

The New Colonialists

by Dave Bleakney

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"I do feel pity for your people that they must live under such a ugly system. Under your system you are taught greed, racism and corruption, and the most serious of all, the destruction of our mother earth." Leonard Peltier, U.S. political prisoner.

We are experiencing the violence of a new finely tuned colonialism. The colonialists do not always rely on direct physical force to achieve economic goals. The use of structural violence or "harm imposed by some people on others indirectly" has become a fine art.

Nearly forty years ago the economist John Kenneth Galbraith warned against promoting "a carbon copy of western capitalism". He urged caution against "urging forms of organization that are commonplace in rich countries upon the poor". The czars of the global economy did not listen.

Unabated, the economic powers pursue the narrow goal of continued economic servitude:

"The World Bank has dispensed much more than loans to the Third World. It has promulgated an intensely ideological view of how Asian, African and Latin American economies ought to behave if they are to achieve economic development. World Bank loans have been a tool through which the rich nations pry open the economies of poor nations for their own benefit".

The global system is connected by links that include the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (the Bank). They are a team, working in tandem where "under the watchful eye of the United States, The IMF and the World Bank use their muscle to open up" developing countries.

Through speculation, foreign debt, currency manipulation or other means (like the promotion of "cash crops") developing nations hang tenuously in the economic balance at any given time. The global economy has not protected the vulnerable and structural adjustment has not solved the debt. Complementary instruments like the World Trade Organization only magnify the imposed ideology leaving Southern economies unstable and vulnerable.

In the South "the vaguest rumor" can cause economic collapse while creating benefits for "intermediaries and agents" of banks and financial institutions.

The IMF and World Bank are the global financial and development police. They enforce an economic system that leaves all citizens, and in particular the developing countries, beholden to an order that subverts their interests. All are to be subject to the free, unregulated flow of goods, services and capital. These institutions are comparable to "the arm-breaking enforcers of loan sharks."

A World Bank official stationed in Africa commented, "Since so many countries are bankrupt and up to their eyes in debt, they virtually do what the IMF and the Bank say. Consequently, the Fund and the Bank play the role of heavies. It smacks of neo-imperialism".

Sometimes the influence of the economic powers ranges from the paternal to the absurd.

Saint Lucia's Foreign Minister George Odlum recently explained "The richer a country becomes, the meaner and more insensitive it becomes... Saint Lucia has been on the receiving end of a banana war with the richest country in the world, which incidentally does not produce a single banana."

Things are not much different at the World Bank. The U.S. treasury secretary Larry Summers directly rewrote sections of the Bank's World Development Report. Is this the new world order, where the world's only superpower must supervise all global economic activities?

There are other forces shadowing the so-called "democracies" of the north. While the IMF and World Bank are run by the wealthy nations under the tutelage of the United States administration and fellow travelers it is large corporate interests that are calling the shots. The Bretton Woods Agreement, devoid as it was of the involvement of poorer countries is not a vehicle for sustainable and beneficial development for the world's poor. Bretton Woods was designed by the powerful.

The IMF/World Bank have a "global economic design that affects the livelihood of more than 80 percent of the world's population." while "globalization has elevated Wall Street to be the only source of value".

The rules mirror competitive sports. There will be few winners and lots of losers. If "equal treatment among unequals leads to inequality" the IMF and World Bank, will never be a vehicle for true economic equality. It would be a rejection of their values.

They are engaged in a "world wide process of debt collection." The debt crisis was created by the wealthy as a cleverly guided extortion attempt. Like the finest of gangsters they lend money and then promptly increase the amount to be paid back.

This does not happen by accident. In Canada, business students learn that when a "company controls the movement of raw materials and finished goods, a host country has little to gain from interfering in the company's operations" and the company may "cease operations" so the country will experience a "loss of jobs."Such are the values of the free market.

There are other measures that are taught to assist future business leaders. A multinational business will mitigate unfavorable political action in the host country since the business can threaten to transfer it's operations elsewhere.

The United States is the poster child for modern capitalism. Is twenty five years of a declining living standard a reasonable trade off for privatized water, private jails for profit, the state sanctioned murder of children and a stock market with no mercy? The polarization of wealth in the USA has reached epic proportions. Chief executives used to be paid 39 times the average production worker. Today they receive 475 times what an average production worker is paid. Such are the lessons provided by the world' largest economic power.

This is not a model to emulate. It leaves too many behind. North American society serves as a model of inequality. The style has been projected around the world in this economic crusade.

One factor is the capacity of the South to participate. Developing countries are observers. They are the audience who will have decisions made on their behalf. There is virtually no African voice at the WTO, IMF, World Bank or other international trade institutions. For Africans, there are a lack of sufficient resources to monitor, research and hence effectively participate in negotiations and discussions for African nations.

Unfortunately, whether by design or not, we are left with a situation of a "cap in hand" style of consultation. "One cannot pretend that 'civil society' can be represented by 350 NGOs carefully selected by the institutions of globalization that finance them...these NGOs are deprived of all legitimacy, of any democratic mandate to represent the 6 billion people living on the planet. This is a mock democracy, a universal intellectual fraud."

Even the one billion dollars recently provided as aid to help fight HIV in Africa by the Inter-Development Bank will help western pharmaceutical agents profit on human suffering. Africans will be left with the bills rather than be allowed any long term effective structure to deal with the issue. Aid becomes tragic farce. Who benefits?

The modern method of exploitation, in most cases, is far less messy than the murderous colonialism of the past. The use of structural violence is working to maintain and extend an unequal world with as little collateral damage to the north as possible. Sublime television images, respecting the powers of the day, keep the real face of poverty hidden. The truth hurts.

What can be done to stop the continuing pillage of the planet on behalf of the "market"?

Our value system is askew. The use of GNP as a measurement of development is fatally flawed. Productive life has been consistently measured by a "more is better" approach. Measurements relating to other qualities of human existence are missing. What is the value of a child's smile? A bird's cry? Clean water? Laughter? Joy? Happiness? What measurement is there for meaningful participation in a society?

Growth cannot be measured solely by production/profit ledgers. There are too many human factors absent. The time has come for the development and implementation of meaningful social indicators. New definitions are required. It requires full and equal consultation between and among peoples.

Values such as sharing must replace hoarding. Some have suggested a "maximum standard of wealth and resources transfer". This would place restrictions on how much wealth one could accumulate or acquire from others.

There is little question that the IMF/World Bank are attempting to become improve their public profile as criticism mounts against them. This has partly been in response to the growing level of resistance worldwide. There will be unprecedented attempts to divide and splinter the opposition by the powerful economies.

Possibilities for financing new stages of development in poor countries conflict with the needs of the stock market. But indebted countries are already starting to regain some lost political ground.

The Group of 77 has been more vocal recently. The model of western capitalism is not looking so rosy.

If the Group of 77 were to cease paying their debts collectively this would raise the stakes and certainly create the possibility of a 'new world order'. There are moral reasons to do so. The debt has been paid several times over. Besides, the ecological debt created by consumer societies is a much greater liability. This would be a difficult situation for the world's superpower. There would be incredible pressure to break such a movement, but as any worker can tell you, there is strength in numbers. At the very least, developing countries must protect their local markets and people from continuous extortion.

Indebted countries must seek increased fair trade with one another where possible. The need to acquire northern technology mitigates their capacity to do so. The developing countries must explore and develop new procedures in order to acquire the technology they need. It won't be easy, but there are several states outside the G-8 and OECD that have significant technological infrastructure. For example, both India and Brazil currently have the capacity for highly technical areas of production.

One can participate strategically in a global forum and still question its validity. Too often, meaningless 'consultation' has been used as a vehicle of communication. Parties must recognize when a consultation is a consultation and not a public relations exercise on the behalf of a powerful interest. Frequently, activists become part of the system they are trying to change. In the end, these institutions and organizations like the Organization of American States are there to manage resistance to injustice, not embrace it.

We can become stronger allies working to confront global transnationals if northern activists work with the southern activists as equals. There are several "development" projects worldwide confronted on the ground by local people and in northern financial centers simultaneously. Such grass roots efforts are to be promoted and encouraged. They are marvelous examples of solidarity. When French farmers take on McDonalds, while Indian peasants confront Monsanto, or as Ecuadorians take over the streets in the name of justice, millions watch from the sidelines, cheering on every move.

The new economic order must be forced to acknowledge alternative models. Experiments in social organization and economic production must be allowed to evolve without the hand of capitalism in every pot. Human dignity and ingenuity must replace dogma.

Progressives around the world must continue to network, as equals, to confront the economic devastation of whole cultures. New allies must be found that recognize diversity as a strength. The use of the Internet (although still predominantly a rich nations tool) is vital. It is not surprising grass roots networks like Peoples Global Action have developed alliances among popular groups to work together when they can. A democratization of resistance is needed. The Internet can never replace local grass roots organizing, but it can augment it in new ways by being a conduit through which our diversity of struggle is celebrated.

North-South solidarity is growing. In the north, where trade unions have long been engaged in bargaining and administering collective agreements with their employers rather than communicating with their members there is a window of opportunity. Radical youth and trade unionists are marching and challenging corporate power.

Trade unions have money and members. They are also sometimes the toughest nuts to crack.

Protectionism and the administration of collective agreements often prevail over organizing for effective change in the status quo. Trade unions frequently spend more time communicating with their employers than with their members. Yet many local unions are joining with others to fight for the community, rather than merely working conditions of their members.

As the Cold War fades to the background, the trade unions need to acknowledge that the post war era of labor relations has ended and as trade unionists gain confidence (and leave petty nationalism behind) they will be formidable allies in the quest for global justice.

Trade unions cannot adopt protectionist models in the North without playing into the hands of the transnationals. Our solidarity must be open and recognize the common struggle of working people everywhere, not only workers at home. Participants at the trade union sponsored Open World Conference warned that the labor movement needs to avoid the constant attempts by global capitalism to co-opt unions. Unions are becoming "instruments of their own destruction."

If we recognize the possibilities we can release the safety lever on fear and apathy. These are natural by-products of loneliness and isolation.

The human spirit is stirring against injustice and economic servitude. There have been a growing number of street protests in the north against various players in global capitalism. In fact, in North America barely a month goes by without a major mobilization directed against a major player in the expansion of economic dominance. More and more politicians, businessmen and bankers are meeting behind armed guards and chain linked fences.

The Canadian trade minister Pettigrew explained "Who can deny that a new model came to light in Seattle?"

When people marched in Seattle, Washington, Windsor and Philadelphia they were expressing their common struggle and humanity with others around the world. While it is true some of the anti-globalization forces are strikingly protectionist and self-serving, they are not to be found on the front lines. Those on the barricades who put their bodies on the line are borrowing a page from the history of the trade unions and generations of previous struggle: non-violent economic disruption in the cause of the greater good.

No longer must we go cap in hand and try to convince global pirates of mitigating their greed through polite requests. The sudden change in agendas at the OECD, G-8 and the EU (where suddenly everyone is talking about debt relief, corporate responsibility, poor nations, etc) has been brought about by rising militancy in the south and north.

There will be increased efforts to co-opt progressive forces. Dropping our paternalist consumerism and dealing with our Southern allies directly as sisters and brothers in common struggle will strengthen all that would reject selfish values. Let us sing the same tune with many harmonies.

It is doubtful that the IMF and the World Bank will ever be a beneficial instrument for the South. The colonial powers will do everything they can to maintain their position of control. It will take a collective push to promote change. People seeking justice must go *around* these institutions if necessary.

It has always been a question of power. Those who organize and coalesce around decent values can win. They must. They will.

Ottawa, August 2000

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