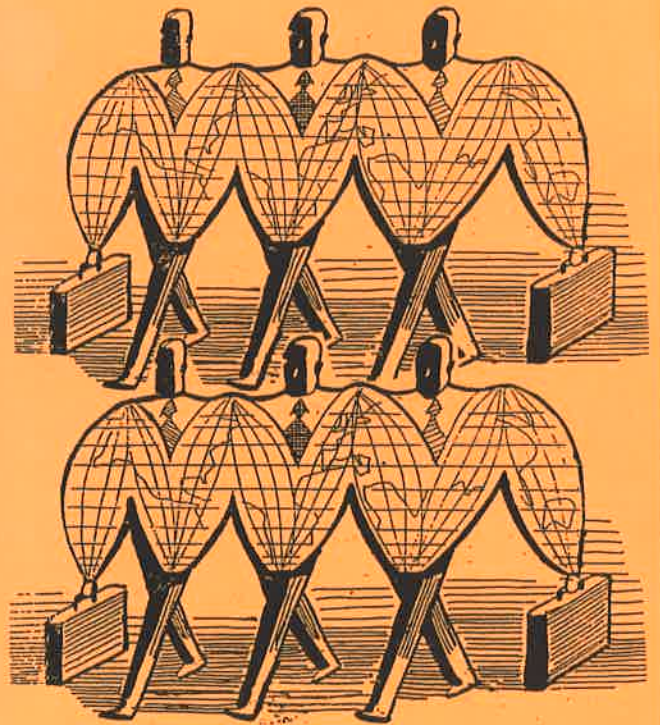


NEOLIBERALISM

The IMF &
the Debt:
Africa & the
New Enclosures



by Silvia Federici

*With an Introduction: Toxic Imperialism,
the Debt & the L.A. Rebellion*

by Mitchel Cohen

A Red Balloon Collective Pamphlet

\$2.⁵⁰

Introduction:

Toxic Imperialism, the Debt & the L.A. Rebellion

By Mitchel Cohen

In December, 1991, Lawrence Summers — the chief economist for the World Bank — issued a surprisingly forthright memorandum to other senior World Bank staff in which he called on the World Bank to encourage industrialized nations to “redistribute” their toxic wastes and pollution to relatively non-polluted areas of the world, as a means of rectifying the current toxic “imbalance.” “I’ve always thought,” Summers wrote, “that

“Underpopulated countries in Africa are vastly under-polluted; their air quality is probably vastly inefficiently low [in pollutants] compared to Los Angeles or Mexico City. ... The economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest wage country is impeccable and we should face up to that.”

under-populated countries in Africa are vastly under-polluted; their air quality is probably vastly inefficiently low [in pollutants] compared to Los Angeles or Mexico City.”

Summers, who edited the World Bank’s World Development Report for 1992, also thinks that “the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest wage country is impeccable and we should face up to that.”

He lamented the fact that “so much pollution is generated by non-tradable industries (transport, electrical generation) and that the unit transport costs of solid waste are so high.” These alone, he continued, unfortunately “prevent world-welfare-enhancing trade in air pollution and waste,” as stipulated for domestic polluters in the 1991 Clean Air Act, which grants “pollution credits” to corporations and regions in the U.S. Those who don’t use up all their credits (by “under-polluting”) are then able to literally sell them to those companies needing them, in order to continue to “over-pollute.”

Summers’ memo certainly struck a nerve. Following its publication in the *London Economist* in February 1992 and the consequent hue and cry against it by imperialized countries, the World Bank was driven into an apologetic frenzy.

But Indian physicist and ecologist Vandana Shiva warns World Bank watchers not to be fooled. She points out that its wordy apologies do nothing to “alter the fact that the World Bank has, in fact, been financing the relocation of pollution-intensive industry to the Third

World. As steel plants close in the North, the Bank helps the expansion of steel manufacture in India. It has financed the displacement of millions of tribals to build the Chandil and Icha dams of the Suvemarekha project to support the expansion of the Tata’s steel plant at Jamshedpur. It continues to finance super thermal power plants to facilitate the relocation of energy intensive industry to the Third World. When fertilizer surpluses grew in the United States, the World Bank gave credit to push chemical fertilizers on India. The World Bank’s practice shows that Summers’ memo is not an aberration but is consistent with the vision of an environmental apartheid, a separate development, of the North and South.”¹

Shiva correctly appraises the role of the Northern nation-states in continuing to dominate the nations of the Southern hemisphere:

“The identification and demarcation of ‘global environmental problems’ and their solutions clearly reveals th[e] political bias of the North. The main areas being identified as ‘global’ problems are atmospheric pollution, including the greenhouse effect and ozone depletion, and preservation of forests and biodiversity in the Third World. The solution to both is the same and is localised in the South. If cars and power stations in America and Europe add CO₂ to the atmosphere, the solution is to plant more trees in the Third World to act as sinks. If genetic diversity is threatened with erosion, the solution again is control over forests in the Third World. Forests in the Third World are thus the solution to all environmental problems, even if the problems themselves have been created by production and consumption patterns in the North. Not only is this unjust, it is also unscientific, because simplistic solution are offered for complex problems.”

“While the atmosphere is a global commons, due to the inherent mobility of atmospheric gases, Third World bio-diversity and tropical forest are not ‘global’ on the criteria of the inherent mobility of the resources. Trees and plants do not move on their own, they evolve in their native habitats and ecological niches. On ecological and scientific criteria bio-diversity is a local or national resource, over which local communities and countries have sovereign rights. Bio-diversity cannot be treated as a ‘global commons’ like the atmosphere. To equate the two is politics, not science. ... Atmospheric pollution is the best example of this kind of global problem demanding responses from a global community on the basis of reciprocal responsibility. If the North wants the South to protect its forests for the future, the South too has a right to demand that the North curb its CO₂ emissions from automobiles and power stations and bear historical responsibility for cumulative pollution.”²

Shiva brilliantly eviscerates North American and European hypocrisy on ecological matters. But she barely avoids a trap that many United Nations non-governmental organizations (NGOs), wanting desperately to respond to the environment-destroying industries of the United States and Europe, all too often fall into: Framing concern over the international debt, the environment and development primarily in terms of a North/South imbalance, which requires international regulation — and thus, the intervention of the U.N. — to rectify it.

That perspective, based upon observing the disproportionate accumulation of the world’s extracted or manufactured resources by the nation-states of the Northern hemisphere, conceals an equally important (but generally ignored) assessment based on an understanding of supra-national *class* relationships. That class dimension, though as powerful an analytical tool as the North/South framework, is more difficult to uncover, for class relationships transcend the boundaries of nation-states and at the same time operate *within* them.

1 Vandana Shiva, “A Common Future or Environmental Apartheid,” in *The Business & Political Observer*, New Delhi, Feb. 20, 1992.

2 Vandana Shiva, *The Business & Political Observer*, New Delhi, Feb. 10, 1992.

Brave New World Bank

Summers, writing for the World Bank, was undoubtedly thinking in terms of class interests when he dismissed health-based complaints by the poor against their own government's dumping of toxics in their communities. Because of their poverty, he wrote, the poor, already with shortened lifespans, would never live long enough to die from the cancers the toxics would inevitably cause in areas with longer life expectancies anyway, so why the ruckus? "The concern over an agent that causes a one in a million change in the odds of prostate cancer," he wrote, "is obviously going to be much higher in a country where people survive to get prostate cancer than in a country where under five mortality is 200 per thousand." Dumping toxics in areas of abbreviated lifespan instead of finding ways to help increase lifespan made sound economic sense to Summers. He tried to sell it as the "moral" position as well.

This was no aberration in an otherwise sterling career. For years Summers had blocked initiatives by environmental organizations to make the Bank ecologically and socially responsible. The memo was simply the latest and most public of a series of actions taken by Summers on behalf of the World Bank. Greenpeace and numerous activists around the world demanded that the World Bank terminate Summers. Brazil's Secretary of the Environment, Jose Lutzenberger, wrote directly to Summers: "Your reasoning is perfectly logical but totally insane. ... Your thoughts [provide] a concrete example of the unbelievable alienation, reductionist thinking, social ruthlessness and the arrogant ignorance of many conventional 'economists' concerning the nature of the world we live in. ... If the World Bank keeps you as vice president it will lose all credibility. To me it would confirm what I often said ... the best thing that could happen would be for the Bank to disappear."³

But neither the World Bank nor Summers would go away. As though rewarding him for his statements, President Clinton sought to appoint Summers as Chairman of the President's Council of Economic Advisors.⁴ Environmental and other non-governmental organizations fought against his appointment and, for the time being, were successful. But, like other flaks for the interests of big capital (such as U.S. Secretary of Commerce Ron Brown, who for years represented Haitian dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier before he was named Secretary of Commerce in President Clinton's cabinet), Summers' work on their behalf could not for long go unrewarded. "The day after Bill Clinton was inaugurated as the 42nd President of the United States," writes the Washington-based Development Group for Alternative Policies, "he appointed Lawrence Summers to the post of Undersecretary for International Affairs at the U.S. Treasury. This position has traditionally included responsibility for the formulation of U.S. economic policy in the Third World, including U.S. policy related to the IMF, the World Bank and the regional development banks."⁵

Mass-Murderers for Social Responsibility?

Summers and Brown are no anomalies. Prior to his tenure as president of the World Bank from 1968 to 1981, Robert McNamara, for example, had been the Secretary of Defense of the United

3 Jose Lutzenberger, in *Greenpeace Waste Trade Update*, no. 5.1, First Quarter 1992.

4 For more on Clinton's appointments, see Doug Vaughan, "The Clinton Cabinet: Affirmative Action for the Ethically Challenged," in *Covert Action Quarterly*, Spring 1993, 1500 Massachusetts Ave. NW, #732, Washington D.C. 20005.

5 The Development Group for Alternative Policies, Inc., "Statement on the Appointment of Lawrence Summers," 1400 I St. NW, Suite 520, Washington D.C. 20005.

States and, in that capacity, the main architect of the U.S.'s "automated battlefield" in the Vietnam war, in which two million Vietnamese were slaughtered. Many other appointments have been equally odious. The revolving door between high-level government appointments and international banking, insurance and multinational corporate boards has been spinning as freely as always during these first two years of the Clinton administration.

Contrary to the hype, the World Bank does not exist to assist nations in overcoming their debt burdens and helping them to save the environment. If anything, the opposite is true. World Bank programs help to maintain countries in perpetual debt (the U.S., unbeknownst to many, is the largest debtor nation in the world) at the expense of the environment, as part of a "carrot and stick" strategy it plays with the International Monetary Fund, the U.S. Agency for International Development and other similar agencies. It also assists global industrial polluters in securing "disposal regions" in the Third World for toxic wastes.

You Provide the Collateral, We'll Provide the Damage

Toxic imperialism is no accident, some hapless by-product of industrial production, but a fundamental component of the New World Order strategy known as "neo-liberalism" — the coordinated and well-managed global looting of resources and labor. As Summers makes clear, the massive environmental destruction well underway today is not the result of poor management by the Northern states "insensitive" to the needs of the South, but a mechanism used by capitalism to batter down all the walls that had locked it out.

Silvia Federici, a professor at Hofstra University and editor of the Committee for Academic Freedom in Africa's newsletter, points out in the following essay that escalating working class resistance to the harsh International Monetary Fund-imposed austerity programs compelled international capital to devise alternative programs to usher Third World countries into capital's preferred course of global industrial "development." But these supposedly "softer" developmental programs, as Vandana Shiva explained earlier, are misnomers, destroying huge swaths of the natural environment and driving countries ever further into debt. As a result, writes Federici, "Africa is being turned into the chemical/nuclear dust-bin of the world, the region where expired pharmaceutical products, toxic wastes, and materials banned in other countries, from medicines to pesticides, are dumped."

Summers, as we have noted, sees all this rather favorably. The exploitation and immiseration of the environment is, after all, as central to the accumulation of capital as is the exploitation of labor. IMF/World Bank "investments," combined with their neoliberal austerity programs and privatization, ultimately destroy non-capitalist cooperative societies which have existed in some areas for millennia. They relegate new areas of the world for waste disposal, extraction of natural resources, and markets, and batter into shape new sources of cheap labor. Like other facets of imperialism, the massive exploitation of the environment in the "Third World" and the commodification of and international trade in deadly wastes are ways in which the international debt crisis expresses itself; they are not, therefore, some avoidable excrescences of imperial domination but essential to it.

That crucial connection between "environment" and "class," however, is invisible when toxic imperialism and the debt crisis are seen solely through the framework of North/South nation-state oppressor/oppressed relations. What goes unseen, in that framework, are the ways the debt crisis is *needed* by capitalist classes in even the smallest countries, however impoverished, in order to hammer

their own working classes into line, obliterate longstanding communal ways of living, develop small capitalist classes and maintain them in power. The natural environment and even national sovereignty are small prices to pay for such "development" — purchased by newly emerging capitalist classes and lumpen militariats mortgaging the future of their countries for a stake in the big international game.

Seen from the vantage of an international class framework, the Gulf War, for instance, becomes not only a slaughter to control a large share of the world's oil resources and test out new weapons systems, but a means to reconfigure the oil-producing proletariat, the better to control it and extract additional wealth from it.

In Iraq the U.S. government and the U.N.'s "allied forces" accomplished this goal by wiping out the most advanced health care, sanitation, and education infrastructure in the region (apart from Israel). At the same time the U.S. allowed the Iraqi dictatorship's Revolutionary Guard to survive intact to crush the leftist-led working class uprising against Sadaam Hussein around Basra (portrayed in the U.S. media solely as a religious Shi'ite rebellion) and maintain a perpetual and debilitating war against the Kurds in the North.

In Kuwait, the war enabled the Emirocracy to bust up the largely Palestinian and Arab working class, with its increasing level of organization and ability to wrest concessions from capital, and replace it with Philippine, Sri Lankan and Malaysian workers who, because of even worse conditions at home and the inability to fight for a higher living standard in the name of "Arab unity" as others had done before, would work for less money and are far from being able to organize effectively, at least for the time being, in their own class interest.

But reframing the issues in terms of class interests and not simply national ones is the last thing the architects of the U.N.'s NGO-ism want to do, even though the international capitalist class evinces no similar compunction over slicing up the world in *its* class interest. The U.N. agencies' own middleclass managerial interests and plans for industrial development compel them to devise policies to "regulate" capitalism's abuses instead of fostering conditions in which the working class and peasants throughout the world could empower themselves to overthrow that system altogether, and its middle-class apologists along with it.

Indeed, along with the IMF/World Bank/USAID axis, the United Nation's NGOs are increasingly becoming part of capital's one-two-three punch. They serve to channel class rebellion into manageable debates over, at most, the form national capitalist development should take, and away from truly socialist revolutions centered on non-toxic, bio-renewable and sustainable production owned and controlled by the working class. Following along, all too often, anti-IMF and World Bank activists prioritize the nation-state developmental "solution" which, in a world economy dominated by international capital, usually stampedes class and ecological ways of framing the issues beneath the emergency of the "immediate need to develop." The two different levels of analysis — "national development" and "class" — generate different, often antithetical, practical conclusions about "progress" and the kinds of projects to undertake.

Free Enterprise Zones and Biotechnology

The [L.A.] rebellion provided . . . a dramatic eye-opening prelude to the Earth-rapers' orgy known as the 'Earth Summit' in Rio de Janeiro a few weeks later.⁶

6 The Chicago Surrealist Group, "Three Days that Shook the New World Order: The Los Angeles Rebellion of 1992," in *What are you going to do about it?* PO Box 6424, Evanston IL 60204.

When the hidden dimension of class suddenly erupts, as it did during the L.A. rebellion following the first Rodney King verdict, and again two years later in Chiapas, Mexico, it shatters the facile framing of North/South power relations and exposes capital's strategy of "neo-liberalism" and privatization within the U.S. as, ultimately, a xerox of what imperialism has wrought abroad: a slave-economy of "maquiladoras" — enterprise zones, sweatshops and, along with them, genetic engineering factories. Not surprisingly, the kinds of resistance that emerge when the debt crisis is seen as a fundamental strategy of global capital are far different from, and often clash with, resistance that expresses itself in the form of overcoming North/South Trade imbalances and creating a "cleaner" developmentalism. It is hardly coincidental for instance, that, following the April 1992 rebellions in Los Angeles and in dozens of cities across the U.S., Jesse Jackson — who for many years has served as an emissary of the most liberal wing of capital to the Black and working class communities — teamed up with banker and "urban planner" Felix Rohatyn to "rebuild America" by promoting the "capitalist solution" — the development of "enterprise zones," rechristened as "empowerment" zones, precisely in those rebellious areas. (Cardenas, the populist presidential candidate in Mexico, played a similar role in Mexico, following Chiapas.)

Wherever enterprise zones have been installed — in Mexico, Southeast Asia, Poland, Haiti — environmental regulations have been suspended or eliminated altogether. Toxic wastes pour into the streets, contaminating drinking water and air with lead, dioxin, cadmium, mercury and PCBs. Minimum wages, decent sanitation and worker health codes are non-existent; and hunger, child labor and prostitution run rampant. During the 1980s, the kidnapping, murder and dismemberment of enterprise zone children for human body parts shipped to the U.S. and Germany for organ transplants became epidemic.⁷ And tax abatements on corporate profits and real estate, which the U.S. government portrays as needed to lure capital investment, are promoted as desirable incentives even though they cut into the potential tax base and place the tax burden and, consequently, the funding of all social programs, squarely on the shoulders of the working class, peasantry, and the impoverished.

Enterprise zones are the inner circles of Dante's inferno, regions of such vast and depraved exploitation and injustice that even some capitalists shudder at the nightmarish logic of capital taken to its logical, horrifying consequence. Is it any wonder that larger and larger police forces — absorbing more and more of municipal and state budgets — are required to repress revolts and keep the lowest rungs of the working class in their place, or that prisons are the fastest "growing" areas of economic investment, along with biotechnology? Marx had an apt term for it: Primitive Accumulation. Biotechnology is its shining apple — polished, propagandized and portrayed as the exciting new "growth industry," its dangerous genetically-engineered products tested on the residents of impoverished inner-city slums, human guinea pigs, infested with modern diseases brought on by a combination of poverty, stress and industrial society's relentless assault on the immune system through its poisoning of food, air and water.

7 See, for instance, Janice G. Raymond, "At Issue: Children for Organ Export?", *Reproductive and Genetic Engineering*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1989, pp 237-245; and, by the same author, "At Issue: The International Traffic in Women: Women Used in Systems of Surrogacy and Reproduction," *Reproductive and Genetic Engineering*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1989, pp. 51-57. Reprints available from Raymond at the Women's Studies Program, Bartlett 208, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA 01003. Also, the transcript of a December 1, 1993 conference at Hofstra University: "Of Human Bondage: The International Traffic in Bodies, Babies and Brides," organized by Linda Longmire and Silvia Federici.

Other aspects of the new domestic urban "development" include: spatial deconcentration (planned shrinkage), forced sterilization, the atomization of communities, the construction of jails (along with biotechnology, one of the few "growth industries" in the U.S. today), a renewed commitment to nuclear power — indeed, the Bush administration used the Gulf war to further gut regulations (already gutted under the previous administration) which had limited the production and storage of nuclear materials (they are now slated for new use or burial in ... surprise! ... "enterprise zones!"), and the rallying of middle-class support behind the ruling class's privatization and austerity programs.⁸

Toxic wastes — inordinately dumped in Black, American Indian, Latino and very poor white working class areas — along with low-level everyday radiation from nuclear storage facilities and power plants (even those that are functioning "properly"), destroy the poorest and least defensible areas of the world. They also end up poisoning working class communities *within* the borders of the U.S. as well. Suddenly, the alleged "privileges" derived by workers from U.S. capital's imperialist plunder of the so-called Third World (seen from a nation-state perspective) become devastating toxic scourges from the vantage of class, with the allegedly "privileged" workers of the North increasingly discovered among its victims.

The poisons spewed by the "industrial North" have returned as cancerous spectres haunting us, immune-suppressant phantasms arising not only from the unequal power dynamic between North and South, but between the North and, increasingly, the *South within the North*. Toxic imperialism, enterprise zones and the debt crisis are part of an international capitalist strategy for "development." It was best laid out in the Summers' "free market in toxics" memo to the "Brave New World" Bank, as an explicit strategy for keeping the working classes within *every* country in their place. Summers was eventually chastized not for planning along such lines, but for putting those rationales in writing and not taking proper precaution to prevent them from being exposed to the public.

Through the machinations of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the U.S. Agency for International Development, the debt crisis thus emerges as one of the key mechanisms used by capital to manage and control production and impose an ecologically horrendous form of development everywhere, whipping the working classes of *every* country into the misery of the capitalist world economy, to the advantage not only of the "North" but to the transnational corporations, capitalist interests and their nation-state lackeys within the Third World as well.

"Development" and national self-determination, when separated from working class revolution, become more and more a "devil's

⁸ See, especially, Bob Fitch, in the *Guardian*, May 20, 1992. Fitch exposes the Citizens Committee for New York City, which was the chief sponsor of the May 16 "Save Our Cities" march on Washington, as part of the ruling class's propaganda barrage: "At most other big demos, the media has either ignored marchers or attacked them as communist dupes. The landing of the Save Our Cities troops in D.C., however, was preceded by one of the most intensive and favorable press bombardments in history. *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *New York Daily News* and the *Boston Globe* all urged us to go. I even have a leaflet with Citibank's endorsement. The reason for the press puffery becomes clearer when one looks at the list of regular contributors to the Citizens Committee, which includes: The American Stock Exchange, AT&T, Capitol Cities/ABC, Carl Icahn, Chase Manhattan Bank, Dow Jones & Co., First Boston, the Forbes Foundation, IBM, Merrill Lynch, Morgan Stanley, The New York Times, the Rockefeller Foundation, Blanche Rockefeller, Laurence Rockefeller, David Rockefeller, Felix Rohatyn, Time Warner, Vanity Fair and the Washington Post... Much energy that activists might expend organizing political resistance, rent strikes, fighting for jobs and building organizations that rely on community rather than the elite is dissipated filling out grant forms, eating canapes at receptions and receiving awards."

choice" between syphilis and gonorrhea, Democrats and Republicans, or being broiled alive instead of fried. The alternatives accepted by increasingly desperate working classes — jobs of any sort, enterprise zones, genetic engineering "growth" industries — are the recycled schemes of the international sector of the capitalist class, which uses the desperation of impoverished areas to knock its insidious plans into place.

From Protest to Resistance

On the other hand, the idea of "Cooperative Zones" — devised by local residents, not government, and emerging directly from the L.A. rebellion — breaks with the existing left's "solutions" — Jobs, Jobs, meaningless Jobs at any price — and its alliance with corporate union bureaucrats aimed at co-opting widescale rebellion into bureaucratic organizational forms over which they have control. The program of Cooperative Zones put together by representatives of the various gangs, church groups and community activists (with the guiding assistance of former Black Panther Michael Zinzun) represents, on the other hand, the U.S. working class's first attempt in many years to articulate for itself the beginnings of a comprehensive program for the social and economic transformation of society. As with the Zapatistas, the rebellions offered the emergence of embryonic forms to accomplish it. The L.A. rebellion was the first conscious radical response to the neoliberal structural adjustment program of the New World Order. Chiapas was the follow-up.

A meeting at Vermont Square Methodist Church in South Central Los Angeles on May 15, 1992, on the heels of the rebellion, was called to insure that the largely unemployed working class of central Los Angeles would play a major role in any rebuilding of the city. The organized left, stuck in the old ways, sadly played no part.

Instead of accepting the designation of "enterprise zone," those present, including representatives of the religious and legal communities, and street organizations (i.e. "gang" members), rejected the ruling class's attempt to use the rebellion to impose "free enterprise zones" and instead came back with a comprehensive set of demands for their community, a radical approach: "What we want is a *cooperative* zone, not an enterprise zone," they said, cognizant of the situation in Eastern Europe and the devastating role of enterprise zones and the "free market" there. These, they agreed, would include:

a) Publicly/collectively-owned stores and services; child care facilities; recreational centers; health care programs; and job training centers.

b) The establishment of public works projects overseen by an elected community board composed of at least 51% residents of South Central, among them trade union representatives, delegates from the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists and the A. Philip Randolph Institute. All monies would go directly into the community and not towards administrative costs.

c) A halt to bankers' red-lining in the city of Los Angeles; a demand that "all incoming monies be put into the existing Black banks to insure that government monies are in the public domain and centered in South Los Angeles."

d) A tenants bill of rights and the rebuilding of public housing.

e) A rejection of all programs set up by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

f) An immediate moratorium on the rebuilding or new construction of liquor stores. Although one would never know it from most press accounts, liquor stores were *targeted* to be burned down during the rebellion (and, indeed, that's what happened), as part of a conscious political agenda to rid the community of them.

g) Community (not "enterprise") control of the police; amnesty to

all arrested and/or deported during the rebellion;

h) That all parks and public property be supervised and staffed by local residents.

i) The planting of trees.

j) The development of arts, crafts, sports, theater, skating rinks, the availability of dancing, singing and music studios, swimming pools, and recreational centers for children.

k) Comprehensive health care and educational programs — including AIDS research, prevention and education — funded by taxing wealthy individuals, closing tax loopholes and raising tax rates on large corporations.⁹

Thus far the U.S. left has failed to recognize the historic significance of the new forms — cooperative zones, and direct action efforts to put them into practice — even though (or perhaps, *because*) they have been created by the working class itself in the fight against the domestic manifestations of the debt crisis, neo-liberalism, enterprise zones and toxic imperialism. In the old days, too, leftists were late to understand the significance of workers councils (or "soviets"); many leftists, trained only in trade unionist approaches to social transformation, opposed the Paris Commune (1871), the 1905-1917 Russian Revolution, and the Kronstadt Commune in 1921, to their shame.

The media has done all it could to steep the left in its own ignorance and to contain such explosive concepts emerging from the bottom-up. Neither *The New York Times*, nor the *Washington Post*, for example, printed a single article about the consequences of enterprise zones and the struggle against them, as part of its "riot" coverage. Nowhere in the so-called "mainstream" media do we find any mention of the debt crisis, the ongoing battle in L.A. against toxic dumping there, or of cooperative zones and the radical program fought for by communities of resistance, all of which were central to understanding the roots of the rebellion, as much as the Rodney King beating.

Also concealed was the multiracial nature of the rebellion itself. Whole families participated, together with their neighbors. Latino youth poured into the streets alongside African-Americans and suffered more arrests and deportations than any other group. Korean-Americans came to Justice for King rallies in great numbers and suffered hundreds of arrests. Over 1,000 white participants were arrested during the rebellion in L.A. alone!

Similarly, thousands of women participated. A *New York Times* photo showed five people shouting, according to the caption, "insults and threats at the police": four were women. Three of four laughing looters pictured on the front page of May Day's *Chicago Tribune* were women. Some young Latina mothers brought babies with them as they looted diapers and food from stores. A British reporter noticed a Black woman methodically pitching rocks through the windows of the *L.A. Times* building. In Hollywood, a "mob of little white girls" — as a radio announcer put it — helped themselves to the entire stock of a large lingerie store. The L.A. rebellion became an exciting follow-up to and continuation of the largest women's demonstration in U.S. history — the march for reproductive rights in Washington D.C. — which took place a few weeks earlier.¹⁰

Although here and there fragments of the true story broke through, there were few images shown by the major media that would, put together, call the dominant way of framing events — as a

9 "Build for People — Not for Profit," a document of demands circulated by the Coalition Against Police Abuse, c/o Michael Zinzun, 2824 S. Western Ave., Los Angeles CA 90018. (213) 733-2107.

10 Information on the racial and gender composition of the rebellion is taken from the report by the Chicago Surrealist Group, op cit. Some sentences in these paragraphs are quoted verbatim, although I've left off the quotation marks to help the flow of the report.

"race riot" out of control — into question. Even though thousands of white people and Latinos participated in the rebellion, and the rebels' principal actions entailed, right from the start, not random violence against people, nor even looting (that came later), but attacking and destroying police stations, government buildings and liquor stores — which participants saw as outside forces poisoning their community — the rebellion was portrayed solely in terms of race, evoking "fear" and "panic" among middle-class white people across the country. Perhaps that was the media's intention.

Despite a handful of horrifying and brutal attacks on individuals passing through the area — generally isolated instances magnified to all-encompassing proportions by a sensationalist media; the revolting attack on a white truckdriver by a few Black teenagers comes to mind (and, of course, left out of most reports is that a group of other Black teenagers shielded the truckdriver and saved his life) — the rebellion revealed the reality that, as Albuquerque Green Party member Petros Evdokas put it, "the 'collapse' of the Soviets is nothing compared to the collapse of capital's ability to fill the gap in life's vacuum with commodities."¹¹

In moments when existing frameworks are disrupted, as in the L.A. rebellion, the potential exists for people to begin experiencing their lives, their social relationships, their emotions, in a completely subversive way. Suddenly, people may "feel satisfaction rather than embarrassment when their leaders make fools of themselves. They may feel resentment rather than gratitude for welfare payments and hand-me-downs. They may be attracted to forbidden modes of sexual expression. They may feel revulsion for socially sanctioned ways of treating children or animals. In other words, the hegemony that our society exercises over people's emotional constitution is not total."¹² A new radical self-awareness rooted in the growing mass consciousness that *revolutionary change is possible* emerges and, along with it, the potential for people to envision a completely different way of living and the creation of a free society.

The L.A. rebellion and Chiapas reframed that whole way of looking at things, and offered a wholly new approach, rife with new possibilities. In contrast to what has been called "the grim puritanism and 'realistic' rhetoric of the Left," L.A.'s new urban guerrillas insisted on having a good time. Queried by reporters as to why they were looting, many replied: "Because it's fun!" A front-page May First *Chicago Tribune* photo is captioned: "Looters laugh while they carry away all they can." Ironically, the banner headline above it reads: "A nightmare of violence in L.A." One class's nightmare is another's pleasant fantasy. Those who took what they wanted from unguarded stores could hardly help making jokes about the "free market."¹³

The L.A. rebellion, which spread rapidly to 44 cities in twenty states, quickly flamed from a protest against a specific injustice to a revolt against the miserable and hopelessly racified conditions of daily life. The L.A. rebellion was both a class revolt and a vivid protest against systemic racial oppression, involving people of all races.

Those conditions of daily inner-city life are very much part of the debt crisis, enterprise zones and toxic imperialism and, strikingly, many participants saw it as such. Speaking in Oakland, California and in Harlem, New York, Michael Zinzun and gang members traveling with him reported that Black and Latino teenagers consider them-

11 Petros Evdokas, Southwest Red Balloon Collective, letter to author, May 30, 1993.

12 Alison Jaggar, "Love and Knowledge: Emotion In Feminist Epistemology," In *Gender, Body, Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing*, by Alison Jaggar and Susan Bordo, Rutgers University Press, 1989, p. 160.

13 The Chicago Surrealist Group, op cit.

selves *an endangered species*. This was also the theme of one of the most popular local rap recordings just before and during the rebellion, as the Chicago Surrealist Group reports, and it is surely one of the major revolutions in consciousness of our time. Equally suggestive, in this regard, is the fact that the *planting of new trees* — to bring *beauty* to L.A.'s minority communities — is a major demand in the program put forth by the Bloods and Crips for the reconstruction of the city.

Thank Marx for the L.A. rebellion, that moment of great truth when thousands of people expressed their disgust for the whole rotten culture by their festive community torching of L.A.'s odious shopping malls, monuments to Amerikan greed, alienation and corporate control of our lives. The burn-downs were not only as a sensible response to unliveable ghetto conditions, but also an ecologically sound step toward doing away with America's poisonous urban wastelands.

In L.A., so-called gangs, working with radical theorists and life-long activists, have brought us a new form — cooperative zones — to counter the toxic formations capital is trying to install, in the same way that, during the 1980 rebellion in Poland, the new form — Solidarity — came into being. Because of those conscious efforts, this mostly non-European working class moved their rebellion beyond a justifiable explosion against racial injustice and horrendous conditions and transformed it into a "new beginning."

It is precisely to drive down that explosive possibility that the current Contract on America takes aim, on the domestic front, while internationally the U.S. has been doing all in its power to scuttle and subvert meetings of imperialized countries to devise treaties preventing the global marketing of toxic wastes.¹⁴ The L.A. rebellion took place in the context of anti-World Bank, anti-I.M.F. rebellions throughout the world. It is instructive that it was the spontaneous uprisings in L.A. and around the country — and *not* the ideological musings of marxists in academia — that put this question, and one possible answer to it — that of cooperative zones controlled by the working class people who live in them — on the historical agenda, to answer the threat of toxic imperialism and save the planet.

In its moment, the L.A. rebellion, followed less than two years later by the stunning revolt in Chiapas, Mexico, opened a window onto the soul of America. We were offered a chance to glimpse some of the new pathways to real socialism the working class is kicking up, through its own motion. The media, articulating the positions of the government and big industry, tried to make both rebellions seem as violent and scary as possible — while they go ahead with their plans to incinerate and poison the planet, killing tens of thousands, millions, in the name of profits.

Toxic imperialism, both abroad and here at home, is the ground from which new social movements are being born. Pushing up through the cement roots of the cities, the new forms — in this instance, direct action cooperative zones — are our true (and perhaps only) hope for turning back the merchants of incineration, nuclear power, bio-technology, toxic waste, poisoned fertilizer, destroyed immune systems (and the ravages of AIDS and Cancer), polluted air, leaded water and asbestos schools — the neoliberal structural adjustment programs of the IMF, World Bank and USAID! — and reclaim our lands, our environment, our labor and our dreams. As an old sage once put it: Here is the rose; here we must dance. ■

The IMF & the Debt: Africa and the New Enclosures

By Silvia Federici

Silvia Federici is co-editor of The Committee for Academic Freedom in Africa's *Newsletter*, and teaches at Hofstra University, New College, Hempstead, NY 11550. An earlier version of this article appeared in *New Enclosures*, published by the Midnight Notes Collective, and in *Red Balloon Magazine* Winter/Spring 1992.

In that brief moment the world seemed to stand still, waiting. There was utter silence. The men of Umuofia were merged into the mute backcloth of trees and giant creepers, waiting. The spell was broken by the head messenger. "Let me pass!" he ordered.

"What do you want here?"

"The white man whose power you know too well has ordered this meeting to stop."

-Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*

THE INTERNATIONAL DEBT CRISIS can be specified as the existence of more than a trillion dollars of loans at quite steep interest rates to Third World countries, which cannot possibly pay the interest much less the principal on these loans given the present collapse of primary commodity prices and intense competition in international trade for light manufactured goods. There have been two major perspectives in the controversy over the crisis. On the one side, the Right has viewed the crisis as potentially threatening the international banking system given the default of major Third World debtor countries. On the Left the crisis is viewed as the main obstacle to Third World development.

Consequently, the "solutions" have been devised and justified within this framing of the "problems" the crisis presumably poses. The Right has seen, in the debt crisis' almost ontological threat to the money form internationally, a justification for harsh, even vicious, IMF policies aimed at making Third World countries "pay up." Meanwhile, the Left economists have not only pointed to the immense "human costs" of these IMF policies, but they also note that since these policies block the economic development of the Third World debtor countries, the debt crisis will necessarily be prolonged by the Right's solutions.

But these two opposing views do share one common assumption: the debt crisis is a threat or obstacle to capitalist development in the 1990s. For the Right, the debt crisis threatens the "stable growth" of the creditor economies, while for much of the Left the debt crisis is the main obstacle to the economic development of the debtor nations' economies.

This assumption is wrong! The debt crisis has been a key instrument used by capital to shift the balance of class forces to its side on both poles of the debt relation. That is, the debt crisis has been used to try to resolve capital's productivity crisis. Far from being an impediment to expanded capitalist domination of the Third World, on the one hand, or, for that matter, to accumulation by the capitalist system as a whole, the debt crisis has been a productive one for the capitalist classes of both the debtor and the creditor nations.

¹⁴ *Greenpeace Toxic Trade Campaign* newsletter, Nov. 30, 1992: "Greenpeace Calls on Basel Convention to Ban Toxic Waste Dumping on Developing Countries."

Who Owns the Land? The African Village: a "Community of Resistance"

That the debt crisis is a productive crisis for capital is nowhere as visible as in Africa. The main aim of the policies generated by the debt crisis has been to disempower workers, and to lay the condition for further capitalist development. This implies settling some key questions, beginning with the most vexing one for capitalist development in Africa: Who owns the land? It is an axiom of development theory that no capitalist industry can be created without capitalist ownership of agriculture; as long as Africans have the means to support themselves they will, as they have in the past, continue to refuse to accept the discipline of wage labor. The debt crisis is a crucial element in driving forward this process in the long-term, in Africa.

Why is the "land question" still so central in Africa? The answer is simple, though somewhat surprising to North American readers for whom the "land question" is a dimly remembered echo of nineteenth century class struggles in the "frontier." In most of Africa, communal claims to the land still live, for colonial domination failed to destroy (to a degree unmatched in any other part of the world) pre-existing communal relations, beginning with people's relation to the land.

This is a factor bemoaned by leftist and rightist developers alike as the main reason for Africa's economic "backwardness." *The Economist* spelled out in a "Nigeria Survey" (May 3, 1986) how crucial "the land question" is. In a section titled "The Capitalist Flaw," we read that:

with two exceptions, Kenya and Zimbabwe (which) were both subjected to farming by white men under European laws of ownership and inheritance, practically everywhere in the African continent, customary land-use laws prevail, which recognize ancient, communal rights to the land.

This means that a prospective investor must negotiate with and pay to the community "for each tree, for firewood rights, for the grazing of women's goats, for grandfather's grave." This is true even in countries like Nigeria, where the state nationalized all the land in 1978. To illustrate this "scandal," the survey article shows the picture of a herd of cows circulating undisturbed, side by side with a car, in the midst of a Nigerian city, cowherd and all.

Predictably, *The Economist* concludes that Africa's land "must be enclosed, and traditional rights of use, access and grazing extinguished," for everywhere "it is private ownership of land that has made capital work." Land expropriation, therefore, is the precondition both for commercialized agriculture and for a wage-dependent, disciplined proletariat.

The survey forgets that land expropriation was by no means limited to settlers' economies. Moreover, the privatization of land has proceeded at an accelerated pace throughout the 1970s and 1980s, due to World Bank Agricultural Development Projects, which under the guise of "modernization" introduced not only tractors but new class ownership relations in the rural areas. The development of these new property relations was spurred by Government expropriation-drives (for infrastructural development, oil exploration, etc.), as well as a massive urbanization process. Thus these changes have had many sources, including the attempts African countries made to "develop" and the growing refusal of the new generations to spend their life "in the bush" following their parents' footsteps.

Yet to this day at least 60 percent of the African population lives by subsistence farming, done mostly by women. Even when urbanized, many Africans expect to draw some support from the village, as the place where one may get food when on strike or unemployed, where one thinks of returning in old age, where, if one has nothing to live on, one may get some unused land to cultivate from a local chief

or a plate of soup from neighbors and kin. The village is the symbol of a communal organization of life that, though under attack, has not completely disintegrated. Witness the responsibility those who move to the cities still have towards the community at home—a responsibility which easily turns into a burden, but serves to support many who otherwise would remain behind. In Nigeria, for example, villages often pull together to pay the fees to send some children to school, with the expectation that once in possession of a diploma they will in turn help people at home.

The "village" to this day forms the reproductive basis of many African countries, particularly for the proletariat, who, once urbanized, can rarely afford the nuclear-family "life-style" that is typical among the middle class. However, among the middle class too, the nuclear family still competes with the village, which (thanks mostly to its women) refuses to be treated like an obsolescent factory. This conflict between city and village is the subject of many tales picturing overdemanding kin driving their urbanized children into corruption by their unreasonable expectations. But in reality, these "unreasonable" demands have kept pressure on the urban wage, ensuring a higher level of consumption both in village and urban centers, so that the consciousness of the cultural and material wealth produced world-wide exists in every bush.

The survival of communal ties and the lack of a tradition of wage dependence have produced many consequences in African political economy. First, it has fostered a sense of entitlements with respect to the distribution of wealth in the community and by the State. Second, it is responsible for the fact that most African proletarians fail to experience capital's laws as natural laws, even though the demand for what industrial development can provide is now a general factor of social change.

Africans' resistance to capitalist discipline must be emphasized given the tendency in the U.S. to see Africans either as helpless victims of government corruption and natural disasters or as protagonists of backward struggles revolving around tribal allegiances (a myth perpetrated by the Western media). In reality, from the fields to the factories, the markets and the schools, struggles are being carried on that not only are often unmatched for their combativeness by what takes place in the "First World," but are most "modern" in content. Their objective is not the preservation of a mythical past but the redefinition of what development means for the proletariat: access to the wealth produced internationally, but not at the price capital puts on it.

Examples of the combativeness and modernity (or even post-modernity) of African proletarians range from resistance to being counted (in Nigeria the idea of a census is still a government "utopia"), the resistance to tax-collection (an occupation which often calls for bodyguards), and the resistance to land expropriation (which often turns into open warfare). Even though the land has been nationalized in Nigeria, for example, negotiations are still necessary with the local chiefs before any tract of land can be appropriated by the government, and until recently, compensation for trees and crops was paid. Finally, the resistance to waged work far exceeds, in terms of work-hours lost and forms of struggle, what could be expected from a waged work-force which is at most 20 percent of the population.

The difficulty capital has had in getting African proletarians to accept capital's laws as natural is compounded among the new generations who have grown in a period of intense liberation struggles (Guinea Bissau in 1975, Angola and Mozambique in 1976, Zimbabwe in 1980) and who see "the West" through the eyes of Soweto. This youth over the last decades has made international capital

despair of Africans' unwillingness to accept the imposed discipline and productivity it requires.

Thus, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, prior to the debt crisis, a consensus grew within international capital that Africa is a basket case and the only hope for its future lies in a drastic reduction of its population growth. (By "Africa," of course, all is meant except South Africa, though southern African events, from Soweto to the demise of colonialism in Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, have been crucial in determining the new "mood.") On trial is "Africa's resistance to development," for Africa, we're told continually by the *Wall Street Journal*, is the only region in the world that has experienced no growth in the post-WWII period. Further, the Africans' attachment to "their traditional ways" (a code word for anti-capitalist behavior), and the standard of living Africans were able to gain, particularly in countries like Nigeria or Zambia, which in the 1970s (due to a rise in oil and copper prices) experienced a leap in the national wealth, must be destroyed if investment is to be profitable in Africa.

Capital has put into place a policy of planned underdevelopment in response to these "structural/political problems," with communal land claims at their core. Thus, not only has capital fled from Africa, in search of safer havens in American or Swiss Banks, but also foreign investors have dwindled to a handful (Africa in the 1970s and 1980s was the region that attracted the lowest rate of capital investment) and foreign aid and African exports have collapsed. Meanwhile the dangers of "population explosion" as a harbinger of revolution have become the gospel of the land. As a result, as former World Bank president Clausen recently put it, "Africa today is experiencing the worst depression of any world region since WWII." This means that from capital's viewpoint, Africa is the bottom of the barrel, the area with the most resistance to "development."

To what extent capital despairs of the outcome can be seen in both the gloomy tones in which Africa is usually discussed and the disregard international capital displays with respect to the preservation of African labor. Africa is being turned into the chemical/nuclear dust-bin of the world, the region where expired pharmaceutical products, toxic wastes, and materials banned in other countries, from medicines to pesticides, are dumped.

The Debt Crisis as Productive Crisis for Capital

It is within this scenario that one must understand the development of the debt crisis which, by the early 1980s, affected more than 25 African countries.

It is difficult to measure to what extent the escalation of the debt has been due to the pressure exercised by proletarian demands, which in the 1970s forced African governments to borrow money from foreign banks and governments, or was engineered by international capital to force African governments to implement policy reforms. What is certain is that the debt crisis has provided national and international capital with a golden opportunity to attempt a wide-ranging reorganization of class relations aimed at cheapening the cost of labor, raising social productivity, reversing "social expectations" and opening the continent to a fuller penetration of capitalist relations, having the capitalist use of the land as its basis.

As in other Third World areas, the crisis in Africa has unfolded through two different phases, each differentiated by more or less direct intervention of foreign governments through the role played by international agencies. There has been, in fact, a division of labor between the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB), corresponding not so much to the need to integrate "soft

cop/hard cop" policies, as to the requirement to deal with different levels of proletarian resistance, the key factor in the dialectic of development and repression. Phase I, roughly lasting from 1980 to 1984, was dominated by the IMF "monetarist policies." This was the phase when, as country after country defaulted on interest payments, arrangements were made with the IMF for stand-by loans in exchange for the infamous IMF conditionalities: cuts in subsidies to products and programs, wage freeze, retrenchment in public sector and massive devaluations, which in many cases virtually demonetized the economy. But by 1984 such was the resistance to further austerity measures and so strong was the hatred for the IMF that a new strategy had to be devised, accompanied by a change of the guard in the form of a World Bank takeover. Thus Phase II, which began in 1984, took the form of World Bank "development."

The World Bank is an old acquaintance of the African continent, where in the post-independence period it rushed to replace the departing colonial administrators. In the 1980s, it played capital's grey eminence in Africa. Hardly a plan or a deal has been made without its intervention, in the capacity of lender, advisor or controller. In 1984, the World Bank announced it would raise \$1 billion to provide 50 "soft loans" to sub-Saharan nations prepared to accept its recipe for "economic recovery" and embark on the path of economic reforms. This "special facility for Africa," which under the name of "Structural Adjustment Program" (SAP) was the model for the Baker Plan presented at Seoul in 1985, emerged as the vehicle for the much hailed conversion to a free-market economy undergone by many African countries since 1985.

SAP, in fact, is Reaganite laissez-faireism applied to the Third World. Its essential model is Milton Friedman's formula for post-AI-lende Chile that demands the removal of all measures protecting the standard of living of workers and forces workers to survive only to the extent that they work in conditions competitive with those of other workers worldwide. Hence, wage levels are decided by international labor market considerations combined with state repression to ensure that wages never rise to "international levels."

SAPs require much repression. In Chile, its implementation cost the lives of 30,000 workers, butchered in homage to the new market freedom. SAP means that in exchange for "growth-oriented" loans, a country accepts the liberalization of imports, the privatization of state industries, the abolition of all restrictions on currency exchange and commodity prices, the demise of any subsidy program, and further devaluations, with the loans financing these programs and setting up export-oriented agricultural and industrial sectors. In the rhetoric of business and the World Bank, once the prices of commodities, services and labor are allowed to "adjust to their market value" and imported commodities are once again available in the markets, everyone will be incentivized to produce more, foreign investment will flow, exports will grow, earning solid hard currency, and recovery will be finally at hand. But SAP means that millions of Africans, whose monthly wages average at best \$30 a month, are asked to pay American-type prices for commodities and services. Even the local food prices reach prohibitive levels as the land is increasingly cultivated with crops not destined for local consumption.

SAP, in fact, is the vehicle for the integration of the African proletariat into the world market, but along lines not dissimilar from those of colonial times, as they are expected to produce crops they won't be able to consume, and pay for what they buy at the international price levels, at the very time when their wages not only have vanished because of retrenchment but have become meaningless in the face of astronomical devaluations. The integration of the African proletariat into the world market via SAP is visible also at the level of

the new bosses: with the new productivity campaign, all attempts at "indigenization" have been dropped and expatriate managers and technicians are flocking back, as in the good old colonial days. The hope is that white masters will be more effective in making people work than were their African counterparts.

The Myth of National Self-Determination within Capitalism

As the key managers of this new turn have been foreign agencies (IMF, World Bank, Paris Club, London Club, in addition to the commercial banks), the measures adopted have appeared as another chapter in neo-colonial relations, with Western banks and agencies replacing the colonial powers in their imperial role. This "appearance" is not unfounded. Once in the grip of IMF & Co., a country loses any semblance of economic/political independence: IMF representatives sit on the board of the Central Bank, no major economic project can be carried on without their approval, storms of foreign officers periodically descend on it to check account books, and no government could steer a politically independent path, even if it wanted to, since every few months it must plead with foreign agencies for debt rescheduling or new loans.

The case of Liberia, which a few years ago asked Washington to send a team of managers to run its economy, is but an extreme example of what today is happening in most of Africa. Equally telling are the overtures African governments (e.g., Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Nigeria) are presently making to Israel and South Africa, with whom, for a long time, caution advised secret relations. Thus, there is a sense in which it is possible to speak of the recolonization of Africa, under the hegemony of Western powers, who are using the crisis to recuperate what was lost in the wake of the anti-colonial struggles.

All this should not hide the fact that both the crisis and the help from abroad have been welcomed by the dominant sectors of the African ruling class. For they have in turn used the external debt to free themselves from the concessions to "their people" they were forced to make in the aftermath of independence and to stem the militancy of the new generations. Undoubtedly African leaders have had to swallow a few bitter morsels. For the African ruling class today, integration with international capital is a different deal from the one they struck in the post-independence period. It was then confronting a less unified capitalist front (with the U.S. competing with the old colonial powers and the Soviet Union in Africa); today the main branches of international capital are integrated. Thus, the nationalistic games African leaders were able to play—publicly boasting non-alignment and pan-Africanism while dealing behind doors with South Africa (as in the case of Nigeria) and taking money from "East" and "West"—are no longer possible. Nor is it possible for them to continue to oscillate between the Scylla of a demagogic socialism and the Charybdis of a waste of capital funds for visibly unproductive purposes.

Why Have No African Leaders Called for Default on the Debt?

The African leaders too have been brought to trial. The golden mouthpieces of international capital have accused them of a personalistic attachment to capital (the famous "corruption" charge) and lack of managerial skills. But the chastisement has been acknowledged as useful in most quarters. The debt crisis has been a "consciousness raising" process for African leaders, who have learned they cannot rule without the help of Washington, London and

Paris, showing in face of the "crisis" the fundamental similarities of their political stands, regardless of how much socialist rhetoric they flaunt. This is why they so easily bend to the demands of foreign capital. It is not because of their helplessness in front of Washington and London, but because of their helplessness in front of the African people. Not accidentally, with the brief exception of Tanzania under Nyerere, nowhere has an African government attempted to mobilize the population that would have eagerly responded to the call for default. On the contrary, they have "passed along" the most murderous austerity policies, diverting substantial amounts of presumably scarce foreign currency to buttress their armies and police forces with the latest anti-riot equipment while playing helpless before the IMF. The debt crisis has unambiguously shown that to maintain their rule African governments must depend on the support of Washington, London and Paris.

Thus, one of the main results of the debt crisis is the reorganization of the mechanism of capitalist command, beginning with the unification of "metropolitan" and "peripheral" capital. Such has been the willingness of African leaders to comply with international capital—often implementing austerity measures stiffer than those required by World Bank/International Monetary Fund—that a number of African countries (e.g., Morocco, Ghana, and Nigeria) are becoming a show-piece for multinational agencies. The turning point came in the Spring of 1986, when the Organization of African Unity (OAU) decided to bring Africa's debt problem to the UN, asking Western countries to help solve it. By this time almost every country in the continent was defaulting on its interest payments and many countries were devoting 30 to 40 percent of their budget to debt servicing—a percentage leftist economists consider a recipe for economic disaster.

This unprecedented move was a decisive ideological victory for the Western Powers who, after decades of anti-imperialist rhetoric, felt vindicated in their pre-independence misgivings ("we told you that you were not ready!"). At the special UN session, by defeating a resolution pointing to their responsibility in the African crisis, they made it clear they would no longer hear about how colonialism pauperized Africa. Indeed, it is now accepted wisdom in the U.S. media that colonialism bears no responsibility for what's happening today in Africa.

The 1986 UN session was the Canossa of African Governments. At it they publicly recognized that by themselves they are unable to rule the continent. It served as the occasion for old and new colonial powers (like Japan) to return to the saddle. Then U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz's triumphal trip through Africa in June 1986 and the murder, one year later, of Sankara of Burkina Faso, the living symbol of African anti-imperialism, sealed the deal.

Since then, the "debt crisis" has unfolded in Africa in all its mathematical logic, showing how misleading it is to view it as a numerical crisis, as it is usually presented. The fallacy of the numerical approach is to believe that from capital's viewpoint "economic recovery" is equal to "debt reduction." If this were the case, much of what is happening around the debt would be incomprehensible. For in most countries, the debt has escalated dramatically since their acceptance of IMF-World Bank economic recovery measures (e.g., the Nigerian debt rose from \$20 to \$30 billion after a SAP was introduced).

The reason for this apparently paradoxical result is simple. The debt crisis is determined not by the larger or smaller amount of the debt due or paid up, but by the processes activated through it: wage freezes, the collapse of any local industry not connected to foreign capital (which provides the hard currency needed for technology and capital investment), the banning of unions, the end of free education even at the primary level, the imposition of draconian laws making

labor and other social struggles an act of economic sabotage, the banning of militant students' organizations, and especially the privatization of land. This function of the debt crisis is best seen perhaps in the well-financed escalation of repression in the debtor countries. The latest technological tools of repression (cars, walkie-talkies, Israeli security guards) have arrived in Africa in the wake of the debt crisis. "Defense" spending is the only type of spending international agencies have not begrudged African governments, though they count every penny when it comes to health or education. "Crisis" here becomes, on capital's part, a misnomer: it is a crisis, rather, for the working class.

What this has meant for people can be seen by looking at Ghana, an IMF "success story," from the viewpoint of the extensiveness of the trade liberalization allowed and the present growth rate. Since 1983, when Ghana decided to comply with the IMF, the national currency, the cedi, has collapsed nearly 100 percent in value. As a result, with the banknotes people are paid in being so worthless, the majority of the Ghanaians have been practically demonetized. Unions, however, have been sufficiently intimidated (thanks to Jerry Rawlings' past "man-of-the-people" aura) as to subscribe to the plan and keep workers from striking. Thus, by international capital's initiative, Ghanaians have been forced to leap beyond the money-relation; e.g., the monthly salary of a middle-level civil servant hardly pays for one third of the family monthly food bill. But as long as people must pay for food, transport and rent, this means that their lives must be a constant wheeling and dealing which today consumes all their energies. (In the long run, though, the experience of having to invent daily new means of reproduction may produce some unexpected results.)

Presently many in Ghana, for example, hold on to a waged job only in the hope of "chopping for the work-side," i.e. using the facilities and utilities the work-place provides for reproduction, not production. Wage or no wage, eeking out a living is an endless struggle, with prostitution, touting to tourists, subsistence farming and remittances from abroad being (for most) the only alternatives to starving or thieving. Meanwhile over the last four years two million Ghanaians, almost 20 percent of the Ghanaian population, have emigrated to Italy, Iceland and Australia, and many others are on the way out. They are called the "road-people," planetary transients, often thrown overboard from ships they illegally boarded, going from port to port in search of a country that will let them in, ready to work under any conditions since a few dollars earned selling watches or bags in New York can support a family in Accra or Dakar. The flight from all of Africa is so massive that it has turned into a job of its own, with people specializing in how to circumvent the restrictions foreign embassies place on visas.

Everywhere, from Nigeria to Tanzania, a new diaspora is at work, sending millions to work in Europe and the U. S. This diaspora is a gold-mine for European and American capital, which still relishes the basic principle of the old slave-trade: people are more productive once uprooted from their homes. The number and status of the emigrants are documented by World Bank demographers, who, with Nazi-like scientific precision, also periodically record what countries fall below the caloric requirements for work or "just" survival. For hunger is re-appearing in surprising places like Nigeria, traditionally the yam basket of Africa, even in times of bumper crops. Not only is meat disappearing, gari (cassava flour), traditionally the cheapest and most basic staple, is becoming unaffordable, at least in the urban centers, where it must be transported by trucks and vans fueled with gasoline costing now what whisky cost in the past.

At the heart of the debt crisis agenda, then, is the annihilation of the old African system of reproduction of labor power and struggle based upon the village and its tenure of the commons. The aim of the

IMF and the World Bank is to make both the land and the people truly available for work, i.e., for wages and rent. To do this, capital had to pierce the veil of its own statistical "money illusion." For according to the statistics gathered by international agencies, most people in Africa ought to be dead, since their per capita income is far below subsistence. But they are not dead. On the contrary, Africa is one of the liveliest places on the planet. The main reason for this contradiction is the immense subsistence productivity of the African commons. The debt crisis is capital's methodical attempt to destroy this productivity of life and substitute a productivity of surplus value.

The first phase of the debt crisis—the demonetization of African economies and the default of post-colonial states—destroyed this money illusion. The message of the demonetization to the average African was that s/he was capitalistically dead and that the time for living in the interstices between the international market and the village commune was definitively over. The bankruptcy of the post-colonial states made it clear that no intermediary would be able to soften the impact of the laws of capital. The famines of 1984-5 made the point with brutal terror throughout Africa.

The second or SAP phase of the debt crisis was (and is) the moment of enclosure. For the essence of SAP is the capitalization of the land, i.e. either local farmers or miners employ the land for the national or international market or the land will be taken by those who will—or, as in many areas, both. If SAPs succeed, the myth and reality of "Mother Africa" is finished.

New Social Struggles and "Capital" Punishment

The debt crisis in fact is almost a textbook case of the old-time truth that economic liberalism not only is compatible with, but at crucial times *requires* social fascism. Thus the Chilean road to economic recovery is today applied to most of liberalized, structurally-adjusted Africa. The Chilean recipe has almost been learned by rote: students' organizations must be banned, unions must be intimidated and driven underground, security forces must be remodeled (usually with the help of shadowy U.S.-British-French-Israeli advisors). The new legislation is also now standard. For example, in Nigeria, Decree 20 against "economic sabotage" prohibits strikes at oil sites under penalty of death for union organizers engaged in such activity, and Decree 2 legalizes preventive detention for up to six months. Increasingly, capital punishment has been used as a weapon in the "war against armed robbery," the Nigerian/African equivalent of "the war against drugs." As for the spaces left to "freedom of speech," let us just mention the case of Nigeria, where even seminars on SAP attended by Nobel Prize winners like Soyinka are nowadays met with armed policemen at the doors.

But none of these measures have put an end to the resistance against the "economic recovery acts." The first major failure of IMF policies appeared in Zambia in December of 1986, a few months after the UN conference on Africa. The Zambian government, amid Kenneth Kaunda's tears, had to turn its back on the IMF following massive anti-IMF, anti-austerity riots in Northern Zambia—the heart of the copper fields. What happened was that after another round of price increases and a further devaluation of the kwacha, people engaged in the most violent protests since independence. The government had to call in army combat units and seal off the borders. The riot was sparked by the announcement that the government was going to double the price of maize meal (as demanded by the IMF). Housewives, youth and the unemployed took to the streets, attacking warehouses where the maize was stored, and soon every other store became a target. The crowd appropriated TVs, stereos and even cars, stoned policemen, attacked government offices and burned down (in Kalulushi) the Presidential Headquarters (hence Kaunda's tears). Ten people were reportedly killed in the many days of rioting,

but in the end the government had to reduce the maize prices and tell the IMF it could no longer comply.

Equally violent and continuous has been the resistance in Nigeria. From the earliest phase of the government's negotiations with the IMF, students, market women and workers have gone to the street protesting the end of free education, tax-certificate requirements for school children enrolled in primary schools, wage freezes, new levies, and the removal of subsidies for domestically sold petroleum.

The involvement of students in riots in Zambia and Nigeria is not unique. All over Africa students have been at the forefront of the anti-SAP protest. Despite the fact that they are a privileged minority, often being ready after graduation to compromise their political convictions for a government job, students in many African countries are now forced, by the objective conditions of IMF-education planning for Africa, to take a more radical stand. (The IMF prescribes a drastic reduction in the number of high-school and college graduates in order to contain wages and reduce expectations.) Thus the IMF-inspired SAPs are the death pill of the post-independence "social contract" which promised a piece of the pie to those who had a high school or university degree. As a result, a pervasive high unemployment rate among graduates has followed the introduction of SAPs. Many university-trained engineers are lucky if they manage to drive a cab. In this context, it is not an accident that every step in the escalation of IMF-imposed economic austerity measures has been accompanied by an attack on students and students' organizations.

A good example of this sort of violent confrontation occurred on May 26, 1986. In the wake of a peaceful demonstration at Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, Nigeria, and one week prior to the arrival of IMF-World Bank officers in Lagos, who were to check Nigeria's books and economic plans, truckloads of mobile policemen invaded the campus, shooting students and visitors at sight. The machine-gun firing police chased the students into the dorms and into the surrounding village houses where they had tried to take refuge. More than 40 students were killed and many more were wounded.

The massacre did not stop the protests however. In the following days, riots exploded all over the country. Students in Lagos, Ibadan and other campuses blocked the streets, attacked government buildings and prisons (excarcerating hundreds of prisoners, including some from death row), and vandalized the premises of those newspapers which had ignored the protest.

Since then, anti-SAP riots have become endemic in Nigeria, culminating in May and June of 1989 with new uprisings in the main southern cities, Lagos, Bendel, Port-Harcourt. Once again, crowds of students, women and the unemployed jointly confronted the police and burned many government buildings to the ground. In Bendel, the prison was ransacked, hundreds of prisoners were set free, and food was confiscated in the prison pantry and later distributed to the hospitals, where patients notoriously starve unless they can provide their own food. More than 400 people reportedly were killed in Nigeria in the days of China's Tiananmen Square uprising, though barely a word about the Nigerian riots and massacres could be found in the U.S. media.

Nigeria has not been alone. Anti-IMF protests have occurred in Zaire, where in December 1988 a crowd of women was machine gunned by government troops. In May, 1990, at the University in Lubumbashi, scores of students and teachers were killed or wounded following protests on campuses around the country against the IMF-inspired policies leading to the deterioration of already-abysmal physical conditions, budgetary crises, repression and corruption. In Ghana, too, student-government confrontation has been the order of the day since the implementation of the IMF deal.

Massive uprisings and insurrections are but one part of the resistance against austerity and SAP plans. A daily warfare is fought at the motor parks against the hike of transport prices, at the "bukas" where people insist on a piece of meat in their soup without having to pay the extra price, and at the markets where people defy government attempts to ban "illegal" (non-taxpaying) vendors. Along with this quasi-legal micro-struggle against IMF policies and their results, armed robbery, smuggling, and land-wars have exploded in response to diminishing access to land due to SAP-inspired enclosures. These struggles have not been in vain. The recent decision at the Paris summit of the OECD (held during the bicentennial of the storming of the Bastille) to cancel a part of the African debt for those countries that implemented SAPs (up to 50 percent for the "poorest" of them) is a recognition of their power. >

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