

**A NEW PHASE OF  
AFRICAN  
LIBERATION**

**SOCIALISM FROM BELOW**

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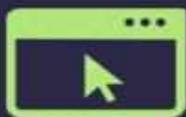
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# **A new phase for African liberation – Socialism from below**

## ***What is going on?***

WHY are so MANY Africans poor? Why do so many die from hunger and disease? Why do so many face a bleak future?

The facts are stark. Across Africa, every year, at least 35 million people, including an estimated 17 to 21 million children, face serious food shortages. These crises are not short-term or one-off emergencies. They recur year after year and will continue to do so until the one common factor in every instance is addressed—chronic poverty.

The total combined income of 48 countries in Africa is little more than that of Belgium. More than two million Africa infants die every year before their first birthday.

According to UNAIDS, 24.5 million people were living with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa in 2005—some two thirds of the world total. An estimated 2.7 million more people became infected during that year and 2 million died of AIDS-related diseases.

The world's great powers speak of “debt relief” and increased aid. But the promises made at the G8 Summit in 2005 of a huge write-off of debt have proved false—and extra money earmarked for aid is linked to privatisation, cuts in public expenditure and more freedom for the West's multinational firms.

For the \$540 billion Africa received in loans between 1970 and 2003—much of it going to corrupt Western-backed dictatorships during the Cold War period—\$579 billion has already been paid back in debt servicing. But the debt is still over \$300 billion.

Wars, whose roots often lie in colonialism and are always fuelled by the poverty caused by capitalism, tear apart large parts of the continent. The war in Democratic Republic of Congo has claimed 4 million victims since 1998.

Of course not everyone in Africa suffers. African countries are class societies with an opulently rich ruling class that sends its children to private

schools in Europe, and uses exclusive hospitals in the West.

Yet for the first time in history there are the means and technology to ensure a better life for all people—in Africa and across the world. The poor are poor, not because there is a shortage of resources to take care of their basic needs but because of unequal access to wealth. Three billionaires have income and assets more than the entire gross national product of sub-Saharan Africa!

The world situation is characterised by a brutal offensive of competing capitalist corporations and their state allies in the process of neoliberal globalisation. Karl Marx described the internationalisation of capital, and it is not a really new phenomenon. But today every corner of the planet is integrated in the global world free market economy—including Africa. The common ideology that shapes these economic relations under globalisation today is neoliberalism.

By neoliberalism we mean the idea, that unrestricted and unregulated ‘free market’ forces are providing the means to improve the life of the majority of people and that the key to poverty eradication lies in the advance of private profit making.

But the contrary is true. Everywhere all over the world we see the demolition of workers benefits and the undermining of workers rights. Basic resources, such as our water, electricity, gas, our public services, pensions and health facilities are privatised – that is they are being sold to private companies all over the world to make money out of these “new markets”, though these resources should be freely available for everyone. Privatisation has led to disastrous consequences for the African continent. The access to basic social services is significantly diminished, long eradicated diseases, such as cholera are back as a consequence of water privatisation, children and poor Africans die of easily treatable diseases, such as diarrhea, as a consequence of health care privatisation. Africans are getting poorer due to unemployment as a consequence of privatisation and outsourcing.

But neoliberalism is also rebuilding class power and wealth for capitalists of all countries. Opening up African markets benefits the major US and European firms and the big local capitalists.

The increased competition between capitalist countries has also lead to a

new era of brutal wars. Imperialist powers, above all the US, fight ruthlessly for control over resources and for geo-strategic domination to keep down other competitors, such as China. These are the real reasons for the bloody war in Iraq and Palestine, but also for the increased intervention of imperialist powers in Africa. The US wants to dominate the Middle East to control the oil resources. But there is also a new Scramble for Africa over West African oil supplies. The majority of Africa's people do not count a thing in these strategic calculations.

By October 2006 the US government had spent \$325 billion on the war in Iraq. This war, according to the respected medical journal *The Lancet*, has caused 655,000 deaths—all for oil and US power.

What about our so-called African leaders? The ruling classes in the developing economies do not resist neoliberalism and imperialism because they are economically dependent on the survival of its very structures, such as WTO, the IMF and the World Bank. Moreover, some Africa rulers are becoming “sub” imperialist powers in their own right. This is the rationale behind the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) mainly initiated by Presidents Thabo Mbeki (South Africa) and Olusegun Obasanjo (Nigeria).

For the ordinary Africans, these partnerships will be partnerships of misery. NEPAD rejects the demands for total debt cancellation. Its policies focus on privatisation of basic infrastructure such as water, electricity, telecommunications and transport, largely in the form of “Public-Private Partnerships” between private industry and government – as usually demanded by the World Bank.

### ***Africa's past***

Today Africa is marked by poverty. Yet for most of human history Africa has been in the vanguard of human development.

Egypt, in Africa, was one of the foremost early civilisations. The great pyramid of Giseh was built over 4,000 years ago. Aksum, in the highlands of northern Ethiopia, was a developed civilisation in Roman times. The Zanj culture on the east coast of Africa south of the ‘horn’ of Somalia developed in the 7th century. Beginning in the area around Mogadishu, a linked set of city states stretched as far south as Mozambique within 100 years. A

developed culture grew up from early times in the Katanga area of what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo.

In 1510 Leo Africanus, an exiled Moor from Granada, travelled to Timbuktu (in modern Mali) and wrote, "Here are many shops and merchants, especially such as weave linen and cotton cloth. Corn, cattle, milk and butter this region yielded in great abundance. The rich king keeps a magnificent and well-furnished court. Here are great stores of doctors, judges, priests and other learned men."

In 1600 a Dutch trader entering the city of Benin in West Africa wrote, "The city looks very big when you go into it. The houses in the town stand in good order as our Dutch houses are. These people are in no way inferior to the Dutch in cleanliness. They wash and scrub their houses so well that these are as polished as a looking glass."

There are many other similar examples. But at the beginning of the 18th century Africa was devastated by the slave trade and colonialism. Between 9 million and 13 million slaves were shipped across the Atlantic between 1451 and 1870. As capitalism developed in Western Europe, it shovelled more enslaved human beings into the plantations of America and the Caribbean to provide the wealth to ignite industrial growth. The historian Patrick Manning has calculated that the removal of 9 million slaves across the Atlantic required the capture of 21 million Africans. Millions of others fled their villages and went into hiding. This all occurred when the population of the entire continent was only around 50 million. The population of Africa south of the Sahara did not grow at all between 1750 and 1850, a time when the population of Africa and Asia both roughly doubled. The stagnation of Africa's population was catastrophic for societies that were short of enough people to develop further. The slave trade also transformed African political life. It meant the development of militaristic regimes which could either hold out against the slavers or which would capture their neighbours and sell them.

In the first great phase of the arms trade British traders alone shipped an average of 330,000 firearms a year to West Africa between 1750 and 1807.

As the slave trade began to wane, colonial invasion exploded. Before 1880 nearly all of Africa was ruled by Africans. Within a few years five European

powers (and the king of the Belgians) had divided almost the entire continent between them. Previously Africans had fought Western invasions and often won – a sign that they were not ‘primitive’ societies. But by the 1880s the West had a significant lead in certain weapons, especially accurate rifles and efficient machine guns. These were used to destroy African states and rob their wealth. At the Congress of Berlin in 1884-85 the Great Powers carved up the African continent. Not a single African was invited to attend.

Once European powers seized these territories they were squeezed for profit, regardless of the cost in human suffering or economic devastation. One particularly well-documented example is Congo, taken virtually as personal property by King Leopold II of the Belgians. In 1875 he caught the mood of other European powers and wrote, “We must obtain a slice of the magnificent African cake.”

Within ten years he had international rights to 2.5 million square kilometres of the Congo basin, with a wealth of natural resources and a population of up to 20 million. Leopold had posed as a great supporter of human rights, even sponsoring an anti-slavery conference. But in Congo there was soon clear evidence of a carnival of massacres behind the veneer of the king’s civilising crusade.

Leopold’s companies used ruthless methods to force people to harvest rubber. Each district was assigned a quota of rubber to produce. Those who failed were beaten, whipped or butchered. The Belgian authorities sent out punitive expeditions to terrorise those who resisted. The killers would hack limbs off the dead, or sometimes off the living. Before the arrival of the rubber companies Congo’s population was around 20 million. An official census taken in 1911 revealed only 8.5 million. Entire regions were wastelands.

Even where colonialism was not so instantly murderous, it pauperised Africa. Half of all the profits on the minerals of the Gold Coast (Ghana) made between 1920 and the end of colonialism were sent out of the country, mostly to Britain.

During the Mau Mau rebellion in colonial Kenya in the 1950s the British authorities held 320,000 Kikuyu in concentration camps, hung 1,090 people, terrorised villages, carried out electric shock torture, beatings and mass rape on a gross scale and killed well over 30,000 people. This was a time when British soldiers were paid five shillings (equal to \$10 in today's money) for each Kikuyu male they killed, when they nailed the limbs of African guerrillas to crossroads posts. During the same period only 32 European civilians and 63 soldiers died.

The sense of continuity with today's wars could not be clearer.

But Africa is also a place of heroic resistance and revolt. The line stretches from Abd al-Qadir, Al Haj Umar, Samori Toure and others who fought colonialism, to the masses of Johannesburg, Lagos and Harare who fight their local rulers and imperialism today.

In order to be free we have to understand the system we are fighting against.

### ***Capitalism***

It is hard to imagine a world without capitalism. But throughout history people have lived in many different kinds of society. Two hundred years ago over 95 percent of people were peasants. They might own a small patch of land and a few basic tools that they could use to produce enough food for themselves and their family. Most of what they needed could be produced in the home.

At the beginning of the 19th century this old system was dying and a new world was being born. Huge factories sprung up in cities like Manchester and Glasgow in Britain. New machinery driven by steam power was introduced, and railways and canals were being created. These changes transformed people's lives as they were dragged away from the countryside and into the new industrial cities.

Karl Marx, who was born in 1818 into this rapidly changing world, wanted to understand what made the new system, which would later be called capitalism, both so dynamic and so destructive. Marx argued that every form of society was based on people coming together in different ways to

produce what they needed to survive, using the tools and techniques available to them.

For the last few thousand years, most societies have been based on a central exploitative relationship-the majority do all of the work while a minority rule over them and live off the wealth that they create. Under the feudalism of medieval Europe, for example, the peasants worked while the lords ruled and were free from the burden of work. Similar relations existed in many African empires.

Under capitalism the relationship between the workers and the rulers takes a different form. Workers do not own any of the tools required to produce what they need to survive. Capitalists own the factories, machinery and raw materials. Workers can only get what they need to survive by selling the one thing they have which the capitalist needs-their ability to work.

On the surface, this seems like a fair exchange. The capitalist gets a day's work and the worker gets a day's wages in return. But the wage a worker receives is not related to the amount of wealth they create for the capitalist. It might be possible for a worker to produce enough to cover the cost of their wage in four hours out of an eight-hour day. Unfortunately, the capitalist doesn't let the worker go home after that-they still have to work for the extra four hours.

This unpaid labour is the source of profits for the capitalist. To the worker it appears that they are being paid for a full day's work. So the exploitation that lies at the heart of capitalism is hidden behind a pay packet. Under capitalism production is geared towards the market, not towards meeting people's needs.

Textile workers cannot survive on what they produce, no matter how many they make. They have to purchase what they need on the market using their wages. Capitalists engage in bitter competition to sell their products to workers or to other capitalists. It is pumping profit out of workers and competition on the market that make the capitalist system tick. Once the system is born it takes on a life of its own. The more profit a capitalist

makes, the more they can invest in the best and most up to date technology. This allows them to make even greater profits and accumulate even more wealth. The capitalists who are most successful at exploiting their workers, competing on the market and reinvesting their profits can buy up or drive out of business any smaller, weaker companies.

This cycle of exploitation, competition and accumulation makes capitalism both incredibly dynamic and incredibly destructive.

Under feudalism there were limits to how much wealth the lord could consume. Under capitalism our rulers' lust for profits is limitless. This is mainly driven by the fact that capitalists are forced to reinvest their profit into new technology, new work processes, new machines to keep the competitive edge above others to ensure the status quo of profit making. Anything that gets in the way, from human rights to the environment, is trampled underfoot. And because there is no overall plan, the scramble for profit leads to economic crises that threaten to bring the whole system crashing down.

Marx argued that capitalism could not be patched up to make it a fair system. Workers are often pushed to fight against specific injustices or for better wages and conditions. These struggles can give workers more confidence and organisation.

But Marx saw them as part of a wider fight against the whole capitalist system. As well as creating horror for millions, capitalism also puts within our grasp a world in which everyone can lead a comfortable and fulfilling life. In order to build another world, workers will have to take control of the wealth they have created and use it in a very different way. Planning is, in fact, a central feature of the modern economy. In a big factory or a major shopping street you will see products from many countries. This means local producers and workers have to be found, goods imported from abroad, transport and distribution arranged.

Someone has to plan how much sugar Pick 'n Pay in Cape Town needs, and

how much passion fruit retailers will shift to shops for the rich in Lagos, Nigeria. This adds up to a huge centralised planned operation involving different transactions, workforces, raw materials and "brain power". The car industry is another example. Giant car firms take investment decisions and draw up detailed plans about multi-billion pound plants years in advance.

They also "outsource" the manufacture of components to smaller firms. The manufacture and delivery of the component has to be planned to match the level of production in the "mother" plant. But all such planning under capitalism is geared entirely to the making of profit and the anarchic competition between rival firms. When plans are drawn up they are based on guesses about who will win out in such competition, guesses which are guaranteed to be wrong in many cases. Plans and products are kept secret by rival firms, leading to huge waste and duplication of research and products.

Huge sums are wasted on advertising designed to help one firm win out against its rivals. Competition and the pursuit of profit also mean that natural resources are wasted, areas of the world are devastated and workers' lives are wrecked. The ups and downs of the market also mean competing firms over reach themselves, produce too much for the market and then go bust. The notion that the market is the best way to organise the economy just doesn't hold.

On the other hand, there is no reason in principle why the economy could not be directed to meet the needs of the many. It would be a hundred times more rational for people to sit down and decide what priorities needed to be tackled and how we could deliver them. It would cut out replication of goods and services. Look at any major industrial sector and you can see ways in which its resources could be used for the common good, whether it be pharmaceuticals, food, transport or manufacturing. And there are industries such as armaments where the skills of the workers and technology that exists could be used to build wheelchairs, adapted transport and so on.

Free market defenders always say that a planned economy would lead to

gridlock as every nut and bolt would need "the say so" before it was made. This is nonsense. If you decided that a factory should turn out wheelchairs instead of tanks you would give the workers on the ground the responsibility to make that happen. A planned economy would mean that the broad outline of what was produced would need to be set. But it would also mean an increased flexibility to turn out whatever was needed quickly, without having consideration of its "profitability" dominate the decision.

However, there is one iron rule to the success of such a planned economy. Factories, raw materials and resources are now in the hands of those who own and run the giant firms fighting to grab ever more profit. This needs to be halted, and all those resources turned into public property—belonging to and under the control of the mass of people, those who do the work and produce the goods. And that needs a revolution by those producers so we can collectively plan what we produce for the common good.

### ***Workers democracy and equality***

Contrary to the common view that capitalism is synonymous with democratic principles, the opposite is true. Capitalism is essentially an undemocratic system. It is based on a few people with money and power controlling the lives of the majority. In most countries you can vote in elections, and sometimes they may even count the votes fairly!

But even then you only get to elect someone in parliament who is out of control for a number of years. And you do not get to vote on who runs the factories or the army or the great concentrations of wealth and power in the corporations and the state.

For socialists, democracy is much more than voting. Imagine it takes a minute to make your cross or mark to select your candidate. Ten times in your life time—if you are lucky and reach your seventies. Shall we be satisfied with a mere 10 minutes of democracy in our lifetime and accept that in the rest of the time the rulers do what they want?

As socialists we stand for the extension of democracy to all aspects of our

society. This includes above all the economic sphere. In our 10 minutes of democracy we are only allowed to have a limited say in politics.

Socialist democracy is based on democratically elected councils in places where people meet anyway, spend most of their life, experience common interests and can share their opinions. Above all, these are the work places. People in a neighbourhood that are not working can easily be grouped around a workplace and take part in the democratic decision making progress.

These workers' councils can elect and also recall at any time representatives that will be sent to national or international councils to implement far-reaching decisions. Everybody will take part in shaping the society and will contribute to social, political and economical decisions. This is very different from capitalist parliamentary democracy where voters are mostly seen as a passive mass to manoeuvre and secure a cosy life for MPs who then work in the interests of the bosses rather than the people who elected them.

### ***Socialism from above and socialism from below***

The American Marxist Hal Draper defined two currents within the socialist movement, "socialism from above" and "socialism from below".

By socialism from above Draper meant the idea that the socialist transformation of society can be achieved on behalf of the working class, but without their direct involvement. These ideas have had different expressions:

It took the form of Stalinism that ruled Russia and Eastern Europe until its deserved collapse in 1989 or China under the brutes who ordered the massacre at Tiananmen Square in 1989. This also applies to the so-called socialist regimes which existed in Mozambique, Ethiopia and elsewhere. They all ruled in the name of "workers and peasants", in the name of "socialism" and a "planned economy". The collapse of these repressive regimes has been misinterpreted as proof that socialism can never work.

In reality, what collapsed was not socialism but state capitalism, a system in which the state and its bureaucratic representatives acted in a similar way to the capitalist class of the market economy in the West. Workers were not in control of the means of production. The plans were not made to produce and distribute what people needed. As in the West consumption was completely subordinated to accumulation. They made people work harder and harder in increasing certain “norms” for less and less rewards. Competition was not abolished but took the form of competing economically and especially militarily with the West. The state bureaucrats became a true ruling class grabbing for themselves the resources that had been produced by the workers. They possessed big houses and cars whereas an ordinary worker had to wait for a small car or a small flat for many years if at all.

Socialism from above takes also the form of social democracy claiming that socialism can be brought through parliament. Once a parliamentary majority has been achieved, laws can be changed in order to distribute wealth to the majority, bring the country’s resources under state control, transform education, end poverty, stop unemployment and implement the interests of the workers. The notion of socialism from above shaped also various national liberation movements believing that a guerrilla army acting for 'the people' can free the mass of humanity.

Also here the reality has been very different. Governments all over the world that are headed by social democratic parties, such as Tony Blair’s New Labour in Britain or Mbeki's Government in South Africa, adopt openly neoliberal reforms or support war drives. They cut taxes for the rich and reduce benefits for the poor. They press through privatisation and cut public spending. They employ the military in imperialist adventures in the interests of the powerful.

Even, social democratic parties such as the ANC in South Africa or the PT in Brazil, which had originally identified with the national liberation struggle or trade union struggles in the past failed to deliver once they joined

government.

It is absolute central for us that “the self-emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself” as Marx emphasised. Slavery was not abolished by the liberal slave-owners. The slaves emancipated themselves in heroic slave rebellions. Liberal bosses will not free workers neither will trade union presidents who are eager to co-operate with bosses and later argue that the sell out was ‘the best they could achieve for workers’.

Every significant improvement in the past is not the product of generous MPs but the collective action of the ordinary people.

Under capitalism the working class has a great political advantage compared with all previous exploited classes. Capitalism, for its own purposes, has concentrated workers together in great cities and towns. It has forced them together into factories and offices. And it has educated workers far beyond the average level of culture even of previous ruling classes.

As a result, it has made the modern working class a force that can organise itself into unions, parties, co-operatives, and other bodies and networks. Never has any exploited class in history had such a capacity to take over and run society.

The very people whose lives are currently dominated by the fact that they produce the wealth and power of capitalism are the key to its transformation.

Therefore, liberation is not in the hand of ‘our leaders’ who will act on our behalf. Workers will and can only emancipate themselves in the process of the struggle. In this process old ideas are brushed aside, new ideas, new confidence and new hopes make way. This is a prerequisite if we want to build a new society. But this does not happen automatically. How then are we organising this struggle? How do we get a socialist society?

## ***Revolution***

Sometimes people understandably feel it as a revolution if opposition parties take over government—especially in countries where one party has ruled for many years. But even if a well-intentioned opposition has a majority in parliament, the power of the banks and big corporations would be still intact. To achieve real social justice more is needed than parliamentary change.

The reality is that modern capitalism is run by a business class which operates behind the scenes to make sure all policies suit their interests. Corruption is the most open form of it in which politicians get their share from deals with big business.

But also more genuine MPs get regularly blackmailed by wealthy business people claiming that if they do not get a good enough profit they will move their companies elsewhere leaving behind a mass of retrenched workers

The power of money means that democracy is undermined. History shows that even if socialists or other more progressive leaders get elected into government they have to face the full power of the ones who control the economy and their state apparatus - nationally and internationally. When the socialist Salvador Allende was elected as President in Chile 1972 and began to implement the nationalisation of the copper mines and serious land reforms, big business evacuated their capital from the country, destabilised the economy and gave way to the bloody coup by Augusto Pinochet which crushed a whole generation of leftist activists.

The basic truth is that economic power is not in parliament. Economic power is where profits are made. As we have seen it is the production process that constitutes the base of our society.

Therefore, real change cannot come through parliament and a few reforms. The production process has to be brought under democratic control of the majority. This requires a more profound transformation—through revolution.

Revolution is not some far away day on which a small group of armed people will violently take power. As the self-emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself, revolution must be made by the majority of people.

Often a revolutionary process starts with struggles for simple reforms. During this struggle the working class gains self-confidence, gets to know its enemies and learns from its defeats and its victories, forms suitable structures until the moment when the working class also physically takes power and removes the old ruling classes from their control over society.

Contrary to the ruling class propaganda, revolution will be not a senseless blood bath, but a “festival of the oppressed” as the Russian revolutionary Lenin described.

Does that mean revolutionaries are against elections and reforms? Not at all! Revolutionary socialists fight for parliamentary democracy against dictators, such as Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe or Hosny Mubarak in Egypt. We celebrate the victory of comrades against the absolute monarchy in Nepal even though we are aware of the limits of parliamentary democracy. We defend parliamentary democracy against a total absence of rights.

Sometimes revolutionary socialists stand for elections on their own. Not because we have the illusion that parliament brings about real social change, but to use it as a platform and to win a wider audience amongst ordinary workers. After all elections are the only experience of democracy they have. The election of a fighting, campaigning councillor in South Africa in March 2006 is an expression of, and can help build, the struggle against privatisation and water cutoffs.

The German revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg once said, “Revolutionaries are the best reformers”. By this she meant that revolutionaries do not oppose reforms however small they might be, but they always fight for reforms in a special way. For example the best way to achieve better wages or bonuses

is collective action of the workers to put pressure on management, as the Debswana workers did with their strike in Botswana in 2004. Suggesting a vote for the opposition, waiting until they are in power and hoping that they will do something for workers will almost certainly lead to defeat. It emphasises the passivity of workers. A politician, a certain 'leader' or a political party will act—if they act—on behalf of workers.

Collective action on the contrary encourages self-activity. Workers actively have to convince their fellow colleagues of the necessity of common action. It strengthens self-confidence as workers have to decide which strategies to follow and which steps to take. But it doesn't have to be always a strike. To defend colleagues against harassment from the manager or to speak out against discrimination at the work place also strengthens the self-confidence of workers. This brings us always a step closer to revolution.

### ***Imperialism***

Capitalism, as part of its exploitative and oppressive character has another brutal and bloody face – imperialist wars. The carnage in Iraq is but one appalling example of the immense suffering caused by capitalism. What are the roots of this?

"The internationalisation of economic life makes it necessary to settle controversies by fire and sword," was how the revolutionary Nikolai Bukharin, writing in 1915, described the link between the economic system and war. He was analysing imperialism as a way of understanding a process of change in the capitalist system and of how the thirst for profit leads to brutal war again and again.

Bukharin explained how, "War is nothing other than the method of competition at a specific level of development." Individual capitalists are locked into a system of competition for raw materials, markets and labour.

This never ending competition means companies drive others to the wall and swallow them up, becoming bigger in the process. By the early 20th century, the Russian revolutionary Lenin explained, "the remarkably rapid process of concentration of production in ever-larger enterprises is one of

the characteristic features of capitalism. "Competition becomes transformed into monopoly." Production bursts out of its national borders and becomes increasingly global. Competition for markets and raw materials begin to take place on a world scale.

The Great Powers compete economically, clash militarily and triumph through mass murder. Bukharin wrote, "The capitalists partition the world not out of personal malice, but because of the degree of economic concentration which has been reached forces them to adopt this method in order to get profits." Companies themselves, however powerful they are, cannot fight wars to secure their interests.

Oil companies like Shell and Exxon may be desperate to get their hands on Iraqi oil, but they don't have any tanks, aircraft carriers or marines. They need the armies of nation states to fight for them. Because production is no longer confined within one country, nation states have to increase their ability to dominate markets, production facilities and raw materials in different parts of the world.

"The fighting force in the world market thus depends upon the power of the nation, upon its financial and military resources," Bukharin wrote. The corporations and the state become tied together. This link between capitalists and the state makes war inevitable.

As Bukharin wrote, "Capitalist society is unthinkable without armaments, as it is unthinkable without wars. The existence of arms is not the prime cause and moving force in wars. On the contrary, the inevitability of economic conflicts conditions the existence of arms. This is why in our times, when economic conflicts have reached an unusual degree of intensity, we are witnessing a mad orgy of armaments."

As well as fighting for important commodities, like oil, the imperialists have to fight to establish and maintain their strategic position in the world. Lenin wrote, "An essential feature of imperialism is the rivalry between several Great Powers, the striving for hegemony, for the conquest of territory.

This can even be "not so much directly for themselves as to weaken the adversary and undermine it". This meant an era of war in which peace was just a breathing space between more conflict. No treaties or alliances can stop the march to further wars.

Lenin wrote, "Any partition of the world could only be agreed on by all of the powers for a short period of time, since as some of them grow economically more quickly than others the military balance between the powers would shift and the stronger ones would dominate a larger share of the world."

Imperialism remains a system of competition between the powers and of economic, political and military domination by a few powerful countries over the rest of the world. Far from being a dry description of wars in the past, it is the reality behind the dead children in Baghdad and the US occupation of Iraq.

There can be periods of relative peace which give the appearance that capitalists can settle their quarrels peacefully or through the intervention of a body like the United Nations. But as we have seen in recent years, at some point war re-emerges onto the agenda.

Our struggle is against each individual war but also against the system that produces them.

### ***Nationalism African socialism and Permanent revolution***

'The working men have no country' concluded Karl Marx in the Communist Manifesto after he investigated how capitalism thrives to expand all over the globe in search for cheap raw material, cheap labour and new markets. He explained, 'National differences and antagonisms between people are daily more and more vanishing, owing to the development of the bourgeoisie, to freedom of commerce, to the world market, to the uniformity in the modes of production and to the conditions of life corresponding thereto'.

When Marx wrote, the extent of capitalist globalisation was limited, but he was absolutely right in his analysis. Today, every corner of the world is integrated into the worldwide capitalist system. Africa is no exception. The international capitalist class moves its investments and its production backwards and forwards across borders to wherever profits are highest. This is why we advocate the internationalisation of working class struggle.

### ***“African socialism.***

“We affirm the right of all colonial peoples to control their own destiny. All colonies must be free from foreign imperialist control, whether political or economic”. That was the declaration of the Pan-African Congress of 1945 held in Manchester, England. It brought together many of the people who would later become leaders in post-colonial Africa. They included Kwame Nkrumah Jomo Kenyatta, George Padmore and CLR James.

Something big was happening in Africa. The African working class had emerged from the Second World War both more numerous and more militant. They were not going to accept the fetters of colonialism anymore. There were major strikes by tens of thousands of workers in Nigeria, French West Africa, Guinea, Zambia and South Africa in the next few years.

Zimbabwean workers launched a general strike in 1948. European plantation owners' demands for more forced labour in the Ivory Coast led to mass protests. In Kenya, the Mau Mau movement attacked both native chiefs and the white settlers who had dispossessed peasant farmers.

Thousands of ex-servicemen returned to Africa with new ideas and expectations. It was an ex-servicemen's demonstration in 1948 that precipitated moves to independence in Ghana.

In 1945 only four African countries - Egypt, Ethiopia, Liberia and South Africa - were independent, and even in these cases independence was only partial or confined to a white minority. Yet 18 years later 30 African states came together to found the Organisation of African Unity.

The process of independence was both driven from below and managed

from the top as imperialism disengaged from formal colonies but still controlled much of economic life. The 1960s were a time of great pride, optimism and expectation in Africa. Kwame Nkrumah, leader of independent Ghana, seemed to offer a new way towards liberation. But such dreams were shattered.

Imperialism stifled the room for manoeuvre of many newly independent states, either by economic means (ownership of key industries, control of trade, manipulation of currencies, etc) or by much more direct and brutal methods. The key case here was Congo, where the Western powers, led by a resentful Belgium that had not wanted to grant independence in the first place, and the United States whose Cold War concerns and determination to safeguard the Congo's wealth for the West made it indifferent to democratic forms, between them masterminded the destruction of the elected leader Patrice Lumumba.

The rocket of pan-Africanism proved much too weak to escape the gravitational pull of imperialism and simply crashed back into another part of the sea of exploitation. It was not a case of corrupt leaders—though some were. Krobo Edusei, one of Nkrumah's ministers was famous for his £3 million gold bed that he had imported in 1963.

There was a far more serious political problem. To break the chains of imperialism required far more than simply a push for national development. Ghana could benefit from the lifting of British control over some industries, but that was nowhere near enough to provide the resources for real change. And Ghana could not opt out from the pressures of the world market.

So when the pressures came, Nkrumah (and Nyerere and Mugabe today) attacked their own workers and peasants in an effort to find the money for capital accumulation to compete. Such measures meant in the long term there was no popular support for these regimes.

Only a revolutionary struggle against capitalism can offer a way forward.

### ***National liberation***

Our internationalism means that we support oppressed nations fighting for

self-determination. That struggle, after all, can restore dignity to people who have been denied it by more powerful, imperialist states. This was the case for the liberation struggle in Angola or Mozambique, or for the Palestinians today. Sometimes as the success of national risings weaken the world imperialists they provide an opportunity for socialists to show the gap between the interests of their "own" ruling class and of workers at home and abroad. The movements against the war in Vietnam in the 60s and in Iraq today are such examples.

Yet national liberation movements may often be led by people or groups who are not socialists at all. Seretse Khama won independence for Botswana out of a deal with the British. Sometimes oppressed nations are themselves oppressors of others.

In our view, socialists can never support nationalism as such. We always have to ask certain questions first. Does a particular national movement strengthen or undermine the struggle for socialism? Does it strengthen or weaken imperialism? Does support for a nationalist movement advance the confidence and organisation of workers or minorities in struggle, or does it weaken them? In our view, socialists cannot be nationalists, least of all nationalists for their own nation. Our job is to break workers away from the notion that they share a common interest with their bosses because they belong to the same nation. Workers have to stand up for their own interest against their bosses and seek support from workers internationally. This international solidarity is critical to defeat capitalism.

### ***There is no socialism in one country***

Because we live in an international system, we believe that no nation-state can exempt itself from the rules by which global capitalism operates. For many years, some socialists believed that you could create islands of socialism, close the borders and keep capitalism out.

The Russian revolution of 1917 was the first time in history that a revolution led by the working class had taken power across a whole country. The Bolsheviks overthrew a powerful empire, yet the combined forces of capitalist Europe eventually strangled the fledgling workers'

state Within a decade the aims of the revolution were overturned and the country transformed into a dictatorship led by Joseph Stalin. Democracy was destroyed, workers' rights were taken away, living standards for most people collapsed.

The new Russian regime under Stalin claimed to be socialist. Yet for us there is no socialism without workers' power—and in Stalinist Russia the workers had no power. Whatever it called itself, it was the very opposite of socialism from below.

When the Eastern European regimes fell in 1989, we celebrated their collapse. For years we in the International Socialist Tendency had argued that what existed in the Soviet Bloc were not workers' democracies but tyrannies built on terror and repression. Wealthy classes of state bureaucrats had been in power depending on their working classes to produce their wealth. These had been capitalist states. The difference with other capitalist countries was that the state and a party bureaucratic apparatus conducted the exploitation rather than individual capitalists. Tony Cliff, one of the founders of our political tendency, called these regimes state capitalist. China and Cuba are other examples.

In the mood of excitement, hope and optimism of the 1960s many African independence leaders looked to Stalinist Soviet-Union as a model for development. Especially, the achievement of industrialisation within a very short time period seemed to be attractive. They looked at their working class still small in numbers and developed a political theory that the working class was too weak to play a revolutionary role. They followed the Stalinist theory that revolution has to come in stages. According to this 'two-stage-theory' the first step would be, what many African leaders who defined themselves as socialists, described as a 'national democratic revolution'.

A cross-class alliance of workers and a 'progressive' national bourgeoisie fights for independence against imperialism. This would make way for the 'second revolution' which would fight for economic independence and

perhaps socialism.

These ideas constituted the basis for the alliance of the nationalist ANC and the Communist Party in South Africa in their fight against apartheid. Today we see in South Africa millions of workers denied the fruits of their struggle. Instead, the national bourgeoisie under the leadership of the ANC enriches itself under the banner of black empowerment. This is just a fig leaf for making profits from privatisation, deregulation and a dual labour market leaving a path of destruction of workers' lives behind. In reality the complete separation of the national democratic struggle and the struggle for socialism lead to the fact that the latter was quickly forgotten.

### ***Permanent revolution***

Can revolution take place in a country where the working class is a minority? That question, which is very important in Africa, is not a new one.

The Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky faced a similar problem around 1905 in Russia, when the country was characterised by what he called 'combined and uneven development'. What Trotsky meant was the existence of old and very new modes of production. Huge steel factories with the most modern machines existed alongside with the most primitive tools for agriculture.

The working class was still very small. This phenomenon we still partly face today in Africa. Across the continent there are enclaves of great technological development, with modern machinery and computers. But a hundred metres away are the shacks of the migrant workers and those drawn from the rural areas to the cities.

Today every country has both a capitalist elite and a working class whose day-to-day labour is responsible for the functioning of key industries that are crucial to that country's economy.

One recent study estimated that, out of a global population of about six billion, 880 million people work for a wage. The wider working class,

including children and non-employed partners of these employees, comprises up to two billion people – and the figure is rising.

A similar number of people are partially dependent on a wage – they earn some of their livelihood in a capitalist way. And the world is now urbanised as never before. Approximately three billion people live in towns and cities.

The massive expansion of the working class has seen the expansion of the forms of struggle associated with capitalism. Mass strikes are no longer a purely European phenomenon – they have occurred in every continent in the world in recent times.

All over the world workers are facing the same problems. They share similar working and life conditions. As multinationals have their tentacles all over the globe, workers are connected in the same way through the production process. When automobile workers strike in Brazil it affects the factory in Germany. When the diamond mineworkers strike in Botswana, it is felt in India where the sorting takes place. This makes capital more vulnerable and workers more powerful.

### ***Trade unions***

Trade unionism is among the earliest and longest lasting forms of working class organisation. It arises from workers' need for mutual solidarity to deal with the twin pressures of a competitive "labour market" and employers' power in the workplace.

Unions are frontline organisations in the battle with capital, but also themselves arenas of internal contention. Socialists seek to play a key role in all trade union activity.

However, a focus on the official union machinery is not sufficient. No matter how left wing union officials or union policies may be, the need regularly arises for independent rank and file organisation within and across the unions.

Full time union officials are a necessity, but also a problem. They are needed to maintain continuity of organisation through different phases and periods. This work requires "office" skills, routine and regular commitment. It also engenders a degree of conservatism. Full time officials are removed from the workplace, and often enjoy working conditions and pay superior to their members.

Most ordinary members have a more discontinuous relationship to the union. Everyday stresses of working class life-travel to work, work frustrations, managing on at best only just enough money, sheer tiredness-absorb much of their attention.

At other times, though, the union means something vibrant and compelling. The whole point of unions is that-sometimes-they engage in collective action. Strikes demand a level of commitment that transforms the meaning of union membership. Supposedly apathetic people change, both in terms of what they're prepared to give and the support and solidarity they demand from their union. In direct struggles officials' conservatism can be a barrier to victory. Success demands boldness, initiative, risk-taking.

The necessary commitment and imagination are found among precisely those ordinary members whose "apathy" was assumed only yesterday. The form of organisation needed for such situations is very different from what's needed in "normal" times.

Rank and file organisation is not an alternative to union membership, but a vital part of it.

The British Clyde Workers Committee expressed the standpoint well during the First World War:

"We will support the officials just so long as they rightly represent the workers, but we will act immediately they misrepresent them."

So called unofficial action is a vital part of working class struggle. Time and again it is the key to defence of conditions and union organisation. Even in "official" strikes the capacity to organise independently of the officials is

often crucial.

Rank and file organisation depends on a network of union activists with real roots in their workplaces, able to pose the question of practical independent action among their members.

There are no fixed formulas. Shop stewards' committees and convenors may provide the backbone in one period, while in another these may themselves be a source of conservatism. As in all working class struggle, there is no iron line between politics and economics.

A revival of rank and file organisation can result from rising "industrial" militancy, but equally from political radicalisation. In the end it is the degree of interplay between these that shapes how far rank and file organisation can proceed. The most successful rank and file organisation rests on a network of militants with revolutionary politics.

In the new era of capitalist globalisation trade unions should align with radical forces such as the anti-capitalist movements and the Social Forums which have in recent times given expression to a milieu of fighting from below for an alternative to capitalism.

### ***The fight against oppression***

If we want to get rid of capitalism and fight for a society in which human needs instead of profits have highest priority, we can only do this together. Collectivity and solidarity are our strongest weapons. Capitalists therefore try their best to divide us in order to break any resistance against exploitation and to ensure undisturbed profit-making. They turn skilled workers against unskilled workers, essential services against non-essential services, locals against immigrants, 'major' tribes against 'minor' tribes, men against women and heterosexuals against homosexuals.

Ethnic discrimination, racism, sexism are not only false ideas. They manifest themselves in open oppression, which undermines our struggle for a better world. The rulers tell us that the only place of women is in the family, to be a caring wife, whose duty is to care for the children and the elders and fulfil the sexual desires of her husband. They tell us that immigrants and

refugees are the ones responsible for unemployment.

All these stereotypes help big business and the political ruling classes to maintain a fragmented working class in which workers are competing against each other instead of forming a homogenous opposition.

There is a long history of discrimination of women. Women were the property of fathers and men. Women earn less than men as they are usually confined to insecure, low-wage or part time jobs. As a consequence of material domination, men tend to dominate also in other aspects of the social relation between men and women. This ranges from taking control over women's sexuality to sexual harassment, violence or the recent phenomenon of women murders called 'passion killings'. Sexual harassment is common at the workplace. Managers consistently abuse women if they don't respond to sexual advances. There cannot be socialism without women's liberation.

But there is hope amidst the horror! With capitalist expansion and the integration of the African continent into global capitalism, women today are a solid part of an international working class. They possess more economic freedom, less dependence from their partners, feel less isolated within the house and family, are in the forefront of many strikes and are prominent speakers within the anti-capitalist movement. We argue that women's liberation can only be achieved through the common struggle of men and women. Men do not gain from women's oppression. It is the bosses who gain by paying women less and dividing the working class. Liberation of women is also not a question of electing some women leaders as 'role models'. To press for demands, such as power sharing and political decision-making might be a strategy to liberate some women who are able to make it to the top competing with men. But socialists stand for the liberation of all women. Furthermore, women feel their oppression very differently. Rich women see nothing wrong with exploiting their "sisters" as maids on a slave wage.

Working class women can't expect anything from 'role models' such as Condoleezza Rice, who is responsible for the killing and ruining thousands of women's lives in Iraq. We also recognise that with the need to maintain the capitalist family there is the attempt to control and contain our

sexuality. Heterosexuality is seen as the norm, as it is the basis for marriage and family, everything else is regarded as unnatural. But human beings are diverse. We respect that and are strongly opposed to sexual oppression of homosexuals, lesbians and transsexuals.

### **Why we stand up against racism**

Socialism depends on workers overcoming the divisions within their own ranks. The most virulent of these divisions is racism, in all its forms. The racism of Hitler and the Nazis produced the organised mass murder of millions of Jews and Gypsies in the 1940s. What is racism?

At root, it means making physical or cultural differences between people into a basis for treating them differently. It can involve skin colour, or language, or religion. In politics, racism is always a basis for reaction.

Racism is a way of diverting people's attention from the causes of their problems, and finding a "scapegoat" in some other group.

Racism doesn't even benefit "privileged" groups it claims to defend. In the US, for example, the most segregated states with the worst racism are also those with the lowest wages for white workers-and of course for black workers.

Who gains from US racism? Big employers in the racist South. Modern racism emerged with capitalism. The Atlantic powers had to justify slavery and colonialism. They invented "biological" differences between so called "races", to legitimise white domination over African and Asian peoples.

Today racism is used to divide working people across the face of world capitalism, hoping they will fight each other rather than unite against their common exploiters.

Racists claim that people of "different cultures" can't mix together. Yet the whole history of our human species suggests quite the opposite. The very languages we speak are mixtures of all sorts of different sources. Our cultures are constantly enriched by interchange with others, whether it's technology, food, music, clothing or decoration.

Against the divisive hatreds of racism, socialists always argue for solidarity with the oppressed and for working class unity. Racism, which helps no one but our rulers, is endemic in class society. But it can be combated and racists can be defeated, as was the case with apartheid in South Africa.

In Africa the notion of ancient “tribal divisions” is often used to divide workers. Yet most of these divisions were started or encouraged by imperialism.

In Rwanda the Hutu-Tutsi divide was entrenched by the Belgians in the twentieth century. Before that there were clashes but nothing on the murderous scale of recent years. Across Africa colonialists drew up artificial boundaries which set people against one another. They privileged some groups in order to make easier the process of “divide and rule”.

There is a constant war of ideas within the working class. On one hand are divisive ideas, which tie us to our rulers and leave us feeling weak, hopeless and afraid. On the other are ideas of solidarity and hope for change. Socialists have to be part of that ongoing argument, all the time.

## **CONCLUSION**

‘A better world will not be donated to us, we have to fight for it’, concluded the German revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg. But how exactly can we fight capitalism - such a big enemy? What we know is that nobody can fight capitalism alone. We need an organisation. One of the biggest things holding many workers from support for revolutionary ideas and joining a revolutionary organisation is the feeling that it is not worth them personally doing anything because other workers will never support them. Will the thinking of people ever change? Will workers ever feel their power?

Marx wrote, “The self-emancipation of the working class must be the task of the workers themselves”. But he also explained that “the prevailing ideas of every society are the ideas of the ruling class”. This seems to be a contradiction if we look at the statements separately. How can workers liberate themselves when ruling class ideas always dominate? But in reality, both statements are true and they are interlinked.

Great movements of people from the base of society can change the world. They draw their power from their capacity to mobilise large numbers of people. Movements provide most of the energy and creativity involved in great challenges to our rulers. The overthrow of capitalism will involve an immense movement from below. It will engage the self-transforming activity of millions of working people, struggling for economic, political and

cultural power.

Such a movement, developing its own democratic organisations from below, will provide the first bases for a new constitution of society.

However, there is a problem. Such movements are mixed and contradictory in their character. Great movements are not composed of people who all think and act the same way. How simple life would be if that were the case! In reality movements are full of all manner of opposed tendencies. While some voices urge more militancy, others urge moderation. Arguments for unity battle with arguments for division. Just as new forms of struggle emerge, some voices hark back to old ways of understanding and action. That's why revolutionary socialists need to organise themselves into a party to argue their case within movements. If they don't, other tendencies or parties will prevail-and hold the movement back, or lead it to defeat. But what kind of party? The task determines the form. Most parties see social change occurring through parliament. They divide their membership into two unequal parts-MPs and councillors, and the rank and file. The first group does the politics, while the rest work to get them elected.

At best, such parties aim to make things slightly better on behalf of the working class. They have a top-down view of politics. They are hierarchical and undemocratic.

For socialists, only an organised workers' movement from below can change the world. That project requires a very different kind of party. Its job is to encourage movements to make their own advances, to win their own power.

Revolutionary socialism involves a different conception of what politics is about. The job of socialists is to intervene actively in movements and struggles, always seeking to advance working class strength and understanding.

The socialist aim is to draw all the best fighters in the unions, in the anti-war, anti-racist and other movements, into a shared socialist organisation. Most of the time-apart, that is, from genuinely revolutionary situations-socialist organisations draw in only a minority of those active in movements and struggles. For most people, the prospect of socialist transformation of society seems remote from the everyday world.

## **Activity and theory**

Socialist activity demands a level of commitment which can come only from political agreement. That commitment only makes sense as part of a shared understanding of capitalism-as the key source of all human problems in the world, and as a form of society that will not last forever. Socialist activity can be understood as a mixture of two kinds of work-"propaganda" and "agitation". Propaganda means, in essence, explaining and discussing every kind of social and political question in socialist terms. It involves putting across quite complex ideas, and winning people to a shared socialist vision.

For socialists, questions of "theory" are immensely important, for two reasons. First, most movements focus on "single issues"-pay and conditions, war, anti-racism, the environment, gay rights, and so on. They deal with symptoms rather than causes. Socialists need to show the interconnections between these issues and the capitalist system that breeds the problems. Second, the history of the workers' movement and other movements is full of important lessons about defeats and victories. How do we know that racism or imperialism damage working class organisation? How do we know the rank and file must organise independently of the union bureaucracy? The short answer is, from the experience of past movements.

If those lessons are forgotten, it is easy to repeat the mistakes of the past. One job of socialist organisation is to act like a "memory bank" for working class struggle. But propaganda alone is not enough. In the end, what counts are ordinary workers' practical experiences of organising themselves effectively, building movements, winning practical victories. The everyday struggle involves immediate, tactical questions. It involves organising, whether for strikes or leafleting or mobilising an anti-war demonstration. "Agitation" is all of these things and more.

Propaganda and agitation alike involve active socialist intervention in and around movements. Doing that effectively requires a high level of democratic debate among socialists. The class struggle proceeds by way of twists and turns. Real movements go up and down. There are constant debates and arguments about the best way forward. Often it's not immediately clear how we should respond to new situations that the

struggle constantly throws up.

## **Democracy**

To be effective, socialists need to constantly evaluate the changing conditions, to work out how best to organise and act. For that, ongoing democratic debate, where we exchange our views and experiences, and decide together is vital. In "normal" political parties, decisions about strategy and tactics are left to a few leaders. Socialist organisation needs to involve every member in debate and decision. A socialist organisation is not divided into "leaders" and "rank and file", but is made up of people who work to give a lead in their own situation-in their anti-war group, in their workplace or union branch. Constant democratic debate is a practical necessity.

Finally, the socialist transformation of society by the working class has never been so urgent. In the Communist Manifesto Marx wrote that the class struggle could result "either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes." For Marx this was a brilliant theoretical speculation - he could not then have foreseen the concrete forms of this "common ruin". The 20th century showed us one possible form, nuclear war; the 21st century shows us another in the shape of climate change and global warming.

Capitalism brings us poverty, famine, division and war. It falls to the international working class to save humanity from disaster by taking power into its own hands and reorganise society not for profits but for the needs of people. This is the beginning of a socialist – and far more just society.

If you want to join the fight for socialism contact: [socialistworkersleague@gmail.com](mailto:socialistworkersleague@gmail.com)  
See also - <http://socialistworkersleague.org>

This publication was published by the **International Socialist Tendency** in Africa, January 2007. This includes the following groups in Africa:

**Botswana: International Socialists**, PO Box 601519 Gaborone,  
isbots@yahoo.com

**Ghana: International Socialist Organisation**, PO Box TF202, Trade Fair,  
Labadi, Accra. isogh@hotmail.com

**Nigeria: Socialist Workers' League**, PO Box 4, Cappa-Oshodi, Lagos  
socialistworkersleague@gmail.com

<http://socialistbulletin.wordpress.com/>

**South Africa: Keep Left**, PO Box 93428 Yeoville 2143, [socialismfrombelow@gmail.com](mailto:socialismfrombelow@gmail.com),

<http://socialismfrombelow.googlepages.com>

**Zimbabwe: International Socialist Organisation**, PO Box 6758, Harare,

[iso.zim@gmail.com](mailto:iso.zim@gmail.com)      <http://isozim.blogspot.com>

In addition, the following African groups are sympathetic to the IST:

**Mauritius:**

**Lalit** (Struggle), [www.lalitmauritius.org](http://www.lalitmauritius.org)

**Kenya:**

**Social Democratic Party** – [www.sdpkenya.org](http://www.sdpkenya.org)

**French Africa: Afrique en Lutte**: [afriquesenlutte@yahoo.fr](mailto:afriquesenlutte@yahoo.fr)

site: [www.afriquesenlutte.org](http://www.afriquesenlutte.org)

See also: [www.istendency.net](http://www.istendency.net)