

## ARE PROTEST MARCHES “USELESS?”

Recently on social media, a respected left-wing commentator referred to mass protests such as the anti-Trump “No Kings” protest as “useless.” By extension, one might reasonably infer that he regards all peaceful protest as “useless.” In his tweet, he goes on to say, “To be effective, protests must disrupt the machinery of the state itself, which is why to build true power we need a militant labour movement that will engage in mass striking.”



This is an oversimplification. It betrays a lack of understanding of social dynamics and a disregard of history. Power in the hands of a predatory ruling class is a centuries-old perversion, but something which has never gone uncontested by the subjugated masses, whose resistance has taken many forms. Strike action by an organised labour force has been but one means of opposing injustice; as just mentioned, mass action has always taken multiple forms, including peaceful marches, especially in the modern era. We must avoid the temptation to invest too heavily in the notion of “strike action by an organised labour force” as the silver bullet overriding all other forms of protest

and resistance. Jasper Bernes reminds us that “the twenty-first century is nothing like the nineteenth, which was characterised by rapid industrialization, urbanization, and proletarianization.” Thus, the early-to-mid twentieth century was a highpoint of proletarian struggle, manifesting particularly in workplace forms of struggle, including strike action.

The emergence of neoliberalism in the 1970s and 1980s was in large measure a response by capitalist class interests to working class gains, particularly in the postwar years. “Class struggle *from above*” was an assault on working class power, and was the beginning of the end of:

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“.....politically guaranteed full employment, collective society-wide wage formation negotiated with free trade unions, worker participation at workplace and enterprise level, state control of key industries, a broad public sector with secure employment as a model for the private sector, universal social rights protected from competition, tax and income policies that kept inequality within tight limits, and government cyclical and industrial policies to secure steady growth. This was the beginning of the neoliberal era - a stage of capitalism that emerged in the wake of the structural crisis of the 1970s. It expresses the strategy of the capitalist classes in alliance with upper management, specifically financial managers, intending to strengthen their hegemony and to expand it globally.

(James Petras’s article, “*Latin America: Class Struggle from Above and Below*, 2014).

In the third decade of the twenty-first century the assault on working class rights (and organising capability) intensifies, what with relentless, ongoing automation of the production process. It is now necessary to acknowledge the emergence and growth of “the precariat.”

The term “precariat” refers to a social class characterized by precarious, insecure, and unstable employment conditions. It’s a portmanteau of “precarious” and “proletariat,” highlighting the precarity faced by this group, which often includes low-wage, part-time, or temporary workers with few benefits. This precarity can manifest as unpredictable income, a lack of job security, and limited opportunities for advancement, impacting their material and psychological well-being. (per Google, June 2025)

There are numerous cases of groups of precarious workers (such as Amazon store packers and Uber drivers, for example) attempting – at times successfully, but certainly against great odds – to take industrial action in their interests as workers. However, the reality of precarity has created the challenge of how to arrest the erosion of working class power, and restore the vanguard role of the working class in the anti-capitalist struggle.

Given the neoliberal assault not only on working

conditions but also living standards more generally, it should not be surprising that the focus of struggle has broadened to include – as part of the anti-capitalist struggle – “other emancipatory currents: feminist, ecological, political, anti-imperialist, and anti-racist.” (from Nancy Fraser’s *Cannibal Capitalism*)

An additional point worth noting is that not all working class struggle has been directed at bringing down the system of capitalism. Ellen Meiksins Wood distinguishes what she calls “protective strategies, in terms of which workers and working class people fight to defend what they have (for example, the fight against gentrification or dispossession of their land) and for basic demands (such as housing and public services).”

Some of the more prominent struggles in the last 30 years have been such struggles as referred to by both Fraser and Meiksins Wood above. One thinks of The Arab Spring; The Occupy Movement, and now, the global Pro-Palestinian Struggle. While these might not have been overtly aimed at overthrowing the capitalist system, given the latter’s all-encompassing stranglehold, success would certainly lead to a weakening of that system.

In his book *The Future of Revolution* (2025), Jasper Bernes enumerates what’s in the revolutionary arsenal of the working class, including:

The party, the union, the commune; the uprising, the insurrection, the revolution; the strike, sabotage, seizure; anarchism, socialism, communism— all of this is from the nineteenth century. What is new is only the workers’ council, the soviet, born in 1905 in Russia from the fires of the mass strike.

As can be seen, the working class has a wide range of options to draw on as they confront an out-of-control capitalism in the twenty-first century. It would therefore be self-defeating to dismiss any form within this range as “useless.”

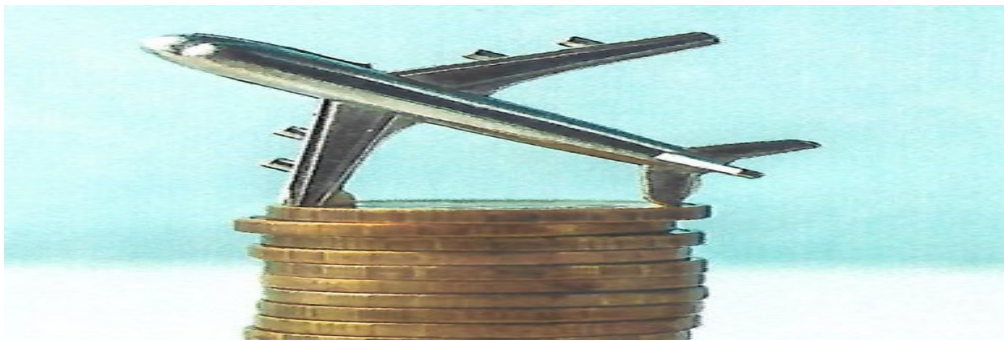
At the current conjuncture, where the working class worldwide finds itself defending against a rising fascism, the nature of struggle will be – in Gramscian terms – a “war of position.” That is, a struggle involving agitation and the undermining of ruling class hegemony, where the ruling classes are stripped of their legitimacy.

## CAPITAL FLIGHT - WHAT TO DO

by John Yu (2001)

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**You have just overthrown the government, your far left party has just won a landslide election, or your vast coalition of civic, labor, and religious institutions have simply decided to come together and ignore the existing government. Capitalists are fleeing your country in their private jets. Investors have pulled out all their money. Foreign banks run by capitalists suddenly decide they are no longer willing to make any loans to your "rogue" nation. The former dictator has packed up all his suitcases full of gold, jewels, and cash from your national treasury, and is now nowhere to be found.**



### Now what?

Economic collapse? Mass unemployment? Depression and starvation? No, of course not.

Wealth is not to be found in currency, in the so-called "precious" metals, in paintings by long-dead painters. None of those are needed to survive. Wealth is found in food, in warmth, in health care, and in the things necessary to produce them. All the land is still yours. All the labor is still yours. Even factory equipment remains, despite the flight of "capital" - that is, the loss of things that represent wealth, but are not wealth themselves. In fact, very little has been lost and virtually all of the productive capacity of your nation remains. All that has changed is the accounting.

Your nation may still have in its treasury the remnants of the capitalist financial structure - gold, other precious metals, paper money from nations around the world. Spend it - as soon as possible. Buy commodities - those things you need to survive and buy any equipment you need to produce the goods you need. That is the real wealth to people who actually have to do the work.

What happens in the rest of the world as the people of your nation are suddenly flooding it with various currencies and "precious" metals, while snapping up real goods? The supply of those currencies and "precious" metals go up, while the supply of real goods go down. These goods become more and more expensive, while "money"

becomes more and more worthless. Thus, there is all the more reason to exchange your money as soon as possible for real goods you will need.

When all the old money has been spent, you are free to live, work, and produce the things you need. Self-reliance is the only secure form of wealth. Trade with other nations can still be conducted, but do not hold on to their money - money is mere promise of future wealth, promises that can be broken whether from malice or from inability to fulfill them. Exchange any money for real wealth as soon as you can.

Money within your own economy should be based on real wealth. When farmers produce a bushel of grain, let them issue a paper note representing that bushel of grain. Since that paper note can be redeemed for precisely that amount of grain, there is no inflation between the notes and the grain. These paper notes can be collected by larger farmer organizations that then reissue new notes based on a diversified index of what they produce. While the value of money issued in this way may fluctuate with respect to goods not on the index, it will not change with respect to the goods that back these paper notes. This is the first step to currency stability.

However, be warned that these notes are still only as good as the institutions that issue them. Either you trust that they can always be redeemed, or you redeem them as soon as it is convenient. This

is especially true of money you receive from other nations that is supposedly backed in the same way. Distance makes people bolder and less hesitant to break promises. Ultimately, however, convenience would probably mean you will place your trust in an organization of like-minded people who will help each other ensure that what you have is really what you have - although you should make sure there are alternatives should you decide to change your mind.

People can probably be trusted when times are easy and when prosperity reigns, but when times are tough, promises are much easier to break than the laws of survival. This is what makes self-reliance of an economy important. This is why local industry and agriculture should be protected. Productive ability is the real source of wealth of the nation.

However, natural disasters also occur. While the world as a whole may be fairly stable, the area around you is much more prone to random fluctuations of climate and geology. Thus self-reliance is not the entirety of a secure economy, but merely the supporting structure. The secondary source of security is prosperity in other geographical locations. The more prosperous others are, the more likely they will come to your aid in times of trouble. The more they have to thank you for their prosperity, the more likely they will come to your aid. Again, merely being creditors to their debt is not enough. Nations are sovereign, whether anarchist or authoritarian. They can break their promises - they can ignore any legalistic claims to debt. It is the general goodwill that can be fostered between two nations or people that will be your salvation in case your own self-reliance fails.

In the end, capital flight isn't really capital flight. Real capital - the people, natural resources, and equipment needed to produce real goods - cannot be packed up in a bag when the capitalist skips town. They will require a lot of labor if they truly want to escape with real capital. What remains when the capitalists are gone are merely the people who are doing the work, and the means to do it.

#### COMMENT ON THE ABOVE ARTICLE

This certainly is a provocative article, and challenges one to consider the feasibility of the scenario sketched. Of course, there are numerous

challenges a country in this situation would encounter, not least the hostility of the Capitalist-Imperialists. If the ferocity with which they are destroying Palestine is an indicator, then their assault will be swift and merciless. It could be expected that the "losers" within the country - chiefly the local capitalists and their hangers-on, would ally themselves with the counter-revolution, and seek to undermine any and all attempts at national self-reliance. Which raises the next hurdle - that of the neoliberal value chain. This means that many countries do not have the necessary diversity in their domestic economies to begin with, since their economies have been structured to provide a single, specialised input to a wider global production process, for example, perhaps a particular economy's single contribution to the global economy is raw coffee beans. Such a country will face an uphill battle to achieve self-sufficiency, at least in the short term.

The article's starting point is the collapse of the existing regime, which presupposes a successful insurrection has happened. Thus, it posits the question, "where to from here?" It is a question not much different from the one which confronted the Paris Commune of 1871.

An article such as this would provide good material for small group discussions/debates on the way forward - on potential pathways to a socialist future.

In such discussions/debates, we would do well to bear in mind the cautionary note sounded by Frantz Fanon in his "The Wretched of the Earth:"

It sometimes occurs during a meeting that a militant's answer to a difficult problem is: "All we need to do is ..." This voluntary shortcut, which dangerously combines spontaneity, simplistic syncretism, and little intellectual elaboration, frequently wins the day. Every time we encounter this abdication of responsibility in a militant it is not enough to say he is wrong. He has to be made responsible, encouraged to follow through his chain of reasoning to its conclusion, and taught to grasp the often atrocious, inhuman, and finally sterile nature of this "All you need to do is . . ."



## THE ULTIMATE BETRAYAL

Writing in April 1994, Phyllis Ntantala asks; *“Did the ANC betray South Africa?”* Her answer was an unequivocal **“NO”**. However, she explains: there is a revolutionary dictum that states, *“No class ever betrays its own interests. What we have is a classical deal: the Afrikaner bourgeoisie ditching the white working class, and the ANC dropping all pretence of ever having represented the Black working class and peasantry”*.

**Dr Phyllis Ntantala (1920 – 2016)** was probably one of the greatest South African feminist intellectual activists.

**Is this the reason why we often hear the clarion call of, “A Luta Continua?”**

The abolition of racial discrimination in our legislation after 1994 did very little or nothing to change the material conditions of the working poor of this country. This should not be surprising, given that “race” and “capitalism” have always gone hand-in-glove, and that the 1994 settlement was all about securing the future of capitalism, not about eliminating poverty, not about the jobless situation in our country and certainly not about equality and justice for all.

According to reports poverty is on the rise in South Africa and living conditions are getting worse. The income inequality that exists, the rate of unemployment (highest in the world) and the National Development Plan announced with much fanfare, in August 2012, that outlines a long-term vision and plan to eliminate poverty and inequality by 2030 has missed most if not all interim targets, and some are even moving in the wrong direction.



Ramaphosa as leader of the Government of National Unity (GNU) has again promised large-scale infrastructural initiatives. However, a closer look informs us that most of these are empty promises. Similar promises were made by Zuma in 2009 and again in 2014. The World Bank has recently granted a loan of R26.5 billion to address the country’s economic challenges, particularly in the energy and freight transport sectors as well as to

boost infrastructure development. The IMF visited SA from 1 – 8 July 2024 to receive an update on the economic developments as well as to conduct a Post Financing Assessment. This was to ascertain the ability of the country to repay the USD 4.3 billion loan of July 2020 to support the country’s balance of payments in the aftermath of Covid-19.

According to Finance Minister, Enoch Godongwana, at present, **it costs the country R389 billion annually** to service the debt.

With this type of investment in infrastructure, it would be expected that construction companies

would be flourishing. However, Murray and Roberts is in business rescue, so is Basil Read and Group Five has been in serious trouble for some time. Promises have been made as

regards Phase Two of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project. Once completed, it is expected to provide more than 490 million cubic meters of water every year to the Vaal Dam. It is supposed to provide water to several provinces for years to come. However, since its inception the project has been dogged by corruption and court cases involving both individuals and multinational companies.

The NATIONAL DIALOGUE is now being promoted as elixir to our manifold problems, a grand exercise in consultation to address South Africa's deep-seated socio-economic and political crises. However, beyond the rhetoric it appears to be a manoeuvre to pacify the voting public and the popular dissatisfaction brewing in ANC ranks

social fabric of South African society.

It is not the people of South Africa who are responsible for all the ills that have crippled and befallen South Africa, but the economic and political system of capitalism-imperialism that has been adopted by the former "liberation"



## ADMINISTRATIVE CAPITAL—TSHWANE/PRETORIA

and most of SA. The National Dialogue is meant to lend legitimacy to the new arrangement, to pacify discontented masses while preserving the power of capital and entrenched interests. A local politician in the Johannesburg metro unwittingly pronounced that it is a "power" struggle and certainly not one of service.

The New Unity Movement has since the dawn of "democracy" in 1994 stated that the post-apartheid state would be characterised by inequality, unemployment, poverty, landlessness, racism and crime. The National Dialogue is merely a façade to plaster over the ever-widening cracks that will lead to a total breakdown in the

organisation in the form of the ANC.

South Africa is in terminal decline. The symptoms are stark. However, the GNU only envisions that a neoliberal solution is the answer to all our problems. The crisis in SA is not only looming, it is deepening. Youth unemployment is above 60%, more than 40% of citizens are unemployed, we have a failing health system, the National Health Insurance (NHI) cannot get off the ground, education is in a mess, gender-based violence has reached pandemic proportions, crime is out of control, children go to school hungry, malnutrition and stunted growth are the order of the day, the postal and rail services are almost non-

existent and so we can go on *ad nauseum*.

Local governments are in a parlous state. Potholes and absence of street lighting are commonplace in all municipalities. Refuse removal blights the landscape in all but the smaller villages and dorps. The provision of clean drinking water is cause for concern and in many local governments households purchase water from local vendors. Power outages have become endemic and are mostly attributed to the malfunction or collapse of essential systems that support a society or economy, the failures normally result from various factors, mostly, ageing infrastructure. The effects range from minor interruptions to extensive chaos, affecting daily life, financial activity, and public safety.

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> attempt to pass the budget Enoch Godongwana announced that fuel levies will be increased to offset the budget shortfall of R22.3 billion announced at the February budget speech. This was to replace the increase in VAT that was announced at the previous attempts. What will be the knock-on effect in the increase of the fuel levies? This will no doubt cast a wider net as all of the population will pay an added hidden tax. This will be an additional burden on the poor, as cost of living is due to increase as fuel prices are increased. **NOW? A deafening silence from all and sundry.**

Why the silence?

Richard S Canca, editor of *The New Teachers' Vision* had this to say in the October – December 1955 issue:

*Man's domination over domesticated animals is*

*not so much a question of his ability to overcome them physically as it is the fact that they accept his dominant position. In like manner, the domination of one human group by another is never, complete unless and until the subordinate class mentally accepted his thralldom.*

One might expect such policies to provoke outrage from across the political spectrum. However, no effective parliamentary opposition to the neoliberal policies of the present GNU exists. Only the fractured extra-parliamentary left opposes such measures.

This is a society in total systemic breakdown.

Phyllis Ntantala (2003) in an article *Mistakes and Miscalculations: The Agreement* (unpublished article) says

*"The agreement cobbled by the South African regime and the ANC at Kempton Park is one of the biggest frauds that was ever sold to a people ... it was agreed to give the reins of power to the ANC on condition that ... the Economic Structure was left intact".*

The longer we allow neoliberalism to dictate the course of events in South Africa, the deeper the crises will become. A clarion call should go out to the left to unite to chart a different course. The burgeoning leftist movement in our country would have to unite, proceed along a path of anti-imperialism and nonracialism. In order to intervene in the present political space, in order to strengthen and to build our movement, and in order to realise the political and organisational objectives we have set ourselves, we need to come together and unite in a front of action and defence.

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