues and consequent political fragmentation have led to an organizational and ideological dead end. This remains convenient and useful to domestic ruling classes and their imperialist patrons. *The missing element is a unifying force with a liberation perspective, capable of articulating the diverse socio-political demands with the resolution of national and pan-national questions and resistance to imperialism.* Under late neocolonialism, there is no substitute for a national liberation perspective in the revolutionary struggle. The real issue concerns its precise class basis and ideological character and its internal and external alliances; the task remains to identify correctly the enemies and friends of the revolution.

Reductionism is rife; and it goes against the grain of the semi-proletarianised condition to disorient national unity and international solidarity. The reductionist dichotomy between the urban and the rural is one of the most established, yet it continues to fail in politics. It is essentially an anti-peasant and anti-indigenous posture based on Eurocentric and economistic notions of who is the natural or potential agent of revolution. It is also a patriarchal posture, blind to the rural-urban linkages between production and reproduction.

The more fundamental dichotomy presents itself as a conflict between ‘culture’ and ‘class’. The fight today over ‘identity politics’ has added a new degree of complexity. The essential conflict springs from a century-old struggle to transform Marxism into a revolutionary instrument for the Third World, which has always been composed of large peasantries, indigenous, and marginalized peoples under colonial, settler-colonial, and neo-colonial conditions. It is a struggle to overcome what Amílcar Cabral called the ‘disconnection’ of national liberation from its social structure, which leads to ideological deficiencies. Under really existing capitalism there is no economic or social force that is devoid of culture. And under late neocolonialism, it remains the case that the most exploited are also the

most historically oppressed. Removing liberation from class struggle, which after all is a struggle for civilizational renewal, is as blind as denying that oppression has a class basis in imperialism.

Petty-bourgeois, corporatist, and reactionary ideological postures continue to disorient national and international solidarity and a proper analysis of evolving contradictions. *It remains the case that proletarian ideology provides the most complete analytical framework for the comprehension of the full spectrum of contradictions of monopoly capitalism.* No other single ideological source can fulfill the revolutionary task in the twenty-first century. But proletarian ideology can no longer be seen as being most natural to the proletariat; it is not! Nor can it be seen as unobtainable by semi-proletarianized peoples, or even segments of the petty-bourgeoisie. Cooperativism and collective self-reliance, the basic antidotes to monopoly capitalism, require the cultivation of a proletarian perspective which must draw on existing sources of solidarity among semi-proletarianized peasants, workers, indigenous and other marginalized peoples. It must adapt to the requirements of diverse forms of cooperative production and social reproduction and modes of life that are in force across rural and urban territories.

It follows that, under really-existing capitalism, proletarian ideology can only

grow from the existing struggles of semi-proletarianized peasants, workers and peoples. Among the most lamentable of lost opportunities under late neocolonialism has been the failure to recognize the radical potential especially of struggles for land and territory, both rural and urban, and their unification in a national liberation perspective. These are the foremost struggles for production, reproduction, and autonomy by the most oppressed and exploited, against the most reactionary, landed elements in society which today are backed by financial power. The problem extends to the realm of international solidarity in relation to land and territorial movements, peasant and indigenous, where commitment is often conditional and romantic, if not absent.

The same problem is not resolved by the organized peasant movements themselves. There is a strong tendency to reduce the peasant, indigenous, or urban agenda to a food or agroecological question, as opposed to the question of liberation, which is what it has always been for the oppressed peoples of the Third World. Liberation requires an unwavering commitment to the land and territorial questions of the semi-proletariat, which unite cities and countrysides, but also clarity on the operation of the supremacist hegemonies surrounding land and national questions, as well as a deeper

understanding of the operation of monopoly capital. As important as the questions of food and agroecology certainly are to a revolutionary twenty-first century, all too often they have served to defuse the radical potential of the semi-proletariat and separate the struggles of the most oppressed, those with potentially decisive influence over other struggles.

What unites peasant, workers, and marginalized peoples in the liberation struggle is the control over the means of production and reproduction against the racist, casteist, communalist, and patriarchal orders that prop up the ruling capitalist classes and their imperialist patrons. The particularities of each country and region must be observed, but without losing sight of the challenge of the world revolutionary situation that is upon us. This challenge requires deep reflection and decisive action on national and international fronts.

The challenge also applies to the question of how to relate to the petty-bourgeoisies and other fractions of the capitalist class whose introverted accumulation strategies may have the potential to serve national liberation. Every context will have its own particularities that need to be properly understood. It further applies to the question of how to relate to popular movements and political parties in the imperialist centres, those with potential

to commit to genuine solidarity with liberation struggles in the Third World. Historical experience has shown that black and indigenous struggles in the North have a stronger tendency to identify with the liberation movements in the Third World, but this is neither automatic nor given ideologically.

### **No Recovery Without Reconstruction**

Monopoly capitalism is in permanent crisis. This is to say that the rate of profit in value-creating sectors at the centre of the imperialist system has been in decline for decades, since the mid-1960s, which is exactly when decolonization made its decisive advance. There have been only two phases of partial recovery, reaching at most two-thirds of the 1965 level, until the outbreak of the financial crisis in 2008, which cut profits down to one-third of the 1965 level.

The current expectations for the post-pandemic recovery in the imperialist centre revolve around a medium-term two-percent annual growth rate of Gross Domestic Product. Whether this proves to be higher or lower, it does not refer to the recuperation of profit margins in the value-creating sectors. This is the other major stumbling block for capitalism noted by Marx long ago: capitalists will seek an escape from crisis via technological leaps, and every technological leap will add capital

and shed labour in the value-producing sectors, reducing the rate of profit. Today, the recuperation of profits by the monopolies occurs by other means, by degrading the labour process in the peripheries, by seeking financial profits in financial bubbles, and by the escalation of primitive accumulation and war.

The recovery that is to occur will be driven by mammoth fiscal and monetary stimulus packages that together in effect compose the so-called Biden Plan. On the one hand, asset purchases by the Federal Reserve have already doubled to eight trillion dollars, on the back of the gigantic post-2008 asset purchases; on the other, the fiscal stimulus as a percentage of GDP is projected to be twice as large as Obama's after 2008, and larger even than Roosevelt's in 1934. These are unprecedented, direct and indirect, subsidies to the financial and corporate monopolies themselves. And despite Keynesian appearances, international finance capital will continue to rule the roost, until the next epic bubble bursts.

None of this bodes well for the Third World, whose total debt has doubled over the decade prior to the pandemic. Dozens of countries have rushed back to the International Monetary Fund. The question of recovery, therefore, does not refer to an alternative development path. The world's labour reserves will continue

to swell, social conflict will intensify, sanctions and pseudo-humanitarian interventions will escalate, while a portion of the labour force in the centres will be repositioned to reap the benefits of the Biden Plan, while it lasts.

China has been the main source of dynamism for the world economy, accounting for over one-fourth of world GDP growth in recent years. But this dynamism has been contradictory and, by its very dependence on Western monopoly capitalism, will necessarily come to an end in its present form. China has uniquely given hope to the Third World by the degree of strategic autonomy it has exercised against the West. Its growth strategy has resulted in a shift in the tectonic plates of trade and investment away from Western monopoly control. China has provided substantial new investments in infrastructural development to fill a critical void, without indulging in debt traps or militarizing economic relationships.

Yet, China's growth strategy has sustained the hyper-consumerist and predatory financial needs of the West while also setting off its own internal disequilibria and speculative bubbles. It has also relied on the raw material exports and manufacturing imports of the peripheries. This overall pattern, still serving the overriding accumulation needs of the West,

has continued to weigh against alternative development paths. Since 2013, China's Belt and Road Initiative has again raised the stakes. It remains possible – indeed, it is imperative – that the relation of forces shifts further in the current crisis, in the interests of China and the whole of the Third World. The growing recognition, by the Chinese leadership itself, of the country's grave internal disequilibria and threats to its socialist character, compounded by its terminal impasse with the West, gives new hope that a more resolute shift towards autonomous development will again occur. It is time that a new era of collective self-reliance is put squarely on the agenda.

This would be in the interest of the whole world, given that the Biden Plan is, above all, a war plan against China and the whole world, not a recovery plan for the world. The US confrontation with China is a strategy of technological domination in the so-called fourth industrial revolution and a battle over the control of global value systems in strategic industries. The technological stakes extend directly to the military field, where all elements of the fourth industrial revolution will be mobilized, artificial intelligence, robotics, big data systems, and integrated logistics. The military encirclement of China and spread of military bases around the world, and the control over terrestrial and



maritime trade routes, over energy and other natural resources, will remain central to the US war plan. The new military megapact secretly hatched between the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom is precisely the emerging strategy.

Nor can the so-called ‘green new deal’ envisaged by the Biden Plan be detached from the war plan. Its stated target of ‘net-zero’ emissions by 2050 can only be achieved by a ‘green’ assault on the Third World, to carve out extraterritorial carbon sinks via land grabs, against peasants, indigenous and other traditional peoples, and create water-intensive monocultures against the biodiversity of the tropics and subtropics. The plan is a negation of historic climate debt obligations. It is more precisely an escape plan to compensate for persisting carbon emissions by the United States and to guarantee the accumulation needs of its corporate monopolies in the energy sector.

By 2050, the stated target date of the Biden Plan, it is likely that global warming will have already reached 1.5°C degrees above pre-industrial levels if it continues to increase at the current rate, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The impact on terrestrial, freshwater and coastal ecosystems will have already substantially changed the conditions of production and reproduction for the most vulnerable peoples of the

tropics and subtropics. These are the regions, especially in Africa and Asia, which are the most vulnerable to crop yield decline due to desertification. Clearly, a rapid and radical change of direction is necessary towards production, consumption, and land-use patterns, one that is not possible under the aegis of the monopolies and their accumulation needs.

There is no recovery without reconstruction. *Reconstruction can mean many things, but it will mean nothing unless it establishes stable and secure living and working conditions for the world’s semi-proletarianised peoples.* This can only be obtained by a new rural-urban equilibrium, which each region and country must seek in accordance with its own production and reproduction needs. This also means that global value systems and associated consumption patterns of privilege, in both North and South, must be overcome. It further means affirming radical sovereignty over the commons in the tropics and subtropics, in the interest of new land rights and new land uses, and on the basis of clear objectives: higher standards of consumption and social reproduction for the semi-proletarianized majorities; sustainable and cooperative production; absorption and stabilization of national and regional workforces; and autonomous industrial and technological development.

Development in the twentieth century was defined in terms of urbanization. This vision is now defunct. In the twenty-first century, development must seek world reconstruction via a peasant path in the countryside and via territorial guarantees for indigenous and other marginalized peoples, which are the only possible guarantees of rural-urban equilibrium, ecological sustainability, and, yes, mutually beneficial North-South relations. The counterpart of the peasant path in urban zones is also, by necessity, the provision of conditions for the development of petty production and social reproduction. In other words, the only starting-point possible for a world transition to socialism is to provide support to the petty production that is already the reality of the large majorities living under monopoly capitalism. Planning methods must be adjusted to this reality, gradually to steer a petty-bourgeois economy into cooperative structures, while linking it up to strategic industrial development.

### **Towards an International Solidarity Front**

Can this change of direction be made without international solidarity? It cannot! International solidarity today remains *ad hoc* and ideologically uncertain. And while innumerable and valiant solidarity struggles exist and continue to sprout in current insurrectional conditions, a coordinated

front of social movements and political parties rooted in the Third World with revolutionary and anti-imperialist perspective has not materialized. It is unimaginable that a committed anti-imperialist perspective will arise on its own to coordinate and guide the type of world reconstruction that is required today and confront the known and unknown challenges as they arise.

An international solidarity front of peasants, workers and peoples must come into existence and set its sights on reinitiating and reinforcing a world socialist transition in the first half of the twenty-first century. This should have at its inception a tri-continental framework of political convergence in the spirit of Bandung, to establish principles of international solidarity and prevent against the cooptation of pro-imperialist forces – their funds, capacities, sensibilities, and agendas. The programmatic purpose of an international solidarity front should be to establish a framework of systematic dialogue among movements and parties and provide ideological, political, and logistical support to struggles as they evolve.

In the short term, the strategy should be to convene a New Bandung meeting. This should be a physical meeting of representatives of selected communist parties with a popular base, national

liberation movements with radical credentials, and social movements which represent peasants, workers, indigenous, and other traditional peoples. The meeting may be planned for 2025, timed to commemorate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Afro-Asian conference in Bandung. A number of initiatives should be undertaken in the meantime to create the infrastructure for political convergence, including structured dialogue.

An international solidarity front must begin to be visualized. Such a front cannot aspire to a level of centralization that pertains to national political parties or social movements. Yet political coherence

*Peasants, Workers & Peoples of the World Unite!!!*

must be sought, springing from an assembly of representatives, mandated by their political parties and social movements, and by means of a political commission with pre-defined functions. The building of such an assembly and commission may become the concrete aim of the New Bandung commemorative meeting. The parties and movements invited to participate must have proven mass membership and internal democratic structures and as organizations must not rely on external sources of funding. All such parties and movements must be explicitly guided by an anti-imperialist, anti-colonial, and socialist perspective.

