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## DOES DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY ACCELERATE THE TRANSITION TO SOCIALISM?

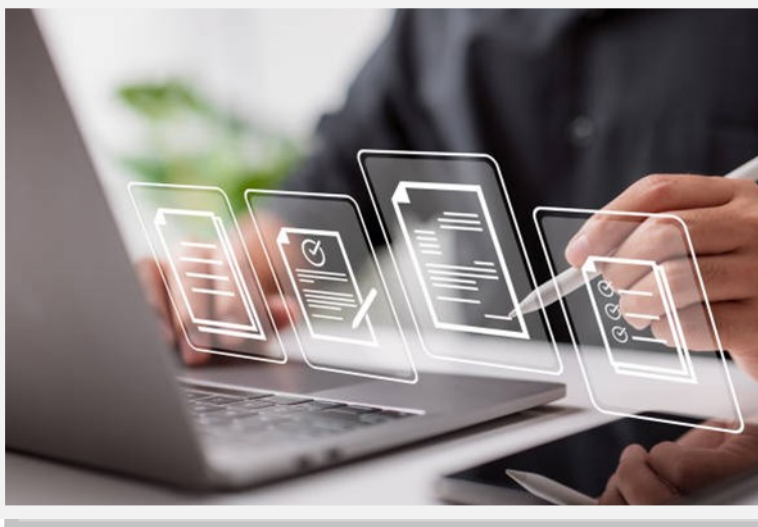
Recent advances in technology, specifically that of Artificial Intelligence (AI) have re-ignited the debate on whether we are closer to the socialist transformation of the (global) economy, or whether capitalism's hegemony has been extended and solidified.

While many commentators are waxing lyrical about the wonders of AI, particularly its power to boost productivity to new, unheard-of heights, others are cautioning against exaggeration. As a matter of interest, Gary Marcus and Ernest Davis wrote an article (Wired, September 2019) which they titled, "If Computers Are So Smart, How Come They Can't Read?" in which they show that "reading isn't just about statistics, it's about synthesizing knowledge: combining what you already know with what the author is trying to tell you. Kids manage that routinely; machines still haven't."

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that advances in digital technology have produced tools which not only enhance workers' productivity and reduce drudgery, but also automate their jobs away.

Analyst Aaron Benanav (2021) has produced research which challenges the impact of digital

technology's culpability in the global jobs bloodbath. He shows that capitalists, under the imperative to remain competitive, have always turned to labour-saving technology, thereby raising labour productivity, generally (in other words, more



technology versus fewer workers automatically means increased labour productivity). However, the real culprit in job loss/stagnation is not increased labour productivity but reduced production. In short, capitalism has reached a stage where it can no longer produce sustained periods of economic growth.

The question has arisen: can our modern-day computing power strengthen the transition from capitalism to socialism?

For some, the answer is "Yes," and the power to create new information by companies such as Google and Amazon, as well as Walmart (there is a book by Leigh Phillips and Michal Rozworski titled,

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“The Peoples’ Republic of Walmart: How the World’s Biggest Corporations are laying the Foundation for Socialism.” (2019)) have reached a point which makes socialist planning of production for needs rather than profits, a feasible option going forward. The basic thesis is that Big Data now puts so much relevant information at our disposal, that the planning problem is solved. To quote Benanav from another article of his (2019):

. . . The internet would make it possible to funnel large quantities of information from all over the world into planning systems, almost instantaneously. Gigantic leaps in computer power would make it possible to process all of this data rapidly. Meanwhile, machine learning and other forms of artificial intelligence could sift through it, to discover emergent patterns and adjust resource allocations appropriately. In *The People’s Republic of Walmart*, Leigh Phillips and Michal Rozworski argue that large companies like Walmart and Amazon already use these digital tools for internal planning—and that they now need only be adapted for socialist use.

However, Benanav goes on to make the critical point that digital planning tools alone will not result in socialism. “Societies of the future,” he observes, “will want to do more than just produce as much as possible using the fewest resources. They will have other goals, which are more difficult to quantify, such as wanting to address issues of justice, fairness, work quality, and sustainability - and these are not just matters of optimization.”

In a nutshell, he proposes that digital planning technology be supplemented by what he terms “planning protocols,” in terms of which society intervenes to create the rules and decisions for what is to be produced. The scope of this article does not allow one to go into detail about what these rules or decisions would be, nor how they are to be put into practice. However, Bananav provides some insight when he says:

In a socialist society, the entire [global] population would control production. Decision-making power would be democratized, and this would almost certainly lead to different kinds of decisions being made. Should people begin to run their own workplaces,

they would likely decide to introduce all sorts of changes, such as those related to working conditions, for instance, or to how tasks are organized and assigned. Efficiency, whether calculated in terms of energy use, resource consumption, or labor time, would remain a concern, but it would no longer be the sole concern. It would simply be one of many. Other considerations—dignity, justice, community, sustainability—would also enter the picture.

Thus, the combination of super computing power which already exists, and grassroots-level participation in planning and decision-making for needs, via “planning protocols” offers a genuine pathway forward.

Our immediate task is clear: we need to seize hold of and democratise the means of production

## NEW WINE IN OLD BOTTLES

A hempen thread of nonracialism and free, compulsory education ran through the educational demands of the political programmes of all liberatory organisations pre-1994.

In summary, the main points on education in the Freedom Charter of the ANC of 1955 read as follows:

- *The doors of learning and culture shall be opened.*
- *Education shall be free, compulsory, universal and equal for all children.*

The Azanian Manifesto of 1984 has the following provisions included in its programme:

- *In a socialist Worker Republic of Azania, there shall be free and compulsory education for all.*
- *The education system shall be geared at liberating the people from all forms of oppression, exploitation and ignorance.*

The Unity Movement in its revised political programme in 2012, stated that it is committed to a programme of transitional demands aimed at precipitating the formation of a people's democracy and has the following main points on education;

- *Compulsory, free, equal and unsegregated education for all.*
- *All racialism and ethnicism at all primary, secondary and tertiary levels must be removed. Non-racial schools, colleges, and further- and higher education institutions shall be open to all who seek an education.*

### What has since transpired?

The ANC by popular vote assumed power in 1994. However, the ANC betrayed the aspirations of the working people. The education system has since been a massive failure,

The Western Cape Education Department has signalled the further demeaning of the public education system by announcing that Wesgro, the official agency responsible for promoting tourism, trade and investment in the region, will establish a Private, Public Partnership (PPP) viz. Edu Invest, to 'fuel education' innovation in the Western Cape.

The implications of this are, with the Curro schools and initiatives such as UCT's online school already firmly established as part of the private school industry, Edu Invest schools (just another form of privatisation of the education system) is set to become another arm of this broadening industry commodification of education..

When news broke about this in the newspapers it just seemed like "new wine in old bottles". The "new wine" being that the WCED has conjured up a new scheme to "solve" the education crisis. The "old bottles" is the attempt to infer that these are plans emanating from the WCED, yet, not dissimilar plans were included in the (extinct) Nationalist Party's published education policy of 1991. These plans were based on the Eiselen-De Vos

Malan report of 1951 and the De Lange commission's report of 1981. However, the 2024 version is much like the 1991 Education Renewal Strategy (ERS).

The report included payment by parents of school fees and more exit points that allow children to do vocational training. This in all probability will be mostly the children from the township schools.

This is typical of those further exploiting the poor, first starve the poor of basic human rights, then offer what they put forward as an elixir (privatisation) for the ills, and then further exploit the poor:

The socio-economic factors indivisibly woven into the education system are characterised by underfunding, overcrowded classrooms, crumbling infrastructure, geographical disparities, home language barriers, historical inequalities and poor teacher quality. These are the main causes of demeaning outcomes.

Further debasement of the education system is revealed in the Oppenheimer Memorial Trust Education Research report that only 55% of South African teachers can perform at Grade 4 children level internationally.

The report exposed that

- 80% of Gr. 6 Mathematics learners were taught

by teachers with mathematics subject knowledge below the Gr. 6 level

Only 55% of South African teachers met the intermediate benchmark of Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) – which 82% of all Gr. 4 learners achieved internationally.

The conclusion is that a large percentage of South African teachers lack the basic subject-knowledge of the subjects they are teaching. It was widely reported that a university of Pretoria study conducted on behalf of the PIRLS 2021 has found that 81% of Grade 4 learners cannot read for comprehension at age 10.

A further breakdown occurs when many of the lecturers at the universities do not have the pedagogical (may have academic) skills to teach those that are training to become teachers.

The Basic Education Laws Amendment Act (BELAA) makes it compulsory for learners to be admitted to school at Grade R level. Great Idea – **CANNOT BE IMPLEMENTED. Why?**

- If all those children are going to be enrolled at schools – the education department will be sitting with a massive accommodation problem. If a school has 6 Gr. 1 classes it is logical that at a certain stage there will be 6 Gr. R classes. Most of these schools at present have only one and for the most two Gr. R classes.
- There is a dearth of educators/teachers in the Early Child Development (ECD) phase. Currently, there are no definite plans to train qualified ECD teachers.
- With current budgetary constraints the ECD classes are under resourced – this will be more so if additional strain is added to the budget.

In the Western Cape, with a shortfall in the education budget of R3.8 billion it is estimated that budget cuts will negatively affect the staff establishment at schools as 2400 posts are deemed to be at risk. All provinces are under extreme pressure, with KwaZulu-Natal by far the worst off. Contract educators may not be reappointed, and some permanent staff might be redeployed. KwaZulu-Natal's situation is even more dire, with 11,092 teaching posts potentially affected. The province is grappling with a R4 billion budget deficit, forcing cuts in essential services such as Norms and Standards payments to schools.

Further challenges affecting schools in South Afri-

ca are

- With the rising cost of living, parents are going to be further burdened and constrained by paying school fees and in fundraising efforts. This will put an added burden on schools to function optimally
- SA's declining educational standards as benchmarked by studies in the results of the Pirls study of 2021, monitored over a five-year period showed a steady decline.
- The four-year Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) that assesses mathematics and science knowledge of the fourth and eighth grade learners show that South African educational performance outcomes have improved. However, SA is still close to the bottom of the class and unequal. These gaps in the results (between well-resourced schools and township/rural schools) in educational outcomes continue to be linked to socioeconomic circumstances.

There are many who believe that harsher socio-economic policies are likely under the GNU. For starters, the feeding trough for parliamentarians has been significantly enlarged, with 9 additional cabinet ministers. Members of parliament are remunerated to the tune of more than R1 million per annum. A cabinet minister gets a salary of more than R2.6 million per annum, while a MEC will be paid R2.1 million per annum. If the country needs budget cuts, surely this should be where we start. To bring about changes, to eradicate poverty and inequality, and to create employment the government must have political and economic power. However, the government is tied to the capitalist system where the rich become richer and the poor become poorer. We have to break the shackles that bind us to this capitalist system

The sooner we realise that what is happening in South Africa today is not what we have struggled for, the sooner we will realise that we will have to continue the struggle for a South Africa we can all desire - free of exploitation, oppression and corruption. We need to destroy the capitalist system that breeds poverty, unemployment, crime and violence.

## PALESTINE: THE STRUGGLE AGAINST SETTLER COLONIALISM

Biden has created another red line; this time he has threatened to withdraw military funding to Israel's genocidal war in the Middle East after thirty days.

There are various ways of looking at this. On the one hand, it could simply be the same old empty rhetoric we've become used to – rhetoric that the US regime (even as it continues unabated to supply tons and tons of deadly explosives to the Zionist regime) feels necessary to put on record, possibly in the hope that posterity will judge it kindly. (For example, the US delegation to the UN has suddenly begun spouting humanitarian concerns for the people of Gaza – these crocodile tears in addition to Blinken's incessant hand-wringing).

On the other hand, it could be code-speak for: Intensify your campaign in the next month, so that we can maximise our bargaining power at the "negotiating" table, where we can continue the war by other means.



It is not inconceivable that, following a Democratic Party victory at the presidential polls in November, an endless round of "negotiations" will be initiated. We are then likely to see a ceasefire (that is, a let up in the continuous bombardment of Gaza); haggling over whether the future should be a one-state or two-state solution; and plans for some sort of rebuilding effort in Gaza. No doubt, too, there will be some serious attempt to de-radicalize Hamas (via the tempting power of US dollars?).

We've seen it all before. What it amounts to is a (strategic) pause in the long-term plans to complete the settler-colonial project, whose Final Solution is the entire subjugation of Gaza (and the West Bank) under Israeli occupation and rule. It would then be a matter of conjecture about when such pause will end, and hostilities will be resumed.

What about Israel's war crimes? Is there a credible scenario under which Netanyahu and Gallant will actually appear in the dock to defend themselves? This brings to mind the process of "denazification" which followed WWII – when the emphasis was on criminal prosecution rather than real political change in the conditions which created nazification in Germany in the first place. This way, Zionist settler-

colonialism will escape prosecution in favour of specific individuals (Netanyahu, Gallant and others) taking the hit.

Mahmood Mamdani (2020) puts it very well:

The depoliticization of genocide in Germany was the result of a de-

liberate and organised process. In the immediate aftermath of World War II and the Holocaust, the victorious Allies in the West reinvented Nazism as an accumulation of individual crimes rather than a political project. By identifying Nazism with the crimes of hundreds of thousands even millions of individuals, denazification became a punitive effort rather than a politically transformative one. The Americans, British, and French all sought, with varying degrees of commitment, to punish individual Germans but not to transform the political institutions and social relations that made the holocaust thinkable and desirable inside Germany and among its allies.

And so, while we support all moves to bring the Netanyahus and Gallants plus the Bidens and Blinkens to trial for their genocidal crimes, we hold that the real underlying problem is that of settler colonialism, and that the struggle for the emancipation of Palestine will need to continue until this scourge is eradicated.

***FROM THE RIVER TO THE SEA, PALESTINE WILL BE FREE!!!***

## WORTH QUOTING

### CLIMATE ACTION IN THE AGE OF GENOCIDE

**We live in profoundly uncertain times. 2023 was the hottest year on record, and 2024 is set to be even hotter. Scientists cannot predict with certainty how these rising temperatures will do to the Earth's complex, dynamic and delicate systems.**



One such system is the absorption of carbon by forests, soil, plants, and oceans. Collectively known as natural carbon sinks, they soak up about half of humanity's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Without them, global heating would accelerate.

This week, an international team of researchers released preliminary findings that show the forests, soils and oceans that have quietly absorbed humanity's excess carbon are now breaking down. The land — forests, plants and soil — absorbed almost no CO<sub>2</sub> this past year, and the ocean's capacity to buffer our emissions is weakening as sea temperatures rise.

In short, it's worse than we thought. The stable climate of the Holocene — an era that allowed human civilisation to flourish for over 12,000 years — has come to a close. We are entering a new geological era defined by disruption and instability.

We may not know where this new geologic age is going, but we know the culprit that brought us here: The current epoch of human history, defined by the colonial mode of accumulation, which we can call the

Age of Genocide.

Since 1492, the world has been shaped by a European — then Euro-Atlantic — ruling class project of domination. It sought to exploit and extract resources from every corner of the globe — human lives be damned. This project carved a brutal path through entire continents, drawing a "global colour line" that divided humanity into those who would accumulate wealth and power, and those who would suffer under the weight of violence and exploitation. Genocide and enslavement became the tools of an increasingly fossil-fuel-driven colonial mode of accumulation that persists to this day.

In the Global North, many view the colonial era as history. But this illusion crumbles when we examine the genocide in Gaza, the vaccine apartheid during the Covid-19 pandemic, or the fact that 90% of climate-related deaths occur in the South. The collapse of carbon sinks in 2023 is just the latest chapter in a long history of destruction. The people of the Global South, those who bear the least responsibility for the climate crisis, are facing its most devastating consequences: extreme weather, displacement, food insecurity, and loss of land.

The reason why the South is still made to suffer is because it continues to enrich the super-rich in the North. As Jason Hickel et al demonstrate in a recent paper over 10% of global economic output is drained, unpaid, from South to North every single year. This has amounted to \$242 *trillion* in the 25 years between 1990 and 2015. Imperialism is our present and its racist logic is built into the very fabric of global politics, the economy and our changing environment.

But things are not hopeless. History ended the Holocene. Human agency has altered geology and is transforming our climate. That same agency — the enormous, almost mind-boggling productive capacities that eight billion humans collectively possess — could radically change things for the better.

To do that — and therefore ensure the survival of our and countless other species on our planet — the colonial project of resource plunder and human subjugation must be dismantled. Without doing so, our

climate will breakdown in ways we can barely comprehend because those that benefit from the colonial mode of accumulation necessarily ascribe such a low value for human life.

Action from the Global South — and its allies in revolt in the North — to dismantle our historical era and construct a new one represents the most meaningful form of climate action. So-called green policies that preserve the fundamental structure of colonial accumulation — such as Amazon's net-zero green-washing, carbon credits, carbon capture and storage, big oil's bogus decarbonisation plans, the annual COP meetings, new imperial plunder over resources for the "green economy" — serve only to distract or intensify our environmental breakdown.

That real action that stands a chance of marshalling human collective agency to secure a stable planet and a dignified life for all will be demonised by the media and political class in the Global North. But it is happening, generally taking the form of a revolt against the prevailing order: its rules, its violence, its hypocrisies.

In Palestine, Palestinians fight occupation and Israel's exploitation of gas fields off the Gazan coast. In the Amazon, indigenous communities fight illegal loggers, who act as the tip of the spear for the global meat industry. From Senegal to Mali, new governments are renegotiating key mining, oil and gas contracts with multinationals. In Vanuatu, student agitation led to the world's highest court, the International Court of Justice, taking up the case of states' legal responsibilities due to climate change. In Colombia, the government of Gustavo Petro has turned the state-owned oil company, Ecopetrol, into an energy company as USO, the oil workers union, develops a plan for a meaningful green transition. In India, farmers defeated the government and global agribusiness with the biggest strikes in human history sustained over two years. And in China, the capacities of state investment and planning were marshalled to achieve the country's climate goals six years ahead of schedule.

Here is just a small snapshot of the resistance and revolts that seek to abolish the present state of affairs that destroys life and wrecks our planet. They can be strengthened and brought together to construct a New International Economic Order for the 21<sup>st</sup> century that stands a chance of not only establishing social justice, but also stabilising our planet's geology and preserving the conditions for all life on Earth.

All around the world, oppressed peoples are in revolt. Our task is to deepen and unite those revolts to close the Age of Genocide and build a future where we can truly live.

In solidarity,

**THE PROGRESSIVE INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT**

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Effects of Global Warming

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