

# The Socialist Correspondent

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**Discussion, debate and authors' opinions:** To encourage the broadest possible discussion and debate around the aims of exposing capitalism and promoting socialism, we hope our readers appreciate that not all the opinions expressed by individual authors are necessarily those of The Socialist Correspondent.

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# The Socialist Correspondent

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## NATO annexes Libya

"Before the war ended Libya's key strategic natural resource (oil) was being handed over to foreign capitalist enterprises", Frieda Park writes in her article, "Libya: bleeding hearts, gushing oil".

The justification for the NATO intervention was "to protect civilians" but the real aim of the massive air bombardment was regime change and to gain control of Libya's oil.

This has been achieved but the cost to the Libyan people will be enormous and they will be paying for a long time to come. The celebrations, by some but not all Libyans, at their "liberation" may well be short-lived as their new rulers take power.

Imperialism is attempting to blunt the progressive Arab Spring and turn it to its own advantage. The lack of protest in Europe and the USA against the military action in Libya made it easier for NATO to carry out its bloody mission.

## Debt "crisis"

While spending millions on re-colonising Libya, capitalism is introducing drastic austerity measures at home in the name of paying off government debts.

However, as Leslie Masters points out, "the finance capitalists love government debt" and "much of the 'crisis' is a deliberately generated panic designed to increase short-term profits on the bond markets."

The cuts in health and education budgets and offering hitherto public services to the private sector create investment opportunities for capital. As Leslie Masters argues, "Greece ... is an example of how the financiers can keep a country 'artificially on the verge of bankruptcy', defraud it by creating an equally artificial panic about its credit-worthiness, buy up cheaply privatised public enterprise and services, and force down living standards for the majority in order to ensure high profits from those same sources."

The arguments over how to deal with Greece (and Portugal and Ireland and Spain and Italy and...) are a reflection of inter-imperialist rivalries as the different players vie to defend or extend their interests.

## Commentary

### News Corps and the Hacking Scandal

Simon Korner writes that "the phone hacking scandal ... has exposed...the workings of capitalist democracy: with elected 'representatives' terrified of the rich and powerful, and the police hand-in-glove with ruling class law-breakers."

This article analyses the rise of Murdoch's News Corps to be one of the big 5 global media corporates, documents its vast profits, explores its future ambitions and exposes its criminal and corrupt nature.

Korner likens the Chipping Norton set (News Corps social grouping) to that of the Cliveden set of an earlier period in Britain and outlines the Murdoch media's consistent support for imperialist wars, the fostering of racism and the promotion of radical right-wing politics.

So, not only does Murdoch's empire make huge profits but it also plays a crucial ideological role in maintaining and reinforcing capitalist ideas.



### Fox, Werritty and their sponsors

Interestingly it was the London "Times", one of Murdoch's titles, which was given the information about the bank account of the company, Pargav, in the presence of Lord Bell, which spelled the end for Dr Liam Fox as a Cabinet Minister. Lord Bell was Baroness Thatcher's Public Relations adviser for three elections and an old friend of Fox.

The revelations which led to the resignation of Fox as British Defence Secretary exposed, yet again, following

the Murdoch hacking scandal, the web of connections between government, big business and a right-wing political agenda stretching across continents.

Pargav was set-up days before Fox's charity, Atlantic Bridge, was closed down by the Charity Commissioners. Pargav's bank account showed that it was funded by Michael Hintze (billionaire hedge fund manager), who had also funded Atlantic Bridge; Jon Melton (venture capitalist); and Poju Zabłudowicz, chairman and major donor of Bicom (Britain Israel Communication and Research Centre). Adam Werritty, Fox's unofficial adviser, had free desk space in Hintze's company office in London and his extensive travels were funded by Pargav.

It has been reported that Werritty, who speaks some Farsi, visited Iran several times for discussions with opposition leaders and that he was involved in a plot with Israel to topple Iran's President Ahmadinejad. Werritty enjoyed close relations with the Israeli secret service, Mossad. It has been reported that MI6 cautioned Werritty about his freelance meddling in Iranian affairs.

### Keorapetse Willie Kgositsile

We devote a section of this issue to the South African Poet Laureate, Keorapetse Willie Kgositsile. His poems are of great artistic merit and at the same time are anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist. This is a difficult thing to achieve.

The section is in three parts: Pallo Jordan's speech at the inauguration of Kgositsile as South Africa's Poet Laureate; Brian Filling's interview with the poet about his influences and his views on the current situation in South Africa; and two of Kgositsile's poems.



We hope that this profile and the two poems reproduced here introduce Keorapetse Willie Kgositsile to a wider audience. His poems are of universal significance.

# Libya: bleeding hearts, gushing oil

The French government has done a deal with the National Transitional Council (NTC) to exploit a third of Libya's oil reserves, giving 35% of crude oil to France in exchange for its total and permanent support of the Council.

## FRIEDA PARK reveals why western imperialist nations were behind the anti-Gaddafi forces in Libya.

Italy's ENI oil company has also signed a deal with the NTC to restart its oil production in Libya and reopen a major gas pipeline running from Libya's oil fields under the Mediterranean to Italy.

This tells us much about the priorities and motivations of the imperialist nations who have led the war of intervention in Libya and the NTC. Before the war had ended, Libya's key strategic natural resource was being handed over to foreign capitalist enterprises.

Bizarrely one of the first "human-

itarian" acts of the West after Gaddafi's overthrow, was to fly plane-loads of money into the country. Keeping the wheels of commerce grinding was obviously more important than providing medical services, housing and food to those suffering from the conflict.

Another surreal moment was the

photo-opportunity engineered for David Cameron when he briefly visited the country. He was seen being given a rapturous reception by staff at a hospital. Even British journalists wryly pointed out that he would not be likely to get such a reception in his own country.

Let us hope that the jarring note these scenes strike and the rush to carve up Libya's oil reserves are not lost on those who felt that the intervention might be a better option than allowing the Libyans to sort out their own problems.

The allegation that Gaddafi was poised to commit all kinds of atrocities against his own people was the Libyan version of "weapons of mass destruction". There would undoubtedly have been a bloody conflict without the West's intervention, but there was a bloody conflict with it.

All over the Middle East governments have been killing their



Part of a group of six Palmaria heavy howitzers of the Gaddafi forces, destroyed by French airplanes on the south western outskirts of Benghazi, Libya, in Opération Harmattan on 19 March 2011. In the background is the road from Benghazi to Ajdabija.

citizens protesting as part of the Arab Spring, but imperialist powers have paid them scant attention as they have had their hands full ensuring they pick off the prize they want.

That is to say to get rid of the maverick Gaddafi, who has often defied imperialism, and lay their hands on Libya's oil. So the people of Bahrain, Yemen etc. have not had much more than deliberately ineffectual hand-wringing from Nato countries.

Surely if imperialism had any interest at all in human rights in the area something would have been done to help the Palestinians, whose horrendous suffering increases daily. Instead, of course, the USA, Britain and others continue to offer their support financially, politically and militarily to the apartheid Israeli state, which is their one guaranteed friend and ally in the region.

Obama, Cameron, and before them Bush and Blair, have their own version of "liberal interventionism" the ideological rationale for asserting imperial power.

Fundamentally it seeks to find justification for intervention in other countries

**"There will be times, though, when our safety is not directly threatened, but our interests and our values are."**

**US President, Barack Obama**

and has been enunciated in different "doctrines" over the decades. In its current manifestation it has been dressed in the garb of protecting human rights as the justification for war.

In the case of Libya the Nato powers obtained backing from the United Nations under the "Responsibility to Protect Civilians". This was then rather broadly interpreted to include massive bombardments of strategic sites, towns and cities across Libya.

In the modern twisted logic and language of the spin doctors "protect" in these circumstances seems to have the same meaning as kill, maim and make homeless. We are yet to know the toll of civilians killed by Nato forces and by the rebels, including the racist massacres perpetrated against black Libyans and immigrant workers.

It seems there was no responsibility to protect these civilians.

Of course imperialism has no interest in these victims, the Palestinian people nor of the thousands across the Arab world killed and imprisoned for protest-

ing against their governments.

Never, ever believe that imperial powers will be motivated by humanitarian concerns. They will only intervene where their own strategic and economic interests are served, with the justification an after-thought.

As President Obama said in his speech on Libya on 28th March this year: "There will be times, though, when our safety is not directly threatened, but our interests and our values are.

Sometimes, the course of history poses challenges that threaten our common humanity and our common security - responding to natural disasters, for example; or preventing genocide and keeping the peace; ensuring regional security, and maintaining the flow of commerce." The US "interest" in this case being "the flow of commerce" or flow of oil.<sup>(1)</sup>

Previous similar attempts to gain strategic advantage and control of oil in the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan have led to long wars of attrition and continued instability in those countries.

In Libya they have tried a new model, whereby they have sponsored and trained the rebels to fight their war for them.

In Britain, senior Ministry of Defence figures say one of the biggest military lessons arises from the transformation of the rebels into credible fighters.

According to one such official, not all of this was thanks to the Nato nations: "The countries that deserve most credit in this conflict are Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. They provided rebels with the training and weapons they needed, and acted as their leaders."

This is instructive for Britain and other Nato states, says the official. "We don't want to repeat the mistake that's often made of regarding the war that's just ended as the template for all future ones.

"But we need to think harder about our capacity to train proxy fighters on the ground at speed. After the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, western states will be reluctant to commit their own troops to the campaign for years to come.

"There needs to be more focus in Nato nations on the need to have training teams at high readiness that can turn a proxy army into an effective fighting force."<sup>(2)</sup>

This begs the questions exactly who are the rebel forces in Libya and who do they represent. On this evidence it would seem to be imperialism. There is more information emerging about the links between the US and the Libyan rebels, not only during, but also prior to the current conflict.<sup>(3)</sup>

After the mess of Afghanistan and Iraq where imperialist powers got bogged down in lengthy conflicts, costly in money, resources and soldiers lives, they seemed to be slightly more hesitant about military intervention in, for example, Iran.

However the model of warfare adopted in Libya where proxies are trained and given military support has been credited with rejuvenating liberal interventionism. The US, Britain, France and others are still in business, able to achieve their ends through different tactics.

**... the Arab Spring represented mass popular protests against political repression and economic hardship. The intervention of Britain, France and the USA in Libya is the opposite of that kind of process, imposing imperialism's plan on the people there.**

Of course proxy armies and fighters are not new and have, for long periods, been a preferred option for imperialism. In the later part of the 20th century in Latin America and the Middle East the USA created and sponsored reactionary and counter-revolutionary forces.

In their previous intervention in Afghanistan they trained and backed forces such as the Taliban and Osama bin Laden to overthrow the progressive government there and defeat the Soviet Union.

One of the most striking things about the Arab Spring was that it represented mass popular protests against political repression and economic hardship.

It was an example of the power of people when they decide that they will take no more. The intervention of Britain, France and the USA in Libya is the opposite of that kind of process, imposing imperialism's plan on the people there.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. See *Arab Struggles will Affect the World & The Middle East and the Supply of Oil* – Alex Davidson The Socialist Correspondent Issue 11.
2. *Defence: Lessons from Libya*, James Blitz [www.ft.com](http://www.ft.com) 30/8/11.
3. See *America's Libyans*, Vijay Prashad [www.counterpunch.org](http://www.counterpunch.org) 31/3/11.

# The Murdochs and the hacking scandal

The phone hacking scandal at the News of the World (NoW) – coming after the banking crisis and the MPs’ expenses scandal – has exposed for a brief moment the workings of capitalist democracy: with elected ‘representatives’ terrified of the rich and powerful, and the police hand-in-glove with ruling-class law-breakers.

**SIMON KORNER examines Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation media empire and its power over politicians and the police.**

At the centre of the scandal is the Chipping Norton set – “the social wing of the Murdoch media empire” – one of the informal power structures that rule Britain.

## News Corp corruption – so far

In 2007, Clive Goodman, the NoW’s royal reporter, and private investigator Glenn Mulcaire were jailed for hacking Prince Harry’s phone at Buckingham Palace. The court accepted the claim by News International (NI) that Mulcaire had been working on his own initiative, and that Goodman was thus a single bad apple at the paper.

The police investigation overlooked the crucial evidence of Mulcaire’s notebooks, which contained the names of up to 4,000 other hacking victims, including that of the murdered schoolgirl Milly Dowler. It was only after numerous civil cases had been taken out against the newspaper by celebrity phone-hack victims that, in January this year, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) announced it would review police material to “assess if a fresh criminal trial is likely.”

Yet still it took the news in July that Millie Dowler’s phone had been hacked during her ongoing murder investigation for the scandal to fully ignite. Current figures show that 12,000 phones have probably been hacked, including those of families of soldiers killed in Afghanistan and victims of the 7/7 bombings in London.

Gordon Brown accused the Sunday Times of using “known criminals” to access his financial and legal files, with

the aim of “bringing me down as a government minister.”

The scandal may also extend to victims of the 9/11 attacks. Senator John Rockefeller has accused the NoW of bribing a New York policeman for phone records.

More recently, a News Corp subsidiary, News America, paid out \$29.5 million to smaller rival Floorgraphics International to drop a case against them for alleged phone hacking during News America’s attempt to buy them out. Two other similar lawsuits have been settled out of court in the US, with total payouts amounting to \$500 million. News Corp as a whole – not just the NoW – is thus implicated in crime on a massive scale.

The NoW was closed down as part of NI’s attempt to kill the story, though Rupert Murdoch’s other papers have been implicated too.

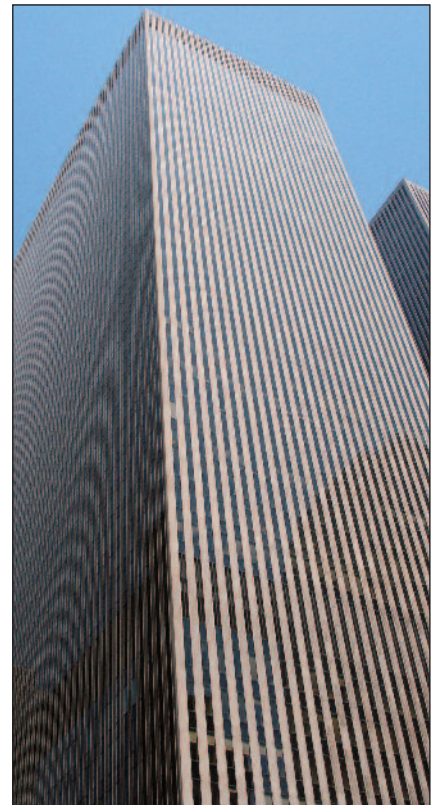
Under Operation Weeting, the police phone-hacking inquiry relaunched in January this year, ten people have so far been arrested, including Rebekah Brooks, former editor of NoW and chief executive of NI, and Andy Coulson, another ex-NoW editor and former press advisor to the prime minister. Deputy assistant commissioner Sue Akers is also investigating claims that NoW paid £100,000 in bribes to policemen and hacked into computers as well as phones. No arrests have been made.

The unraveling of News Corp’s UK operations reached a climax with the resignations of both Rebekah Brooks and Les Hinton, chief executive of the News Corp-owned Dow Jones, on July

15, four days before the scheduled parliamentary select committee hearing into the affair.

Hinton had been accused of orchestrating the cover-up at NI, starting in 2007, when he was brought in as Murdoch’s trusted fixer to contain the increasing number of allegations of phone-hacking. Hinton hired law firm Harbottle & Lewis to conduct an internal inquiry, which found that hacking was routine at NoW.

Yet in spite of this, Hinton twice testified before previous parliamentary committee hearings that the hacking was limited to Clive Goodman, though Hinton had been copied in on a letter sent by Goodman, which alleged not only widespread hacking at the paper but that Andy Coulson had promised him his job back if he kept quiet.



**News Corporation’s headquarters, 1211 Avenue of the Americas (6th Avenue), Midtown Manhattan, New York.**

If Goodman's allegations are substantiated, Coulson would stand accused of perjury during the Tommy Sheridan trial last December, at which he testified that he knew nothing about hacking.

Rupert Murdoch and his son James (pictured), along with Brooks, faced the select committee on July 19. One of James Murdoch's central claims at the hearing was that a huge out-of-court settlement paid by NI to phone-hack victim Gordon Taylor, the Professional Footballers' Association chief executive, had been made in good faith, without him knowing of anyone other than Goodman's involvement in hacking.

This claim has since been contradicted by two disgruntled NoW former executives, editor Colin Myler and legal manager Tom Crone, both of whom said they had informed Murdoch of Goodman's incriminating appeal letter.

More recently at a select committee hearing in September, the two men cited an email written in 2005 implicating ex-NoW chief reporter Neville Thurlbeck in the hacking scheme, thereby once again contradicting NI's claim that the scandal was down to Goodman alone.

Crone said he discussed the "for Neville" email with James Murdoch in 2008, asking him to authorize Gordon Taylor's £430,000 payout. Murdoch now faces a second hearing to explain his earlier statement, and to explain why Goodman was paid £240,000 after his dismissal, if not to buy his silence.

A public inquiry under Lord Leveson has been launched – which will create a breathing space for Murdoch and the government and no doubt obscure more than it reveals.

### Police corruption

What Brian Paddick called the 'cosy and dangerous' relationship between police and NI began during the Wapping dispute in 1986 when, according to the Unite/NUJ-sponsored *Wapping Post*, the Met "invoked powers to seal off the streets three days before the unions even decided to strike".

The collusion continued over the next 25 years, with many "stings" arranged by the NoW leading to high-profile arrests, good for the paper, good for the police – a "symbiotic relationship" as Rebekah Brooks called it. In 2003, Brooks and Andy Coulson admitted bribing police for information before a parliamentary select committee. No prosecution resulted.

Andy Hayman, the policeman in charge of the initial royal phone-hacking inquiry in 2005, has since been accused in parliament of doing a deal to suppress the investigation over fears that his own



Photo by:  
Esther  
Dyson

expenses scandal would be exposed by the NoW. Having left the force, Hayman was effectively silenced by Murdoch by being given work as a Times columnist.

After the CPS announced a review of the phone-hacking material this January, any new witnesses who came forward to the police were interviewed under caution, a deliberate tactic to prevent any new evidence coming to light. John Prescott, one of the paper's hacking victims, accused the police of 'putting a lid' on the inquiry, but was ignored.

Only when the lid finally blew off the scandal was Boris Johnson's hand-picked police chief, Sir Paul Stephenson, forced to resign, as was his assistant John Yates.

Both Yates and Stephenson, after a very swift investigation by the in-house IPCC, were exonerated, yet questions as to why Yates and Stephenson held so many meetings with NI executives during ongoing police investigations remain unanswered.

According to the *New York Times*, eight of Stephenson's meetings were with Neil Wallis (one of those arrested), an editor at NoW, who was employed by the Met as a media consultant while NoW was under investigation. Wallis "is said to have reported back to NI about the hacking case during this period."

Wallis's employment was not revealed by the Met until after his arrest in July. Wallis also worked for Champney's Spa

where Stephenson was given £12,000 worth of treatment for free. Stephenson admitted that more than ten of the Met's 45 media operations staff had worked at NI before joining.

Police corruption may explain the speed with which they dismissed the sudden death of major whistleblower Sean Hoare as "unexplained but not thought to be suspicious". Hoare had accused Andy Coulson of actively encouraging phone-hacking at the NoW, but presumably his evidence will now go with him to the grave.

NI has been shielded by the others in the state machine. When the then director of public prosecutions, Ken Macdonald, assessed Yates's review of the 2008 phone-hacking evidence – that there were possibly "10 to 12" cases involved at the maximum – he concluded that there was no need for an investigation.

Macdonald, now a Lord, was retained by NoW to advise it on the allegations against its journalists and is a contributor to the Times. Macdonald's successor, Keir Starmer, however, fell out with Yates, accusing him of misinterpreting his ruling on hacking, by claiming it was illegal to hack voicemail messages only if they had not already been heard by the recipient. The row led to Yates's downfall.

### Media collusion

Of the British media, only the *Guardian* has consistently investigated the story from the start. The Tory press has been conspicuously muted, unwilling to risk Cameron's position and anxious to avoid an unwinnable war with Murdoch. Most papers said very little until the Milly Dowler scandal broke, when they sensed the tide turning.

Even the BBC – the target of fierce attacks by the Murdoch empire – has been accused of aiding NI's bid to buy BSkyB.

BBC business editor Robert Peston's scoop that Vince Cable had declared "war" on Murdoch – based on information from Peston's friend William Lewis, the former NoW editor-in-chief – led directly to Cable's replacement by Jeremy Hunt, who immediately backed the controversial BSkyB takeover deal Cable had been hindering.

Labour MP Tom Watson has accused Peston of doing Murdoch's bidding over the timing and nature of his other scoops, which have focused attention away from NI executives. Peston denies this, yet clearly enjoys close connections with the Murdochs, having hosted a private event at the BBC at Christmas, at which James Murdoch addressed BBC

executives and discussed the BSkyB bid.

### Political collusion

As for the corruption of politicians, David Cameron has admitted that they were “all in this together”.

Labour’s relations with Murdoch go back to Blair’s 1995 Australia trip, after which Murdoch backed Labour, and Blair, in office, amended already lax media ownership regulations to News Corp’s advantage.

Lance Price, a Blair advisor, called Murdoch the “24th member of the Cabinet”. More recently, Murdoch leant on prime minister Gordon Brown to suppress the row over the hacking scandal. Brown obeyed, and a judicial inquiry into the hacking allegations was shelved before the last general election. In June this year, Ed Miliband, Ed Balls and other Labour politicians attended NI’s summer party in London.

But it’s the Tories who have long been closest to Murdoch. Andy Coulson’s four-year employment as Cameron’s right-hand man, and Cameron’s 26 meetings with NI executives in a single year, could not have made the connection clearer.

Tory media policy has frequently been shaped by News Corp – most obviously in their backing for the BSkyB deal, including the announcement last July that Ofcom, the media watchdog, would be scrapped, a move rewarded by the Sun’s switch of support from Labour to the Conservatives.

The 6-year freeze on the licence fee, plus cuts in BBC World Service and BBC Online, obediently echo James Murdoch’s famous attack on the BBC at the 2009 Edinburgh TV festival, while Tory plans to ‘top slice’ the BBC’s licence fee money were dropped because Murdoch made it clear he didn’t want the money shared among several commercial broadcasters.

### News Corp’s financial position

Though Murdoch’s newspapers dominate the UK market and wield great ideological influence, they provide only a fraction of News Corp’s profits worldwide.

While NI – News Corp’s British newspaper arm – made a loss last year, News Corp as a whole made profits of £1.7 billion – compared to £1.5 billion the previous year. Rupert Murdoch insisted the phone-hacking scandal would have “no material impact” on the company’s profitability, and shares rose 5% accordingly.

His \$12 million bonus for last year, announced to shareholders after the scandal broke, indicates his continuing



News Corporation's Fox News Channel's main studios in New York.

power. James received a \$6 million bonus, but he declined to take it “in the light of the current controversy.”

Globally, News Corp has four major media rivals: Disney, the biggest media company in the world, Time Warner, CBS Corporation and Viacom. These giants emerged after rapid concentration from the 1980s onwards, a process in which domestically owned media were absorbed into the global oligopoly of, mostly, American companies.

These big 5 companies own all the big US film studios, most of US television, 85% of the global music market, and major slabs of publishing and satellite broadcasting. Murdoch predicts that eventually there will be only three giant media companies – including his own.

In the US, News Corp owns the Dow Jones, the New York Post, Fox News, Fox Sports, Twentieth Century Fox TV and publisher Harper Collins. In India it owns Tata Sky, as well as Star TV which reaches 150 million viewers in mainland China and a further 150 million in 100 other countries. News Corp also dominates the satellite market in Europe and Latin America, and the newspaper market in Australia and New Zealand.

It was the infamous move to Wapping – closed this September – which proved to be the springboard for the company’s huge leap forward into the top tier of global media companies.

What the Economist called “the biggest union-busting operation in history” trebled the company’s share price in 1986, allowing it to borrow massively and buy the ailing 20th Century Fox studios, after acquiring Metro Media Television and renaming it Fox TV, at a stroke gaining an American audience of 30 million and the weight to take on CBS, NBC and ABC.

From its strong position in the global media oligopoly, News Corporation now wants to expand beyond the media field altogether, which James Murdoch says is “not big enough”, and confront the world’s technology and telephony giants, taking the company in a new strategic direction.

Its ambition is to compete with Apple, Google, Microsoft, Telefonica, Deutsche Telecom and Verizon, which are “much, much bigger beasts than a News Corp or a Time Warner.” The BSkyB deal would provide a platform for this confrontation.

In the UK, if News Corp does finally acquire the 61% of BSkyB it doesn’t own – making use of its £7.3 billion cash mountain – it will become Britain’s biggest ever media player by far.

Compared to Berlusconi’s control over Italian television, Murdoch would achieve greater power, dominating both press and television, compared to Berlusconi, whose power lies mainly in television.



By 2015, BSkyB's projected turnover will be £9 billion, double that of the BBC, and almost treble Virgin Media's £3.9 billion, and its profits will be £1.7 billion, according to Enders Research. BSkyB, under full Murdoch ownership, would bring in 25% of News Corp's annual revenues, as much as its Fox companies in the US. Ditching the NoW will have been a price well worth paying.



Murdoch's expanded corporation, by integrating his print and television news, would monopolise commercial news provision in the UK. Murdoch's ambition regarding the news revealed itself in 2001, when Sky News led a consortium bidding against ITN to provide ITV's news. ITN held onto the contract by cutting its fee from £46 million to £35 million – slashing its own costs, and jobs, to do so. The next auction could leave ITN fatally weakened.

In terms of audience reach, Sky radio enjoys a virtual monopoly of commercial radio news. Its audience of 33.4 million listeners puts it on a par with the BBC. While Sky TV, whose parent company is BSkyB, has only 11.7 million viewers, behind ITV's 21.9 million and the BBC's 33.5 million viewers, subscriptions to BSkyB's all-important combined packages – television, broadband, phones, line rental and multi-room services – are projected to rise from 21.6 million to over 33 million by 2015.

Before the hacking scandal broke, the only constraints the Office of Fair Trading put on News Corp's 100% ownership of BSkyB were that when Sky News was demerged from News Corporation, it would be given guaranteed funding for 14 years, have an independent chairman and retain its £40 million a year subvention by the parent company.

Sky News journalists were sceptical as to how long Murdoch would have stuck by this agreement. Now, Murdoch's

capitalist media rivals BT, Guardian Media Group, Trinity Mirror and the Telegraph Media Group, which in March were threatening legal action against the bid, have gained ground.

But unless the Leveson inquiry forces the government to declare Murdoch unfit to own a UK broadcasting company, News Corp – with dramatic changes to its board if necessary, including the possible removal of Rupert to a non-executive position – is likely to launch a new assault on BSkyB.

The BSkyB board has kept James Murdoch on as chairman, in spite of the scandal, indicating that they believe News Corp will gain full control in due course.

As for the British press, NI controls a massive 37% of the market – 14.5 million readers, double the Daily Mail Group's 7.3 million readers and Trinity Mirror Group's 6.8 million.

Its three modern printing plants – the biggest printing centre in the world – built at a cost of £650 million in 2008, produce all the Murdoch papers as well as the Daily and Sunday Telegraph, with the capacity to print the whole of the UK press.

The losses NI makes on the Times – £240,000 a day – are made up for by cross-subsidies from BSkyB, which will increase if the stalled merger goes ahead. The online readership of the Times, as well as the Sun, would be boosted by “bundling access to the two papers’ pay-walled websites in with Sky’s broadband packages,” says media consultant Tabitha Elwes.

This drive towards concentration of the commercial media is not unique to Murdoch. Manuel Castells in his book *Communication Power* identifies the emergence of ‘infocapitalists’ who build networks of business and political power by owning the production of information and knowledge.

Their powerful cross-media empires develop to a new level through technological convergence. The BSkyB bid and the huge Comcast/NBC merger in the USA are typical of this trend.

#### The ‘sordid nexus’

George Galloway wrote recently that Rebekah Brooks and the Chipping Norton Set represent the “sordid nexus between the Murdoch empire, 10 Downing Street, the police and MPs...” Such informal, hidden structures binding the ruling class together are nothing new.

In the 1930s, a similar grouping known as the Cliveden set, named after Lord and Lady Astor's country estate where establishment gatherings were held, included pro-Hitler foreign secre-

tary, Lord Halifax and Geoffrey Dawson, editor of the Times.

Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, the head of the intelligence service and the minister of defence were also linked to the group, as were the major pre-war press barons, Beaverbrook and Rothermere. Cliveden's pro-fascist aims were reflected in the Daily Express and Daily Mail, which praised Mussolini, Hitler and Mosley.

Today's Chipping Norton set bears a strong similarity to Cliveden, representing the most reactionary elements of capitalist society. While not overtly fascist, Murdoch's media consistently support imperialist wars, foster racism and promote radical rightwing, Tea Party-style politics here, in Australia and the US.

The Chipping Norton set's conspiracies to shape politics and circumvent bourgeois legality represent a dangerous advance onto democratic ground won by the working class.

This is potentially more insidious than, for example, Robert Maxwell's collusion with MI5 to defame Scargill after the miners' strike or – beyond the media industry – the corrupt £43 billion Al Yamamah arms deal with Saudi Arabia, the subject of a Serious Fraud Office investigation cynically quashed by Tony Blair.

The ideological sway of the media, greater than that of other ‘normal’ industries, puts the Chipping Norton set at the very centre of maintaining and reproducing ruling class power in Britain.

Because of this, and the fact that the workings of ‘democracy’ have been ex-

**Today's Chipping Norton set bears a strong similarity to Cliveden, representing the most reactionary elements of capitalist society. While not overtly fascist, Murdoch's media consistently support imperialist wars, foster racism and promote radical rightwing, Tea Party-style politics here, in Australia and the US.**

posed so starkly, the setback suffered by Murdoch may have wider reverberations politically – if it can be utilised.

A campaign for greater media accountability and tighter ownership laws, as promoted by the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, could have the potential to disrupt the customary ease with which the bourgeoisie rides roughshod over the public.

# Riots: capitalism, alienation and anger

In his classic book *The Crowd in History*<sup>(1)</sup> first published in 1964, George Rudé sets out a number of questions which enable us to analyse the significance of a crowd acting in some social, political or economic context.

## **FRIEDA PARK reflects on the riots in London and other cities during August 2011.**

These are:

1. What happened during the event, its origins and its aftermath, i.e. its historical context?

2. How large was the crowd, how did it act, who (if any) were its promoters, who composed it and who led it?

3. Who were the targets or victims of the crowd's activities?

4. What were the aims, motives and ideas underlying the activities?

5. How effective were the forces of repression or law and order? What was their degree of loyalty or disaffection?

6. What were the consequences of the event and its historical significance?

In setting out these questions Rudé was explicitly creating a framework to judge such events objectively, as social phenomenon, rather than to resort to subjective and prejudiced reactions which have been all too common in responses to the recent riots in England.

Whatever their political stripe most commentators have rushed to condemnation and having done that they have then set out their stalls regarding the causes and what needs to be done to prevent such things happening in the future.

Leftish arguments favour explanations such as the government's cuts, in particular to services for young people and the greater barriers to them remaining in education. The ideologies of individualism and consumerism have also come in for attack.

On the right arguments that emphasise the moral culpability of individuals and their families are favoured. Much of the right-wing commentary has been couched in hysterical language, which talks of a feral underclass and further seeks to demonise young people. The arguments of the right tend to be drawn

less from evidence of what is happening round about us and more from visceral class-hatred and fear, sometimes also allied to racism.

What is the evidence that society is more broken than it was a decade, two decades, fifty years, a century ago? There is nothing of substance. In fact moral panic about social breakdown has been around for as long as history. If society had been falling apart as rapidly and as disastrously as the right would have us believe then truly we would all be living in an uncivilised and lawless state of nature, where, as Hobbes said, life would be "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish and short."<sup>(2)</sup>

Some things about our society and family lives are worse than they were and some are better. But a good society will not be the product of individual morality, especially since the society that we live in is founded on immorality. Criminality lies at the heart of capitalism.

The few who hold power and own the means of producing wealth use the labour of the many to realise this potential and do not return to them what they create through their work. Rather they keep for themselves obscene amounts in the profits that they derive from the work of others. The proportion of this looted wealth has been increasing in recent years and as a consequence inequality has grown.

Thus philosophers, such as Hobbes, ascribe to humanity the traits of capitalism itself. If capitalism and its dog-eat-dog morality were unleashed without restraint then society would indeed descend into chaos, but that does not imply anything about the goodness or badness of human nature.

Among its other functions the capital-

ist state and its laws serve not only to protect property from the relatively propertyless, but also to regulate the anarchy of capitalism so that capitalists can protect their individual interests and deal with each other.

Necessarily this is fraught with contradiction and hypocrisy. The growth of the oligarchs in Russia and the pillage of the resources of remote areas such as the Amazon basin are examples of unconstrained neo-liberal capitalism of the type espoused in the post-Soviet world. This has had its effects here too. England's riots took place in this historical context.

We should not, then, rush to judgement on the individuals who rioted and their families, who are at the bottom of the power heap. Let us reserve our opprobrium for those at the top who defend an immoral system and who have engaged systematically in activities which are illegal even in capitalist terms, yet who see their own criminality as lesser whether it be tax-dodging companies, MPs fiddling expenses, corrupt ties with the Murdoch media or their own youthful vandalism.

Moralistic approaches demand that the oppressed - de-moralised by unemployment, by being told that their modest needs are not as important socially as the banking system, by racism and other forms of discrimination - be paragons of virtue and more moral than their rulers.

In returning to Rudé's questions, we do not yet have enough information to answer them comprehensively. Any analysis at this point must be provisional, indeed it would take some considerable research to address them fully as we cannot expect the mainstream media to do that for us.

The context of the riots is the worsening situation of working-class people, made to pay the price for the financial crisis, the product of the triumph of neo-liberalism. Young people have been particularly badly hit. In most parts of London youth unemployment is over 20%.

The organisations of the left and the labour movement have also been in

drastic decline and are less able to provide a coherent ideological outlook and forum for action. The riots were triggered by the murder of a young black man by the Metropolitan Police, with young black males particularly facing constant harassment from the police.

Having said that these were not race riots, people of different ethnicities participated. The rioters were overwhelmingly male, mostly young and poor.

The Ministry of Justice published its first statistical report of those accused of offences brought before the courts by 12th September 2011.<sup>(3)</sup> A further bulletin was also published on 24th October<sup>(4)</sup>, by which time 1984 people had appeared in court. It gives more information on the socio-economic back-

grounds, ethnicity and other demographic information relating to these individuals. This information refers only to those charged with offences. The table below summarises some of the information contained in these reports.

The punitive nature of the sentencing is clear, those involved in the riots have been dealt with more harshly in every way than run-of-the-mill criminals. Those charged were less criminal than those who usually come before the courts, but had committed significantly more crimes than the general population.

There is no information on conviction levels in the communities in which the riots took place, so it may be that people in those areas already have higher

levels of convictions than the average in the population. Even at that it is clear that the riots attracted people who already had criminal records. Is this because they are more criminal, more disaffected, more subject to repressive policing or all these things?

Understanding this would take some further work. It is not helpful to write people off as criminals as though that explains everything. What is clear is that economic poverty and educational deprivation were key characteristics of the rioters.

Unsurprisingly then, the targets of the rioters seemed mainly to be property and the acquisition of consumer goods, though there were also attacks on police stations.

According to a Home Office report on the disturbances, only 6% of crimes were recorded as being against the police.<sup>(5)</sup> Big stores and brands such as Currys, Debenhams and JD Sports, which lost £700,000 worth of stock alone, were favourite targets, but the riots also affected working-class people and small businesses, including loss of livelihoods and lives.

Groups of rioters are reported to have been relatively small and highly mobile, using electronic messaging and communication systems to coordinate their activities.

Police forces appeared unprepared for this and it was said that their planning has focused on large scale crowd problems which are more predictable in character, such as demonstrations and football crowds.

However, cuts to police budgets were widely commented on as being a factor limiting their capacity to deal with the unrest. Police actions both triggered the riots and also allowed them to develop.

A degree of disaffection may have played a part in this. Disturbingly for the powers that be the riots showed that the police can be out-manoeuvred on the streets.

There was no discernable leadership in the riots either of a formal or informal nature. There has been a debate round the involvement of organised criminals and gangs, however, the evidence to date seems to indicate that this was not a moving force.

As reported in the Home Office report cited above, police forces across England have estimated that only 13% of rioters were members of gangs. It goes on to say: "...most forces perceived that where gang members were involved, they generally did not play a pivotal role. While there were some

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**UK Ministry of Justice statistics** (24 October 2011)

Characteristics	Charged Aug/Sept 11	Similar crimes 2010
■ Male	90%	85%
■ Aged below 21 years	53%	31%
■ Aged over 40 years	5%	15%
<b>Ethnicity where recorded</b>		
■ White	42%	
■ Black or mixed heritage	46%	
■ Asian or mixed heritage	7%	
■ Other	5%	
<b>Sentenced in Magistrates courts</b>		
■ Custodial sentences	42%	12%
■ Average sentence	5.7 months	2.5 months
■ Average sentence for under 18 year olds (burglary)	7.6 months	
■ Average sentence for over 18 year olds	5.5 months	
<b>Sentenced in Crown Courts</b>		
■ Average custodial sentence	17.4 months	11.3 months
<b>Previous convictions</b>		
■ Males under 18 years with previous convictions	45% (compares with 2% in general population)	
■ Males 18 years and over with previous criminal convictions	71% (compares with 28% in general population)	
■ Number with no previous convictions	24%	23%
■ Number with more than five previous convictions	40%	50%
■ Number who have previously been in prison	26%	35%

# Debt “crisis” created by the financiers

A debt crisis is engulfing the Eurozone, and has even briefly touched on the USA ... Or, at least, that is what we are told by the ruling class and its media organs.

**LESLIE MASTERS examines the current capitalist government debt “crisis” and argues that finance capitalism loves government debt.**

Greece is close to defaulting on its government debts. Portugal, Ireland and Spain are finding it increasingly difficult to borrow money on the international financial markets.

The same markets threatened to downgrade US government bonds from their (usual) triple-A rating (a very very safe investment) to double-A (a very safe investment).

Perhaps the last showed up just how much of the “international debt crisis” is a sham. The US economy is still the strongest in the world, despite the rapidly increasing strength of China. As the *Financial Times* put it, downgrading US debt from triple-A to double-A would simply mean that double-A becomes the new triple-A – i.e., the yardstick against which all other governments’ bonds would be measured.

The impression is given that the most powerful elements of the ruling class hate government spending and debt. Actually, the finance capitalists love government debt.

As Marx put it in *The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850*: “... the faction of the bourgeoisie that ruled and legislated [through the Chambers] had a direct interest in the indebtedness of the state. The state deficit was really the main object of its speculation and the chief source of its enrichment. At the end of each year, a new deficit. After the lapse of four or five years, a new loan. And every new loan offered new opportunities to the finance aristocracy for defrauding the state, which was kept artificially on the verge of bankruptcy...”

Government debt in the developed world is not the same as personal debt, or even government debt in the Third World (which is often more or less the same thing, since much of the loaned

money finds its way into the offshore bank accounts of individual ministers – with the tacit support of the Western governments guaranteeing the loans).

If an individual runs up too much debt, their bank will soon stop them borrowing more, since the individual

usually has finite resources – their regular income. Even during crises, however, Western governments are usually pulling in billions, even trillions, from tax revenues and state-owned enterprises.

## Government Bonds

Furthermore, government debt is not financed in the same way as personal debt. To raise money on the financial markets, the government issues bonds and bills.

These are bought by financial institutions and earn them interest until they are redeemed. Both the bonds and their interest can be sold on the (secondary) financial markets while they are current.



European Central Bank headquarters in Frankfurt, Germany.

Bonds have a face value (determined by the issuing government) but many, if not most, are initially sold at auction, at a price lower than their face value. The difference determines how much interest the government has to pay on a bond during its lifetime (the smaller the difference, the smaller the interest).

This difference also gives a measure of the "confidence" of the financiers in the issuing government: the bigger difference (i.e., the lower the auction price and, therefore, the higher the interest), the lower the level of confidence. This is the (vulgar economic) theory, at least.

It is also the basis for a considerable degree of speculation in government debt. Much of the "crisis" is a deliberately generated panic designed to increase short-term profits on the bond markets.

Decreased confidence in a government drives down the price at which new bond issues are sold, and drives up the interest that is paid on them. On short-term bonds (of one or two years maturity) the expected returns can be very high. Bond insurers do quite well out of the process as well, since the cost of guaranteeing repayment also increases.

Immediately prior to the remarks cited above, Marx had also written: "... It was impossible to subordinate the adminis-

## Top holders of USA Treasuries

(December 2010 - Source: Wikipedia)

Holder	\$US billion
1. China	1160.1
2. Japan	882.3
3. UK	272.1
4. Oil Exporters	211.9
5. Brazil	186.1
6. Carib Banking Ctrs	168.6
7. Taiwan	155.1
8. Russia	151.0
9. Hong Kong	134.2
10. Switzerland	107.0
11. Luxembourg	86.4
12. Canada	76.8
13. Singapore	72.9
14. Germany	60.5

tration of the state to the interests of national production without balancing the budget... And how was this balance to be established without limiting state expenditures, that is, without encroaching on interests which were so many props of the ruling system, and without

redistributing taxes. That is, without shifting a considerable share of the burdening of taxation onto the shoulders of the big bourgeoisie itself?"

So, while the finance capitalists love government debt for the profits it brings, they certainly don't want the balanced budgets that are part of the public rhetoric of the Tories here, or the Tea Party in America.

Nonetheless, cutting budget deficits makes sense from their standpoint.

### Budget Cuts

Firstly, it is not just balancing the budget that threatens to increase the tax "burden" on the wealthy: the bigger the deficit, the more likely the government is to increase taxes (albeit on all sections of society) in order to pay the debt.

In some cases, they may also resort to inflationary measures, as the US government did after World War II, printing money hand over fist to pay off debts incurred during the war (amongst other things). Inflation always benefits the debtor: debts incurred in uninflated currency are paid off in inflated (devalued) currency.

Secondly, cutting taxes for the wealthy will be accompanied by deep cuts in social spending (health, welfare, education, etc.), as well as defence and

# Riots: capitalism, alienation and anger

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incidents which suggest orchestrated offending related to gang activity, clear examples are few in number..."

Riots will inevitably attract criminals, however, Prof. John Pitts pointed out on the BBC news website that riots are not necessarily advantageous to gangs whose main business is selling drugs: "You can't sell drugs when there's a riot. There are cops everywhere."<sup>(6)</sup>

In other words drug dealers, like other capitalists, prefer to operate in a more controlled environment. Yet the fear of gangs running amok in our streets was widely promoted by the right, helping to bolster panic about social breakdown, to promote a "law and order" agenda and divert attention from the real causes of the riots.

As to the motivation and ideas of the rioters, people in or around the riots interviewed in the media expressed a basic sense of alienation, lack of access to

material goods, work and opportunities and that they were being further marginalised. Some also expressed anger against the police.

The most immediate outcome of the riots to date has been the vindictive sentences meted out to people many of whom committed relatively trivial offences. This was designed as a future deterrent, but has the effect of further criminalising young people. There has also been a huge upsurge in right-wing ideology blaming individuals, families and a lack of "discipline" for the riots.

There has been some talk about the need to provide more support for people, however, with a government committed to slashing services it is unlikely that we will see policy develop in this direction.

On balance we can expect more repression, including the restriction of electronic communications, as a response to social unrest.

For sure the riots were not a conscious mass-movement with political objectives,

but they were born out of the current social and economic circumstances.

They had economic motivation in the acquisition of consumer goods and expressed anger as opposed to passive acceptance.

Changing that anger into something more will require ideas and organisation.

### FOOTNOTES

1. *The Crowd in History*, George Rude Serif 2005.
2. *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes 1651.
3. Statistical Bulletin on the Public Disorder of 6th to 9th August 2011, UK Ministry of Justice 15/9/11.
4. Statistical bulletin on the public disorder of 6th to 9th August 2011 – October update, UK Ministry of Justice 24/10/11.
5. An overview of recorded crimes and arrests resulting from disorder events in August 2011, The Home Office October 2011.
6. England Riots [www.bbc.co.uk/news](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news) 16/8/11.

other expenditure.

Cutting the health and education budgets provides investment opportunities for capital (as is quite explicit in the rhetoric of the Tory coalition government). Cutting state employment (defence, civil service, etc.) and welfare spending produces downward pressure on labour costs.

The overall impact of the budget cuts, austerity packages, and the like, is, therefore, to release more capital for investment (tax cuts for the wealthy), open up further investment opportunities for capital, and to increase the profits to be had therefrom.

The second of these is particularly important at present: the financial sector got its fingers badly burned playing with “sub-prime” lending (to the point where it actually converted many middle-income households into sub-prime borrowers).

But, despite the failures, the financial sector still has plenty of capital at risk of standing idle. With some existing channels closed off or restricted (for now), new ones are needed. Those new opportunities will be provided by the newly-privatised state sectors. In Britain, the vultures are already hovering over schools and hospitals.

But if much of the debt crisis is smoke and mirrors, generated by the sabre-rattling of the ruling class to justify tax cuts and austerity programmes from which only it can benefit, for the people on the wrong end of those austerity programmes, it is a harsh reality. Nowhere more so than in Greece and, very likely, soon also in Portugal, Spain and Ireland.

### Profiting from Greece

Greece is on the point of enforced (and unnecessary) bankruptcy (at the time of writing). Its new two-year bond issues are carrying interest rates above 26%.

Various countries within the Eurozone are arguing as to whether they should continue to bail out the country, or let it go bust by defaulting on its international debts.

If bankruptcy is opted for, several banks – principally French ones – may take a beating because of their exposure to Greek debt – punishment for their own speculation.

But are the Greeks really the sub-prime borrowers such interest rates would suggest? Certainly, Greece has a relatively limited tax base: it is estimated that no more than 25,000 Greeks have incomes above €100,000. More than 12% of the workforce is employed in agriculture (generally a low-income sector); unemployment had reached nearly 17% by May this year; and 20%

of the population live below the poverty line.

Many of the wealthiest Greeks are shipping magnates (now, also, financial magnates) living in tax exile. Government expenditure, therefore, can only with difficulty be financed from increased taxation. Borrowing from the financiers is inevitable.

But Greece is by no means a poor country – its economy was ranked at 27th in the world in 2010. Its public sector accounts for around 40% of its GDP (about \$124 billion out of \$310 billion on this year’s estimates). That would be a significant channel for investment once privatised on the cheap, as it will have to be under the austerity measures currently being forced on Greece.

Greece, however, is more than just a prime example of how the financiers can keep a country “artificially on the verge

**The impact of the budget cuts is to release more capital for investment (tax cuts for the wealthy) and to increase profits.**

of bankruptcy”, defraud it by creating an equally artificial panic about its credit-worthiness, buy up cheaply privatised public enterprises and services, and force down living standards for the majority in order to ensure high profits from those same sources.

It also demonstrates deep organic problems within the Eurozone. Problems which have rendered the weaker economies of that entity (Greece, Spain, Portugal, Ireland) particularly vulnerable to attack.

### Eurozone

The Eurozone is the product of, among other things, economic illiteracy – made all the starker by the fact that, at its heart, is Germany, the birthplace of Karl Marx.

150 years ago, he would have understood why the Eurozone in its current form could be nothing more than a useless abortion. But even eurosceptics have a better understanding of the problems with the Eurozone than its creators.

A single currency cannot simply be imposed upon a group of disparate countries by diktat, and expected miraculously to work, as the Euro was on most countries of the European Community. No more so could a single currency be imposed upon a single country.

Some national currencies, including the pound sterling, date back to the early part of the Feudal era – but they were

national in name only. So many barriers to the integration of the markets that did exist – the Feudal system (“natural economy”) in the countryside, Guild regulations, slow communications, internal customs duties levied by the robber barons, to name but a few – meant that the equivalent value of a pound in one part of England was not the same as in another.

Only after these (and other) fetters to production, distribution and exchange had been broken by capitalism could national markets arise, and the “national” currency be imbued with real meaning.

And this is the problem with the Eurozone today. For all the much-vaunted freedom of passage across borders for capital and labour, which would produce a genuinely single market within the zone, there are still too many barriers to such transfers in reality.

Movement of labour is prevented by both legal and social (e.g., linguistic) barriers. Governments practice protectionism for favoured industries, and opt out of various laws relating to the economy.

Furthermore, each government jealously guards its prerogatives in relation to taxation and spending. Thus, while we have monetary union, the lack of corresponding political union means that, while the national economies within the zone are by no means independent, they are not a single economy.

A clear symptom of this is that, in 2010, the official inflation rates in these countries ranged from -1.6% (deflation) in Ireland to +4.5% in Greece.

Even the eurosceptics understand enough of this to compare the Eurozone to the United States, which is a federal republic – but has a single economy. (Germany would also be a case in point.)

If there are economic problems in one part of the States, there are mechanisms in place to transfer capital and money from other parts of the Union to the stricken area.

Such mechanisms do not exist within the Eurozone; instead, when a country like Greece gets into trouble, financially and economically, it has to be bailed out by special measures ground out like blood from stone from other individual governments and the IMF, while the people of Germany and France cry out against their tax euros being used to prop up the “profligate” Greeks.

These same barriers to economic integration are what make its members vulnerable to attack by international finance: each country has to raise loans separately to cover government spending, so can be picked off one by one.

# Chile wakes from its long slumber

Chile has really woken from its long, anaesthetised, “centre-left” induced slumber. Dozens of university faculties and secondary schools have been on strike now for 3 months, often combined with sit-in occupations.

**DAN MORGAN writes from Chile on the protests demanding free, quality public education.**

**Dateline: 24 August, Santiago, Chile.**

The market model of education is being actively rejected by virtually all organisations of students, teachers and parents.

On August 4th, the government decreed 'enough was enough' and banned two planned marches in Santiago. The result – chaos, and literally hundreds of tear gas bombs choking the centre of the city.

Then, that night, the first of weekly 'cacerolazos', protest banging of pots and pans, heard in working class and middle class neighbourhoods on a massive scale.

Since then there have been more massive marches and on one of the few wet days of the year about a hundred thousand marched and also blocked the anarchist minority who usually give the TV images of violent behaviour, which muddy the message.

Big marches also in almost all provincial capitals. On Sunday 21 August, a march to a concert in Santiago's biggest park, close to a million people, and popular artists. On August the 24th and 25th the Trade Union Confederation (CUT) held a general strike for labour, social and economic reforms. As usual, the danger of dismissal meant relatively low support in the private sector.

This year, there was also a campaign by the government against public sector workers who supported the strike by a large majority. The call for free, quality public education is the key demand of the moment, and in four huge marches in Santiago, and again almost all cities, the response was overwhelming.

Hundreds of thousands jammed the main street (and not a policeman in sight until well after the crowds had gone). Far from fading, the movement

just continues to grow.

Linked to the demand for an end to the market system of education, other demands are gaining support:

- Re-nationalisation of copper. The state Copper Corporation was never privatised but new deposits were given to private companies like BHP which means that 70% of production is now private.
- A thorough tax reform to change Chile's incredibly regressive tax regime.
- A plebiscite to decide on free education.
- A constituent assembly, to plan a new constitution.

Even many politicians from the Concertación coalition which managed the neo-liberal model for 20 years, are re-discovering some radical principles and supporting the growing tide of discontent.

The government announced its third package of measures to try to stop the protests. Some money has been found, to reduce the interest rate paid on student loans to 2% (from 5.6%), and give scholarships to more poor students.

Totally inadequate, say the university, and secondary students' federations. The pro-market forces show signs of desperation in their statements and actions.

The main newspapers, of course, print articles with ever more spurious arguments for the present model.

The President of one of the two government parties has said “we must not give way to a load of useless subversives ...” An ex-military, pro-fascist mayor of a well-heeled suburb described Camila Vallejo, the popular President of the University of Chile Students as having “a demonised face”, and the Teachers' College President as “pollerudo”, an insulting term like 'mummy's boy', for a man who allows himself to be led by a woman.

Victory may not come this year but Chile is awake, and all the elements of the 'Chicago Boys' model, imposed with blood and iron, are under attack.

**Dateline: 7 October, Santiago, Chile.**

One of the demands thrown up by the movement for free, quality, public education in Chile is for a referendum, or plebiscite, to decide the issue.

So on my way to the market I have just voted in a popular plebiscite being held by over 60 organisations, headed by the teachers' college.

All over Chile, there are thousands of ballot boxes, and people are queuing to sign in favour of free public education.

Despite overwhelming public support, the government is taking a hard line and saying no. It goes against their obsession with the market, and their moves to privatise what is left of public enterprise and services.

The draft education budget for next year has only a 7% increase, nothing compared with the demands, and less than the average of the last four years!

The education movement slowed its momentum a little because of a plane crash that killed a popular TV presenter and a businessman who started a reconstruction charity after the earthquake last year, and then there were the national holidays around 18th September.

Since then, the media and government have worked hard to dampen the protests but massive marches have restarted, although one on 6th October was banned.

A 'dialogue table' was strongly promoted but the Minister gave nothing on the issue of free education, so the students walked out - their intransigence, of course, according to most of the media.

So early victory, even partial, is unlikely. What is certain, however, is that the issue will not go away. A new generation of students has roused society, and things have changed. Other demands, such as for tax reform, political reform, and a new, democratic constitution, have won new supporters.

Demands for real changes are again on the agenda.

# £9.3 billion bill for London Olympics

The 30th Olympic Games are due to open in London on 27 July 2012. The budget for the London Olympics is £9.3 billion. It has increased fourfold since Britain won the bid in July 2005.

## **PAT TURNBULL reports on the scale, construction, costs and impact on local people in the east end of London.**

New venues are being built on a site near Stratford in East London. They include the Velodrome, the Olympic Stadium, the International Broadcast Centre and Main Press Centre, the Athletes' Village, the Basketball Arena and Handball Arena.

Outside the Olympic Park but nearby will be the Lea Valley White Water Centre and enhanced rowing facilities at Eton Dorney. Sailing facilities will be at Weymouth and Portland on the English

south coast. 'Welcome to the Olympic Park', a February 2011 publication on the website of the Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA), says: "After the Games, a new sustainable community will be integrated with the area surrounding the Olympic Park, with local people benefiting from a new park, new homes and world-class sporting facilities." According to the ODA, the Water Polo Arena and the Basketball Arena are to be dismantled and relo-

cated elsewhere. The other sports facilities are to be mainly kept and made available for 'community and elite' use, except for the Olympic Stadium, which, on a rental basis, may become West Ham United's new football ground.

It is not clear, however, where the money will come from to maintain the sports facilities and what the cost will be to the public to use them.

GLL, which describes itself as 'a charitable social enterprise that exists for the benefit of the community', already runs sports and leisure facilities, most of which used to be run by the councils, in five of the Olympic boroughs.

On its web site it states that its ambitions include: 'to be at the forefront of London's Olympic preparation and legacy requirements; to be the operator of the Olympic Aquatic Centre and Multi Use Arena.'



**The new 12,000 seat London Olympic basketball arena which will be relocated after the 2012 Games.**

Photo by: Jon Smith



GLL operates leisure centres in Hackney. There seem to be a whole range of different charges, but here is an example. A member, having paid an annual fee of £33.55, pays £3.05 for a swimming session, £6.30 for the gym, and £5.90 for badminton or squash.

The concessionary annual fee is £1.10, the individual charge per session being £1.05 for swimming, £4.40 for the gym and £4.20 for badminton or squash. For non-members the prices are higher, £4.30 for a swimming session for example.

If the local borough councils have the responsibility for the maintenance of the park and its facilities, there will be a problem. Sir Robin Wales, Mayor of Newham, has pointed out that Newham's overall budget has been cut by £75 million over the next four years – a 14 per cent cut. The other boroughs have suffered similarly.

Some local citizens might have liked to visit some Olympic events, since it is taking place on their doorstep. 8.8 million Olympic tickets are to be available and the biggest tranche went on sale earlier this year. Most of the citizens of the six Olympic boroughs – Barking and Dagenham, Greenwich, Hackney, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest – are unlikely to have got any. The lowest priced ticket was £20.

To bid for tickets it was necessary to guess what might be the least popular events, then bid for far more than you really wanted, in the hope of getting something. So you had to have enough in the bank to cover the cost in case you got everything. That ruled out most people living in some of the poorest areas of Britain.

The Olympic Village is at the junction of Hackney, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest. 11 residential towers are being built, with central courtyards, trees, lawns and winding paths. They will house 17,000 athletes, then be turned into 2,818 new flats and houses.

There are more than 100,000 people on the council waiting lists of the Olympic boroughs. In Tower Hamlets there are 23,000 on the waiting list and 15,500 families in overcrowded housing. Hackney is the third most crowded area in Britain – 10,897 people live in each of its 19 square kilometres compared to the London average of 4,800 per square kilometre.

A quarter of people in Tower Hamlets and Hackney and a third of people in Newham are forced to rent privately, liable to be evicted at two months' notice and have the rents raised at any time. Evictions are arising from non-

payment of rent now that the government has put a cap on the amount of housing benefit which can be claimed.

The proximity to the Olympics is one factor forcing the rents up. Remy Zentari, owner of L'Epicerie delicatessen in Chatsworth Road, Hackney, told local paper Hackney Citizen: "All of a sudden landlords who don't live in the area hear about Chatsworth Road and the proximity of the Olympics and decide it's time to up the rent. Some of these landlords don't even know where their properties are. I employ 15 people, all of whom live locally, and for them rent rises are a very big problem."

To return to the Olympic Village, the original plan was for it to be built using mostly private money. Then the Olympics Delivery Authority (ODA) ran into the credit crunch of 2008 and 2009 and could not get a loan.

So the ODA dipped into the contingency fund set out for the Games. The cost was just over £1 billion, of which £827 million was put up by the government. The remaining £258 million was supplied by Triathlon Homes, the company that won the contract for the 1,379 'affordable' homes that were a stipulation of the bid.

Of these 1,379 'affordable' homes, only 675 will be at social rents – the usual rents for council and housing association homes. The rest are likely to be at between 60% and 80% of market rent, or on a part rent/part buy basis, beyond the reach of most local residents.

### Qatar Involvement

As to the other homes in the Village, on 12th August Qatari Diar, the investment arm of Qatar's royal family, signed a £557 million joint venture deal with Delancey to buy the long-term management of the Village.

"This deal will deliver a significant return to the public purse and a first-class owner for the Olympic Village," said ODA chief executive Dennis Hone.

Qatari Diar's purchase comes along with six adjacent future development plots with the potential for a further 2,000 new homes. The 1,439 homes the Qataris have bought will be rented out instead of being sold.

This will create the first UK private sector residential fund of over 1,000 homes to be owned and directly managed as an investment.

Jamie Ritblat, chief executive of Delancey, said: "This acquisition reflects the first truly great residential investment opportunity in the UK, offering a chance to break the mould and create a sustainable leasing model to provide first class accommodation."

This purchase for profit is most unlikely to meet local needs.

Another promise for local people was jobs resulting from the Games.

Recently, new jobs in the area have been almost exclusively part-time with poor security and low wages.

Many people are earning under £15,000, below the £16,000 poverty level. Manufacturing jobs have been very badly hit. Over the period 1995 – 2007 in London as a whole employees in manufacturing reduced from 8.1% to 4.5%.

But the drop was starker in all the Olympic boroughs. In Hackney the drop was from 14.2% to 5.8%, in Waltham Forest from 15.2% to 6.7%, and in Newham from 13.1% to 5.1%.

In the past local councils have been a major employer, offering reasonable wages and working conditions, pensions and job security. 30 years of cutbacks and contracting-out of services have eroded this. All the local councils are still cutting back; this year Newham, as an example, has shed 200 jobs and renegotiated conditions of employment with other staff.

On the Olympic construction site, there was an ODA target of 10 – 15 per cent of jobs from the 'host' boroughs – not a very high target. ODA figures in September 2008 said 24 per cent of 2,701 workers were local residents, 58 per cent from London and nine per cent previously unemployed.

UCATT, the building workers' union, suggested the proportion of migrant labour employed on the Olympic site was at least 42 per cent (the average for London) and highlighted the danger that they had been recruited by employment agencies and then exploited through poor pay and excessive working hours. And a migrant worker is a 'local resident' if he is living locally while working on the site.

So far the major new employer is the £1.45 billion Westfield Stratford City, Europe's largest urban shopping centre, which opened on 13th September. It has 300 shops, 70 restaurants, a 14-screen cinema, three hotels, a bowling alley, the UK's largest casino, and 5,000 car parking spaces.

Seven out of 10 Olympic spectators will have to walk through the mall to reach the stadiums. John Lewis is the biggest shop in the centre. Manager Noel Saunders reported that of the 1,000 staff it hired, at least 200 were local residents who had never worked before – either school leavers or long-term unemployed. Next year, and subsequent years, will prove who are the big winners out of the 2012 Olympics.

# 1980 Moscow Olympics' success

On July 19th, 1980, the Olympic Games opened in Moscow. These Games, in the Soviet Union, were the first to be staged in a socialist country.

## PAT TURNBULL contrasts London today with the Moscow Olympics hosted by the socialist Soviet Union.

In 1975, when the organising committee was formed, its head, Ignati Novikov, Deputy Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers, said: "We wish in no way to eclipse the efforts of our predecessors – the hosts of former Olympics – by gigantic construction work on sports centres. Our main objective is rationality. We have adopted a policy of making the maximum use for the Olympics of the available sports buildings and other facilities. Only what is essential and what can be used after the Games is being built."

The preparations for the 1980 Olympics coincided with the tenth five-year national economic plan. 17,700 million roubles were invested in the development of Moscow during the plan.

The reconstruction and renovation of sports facilities cost approximately 230 million roubles. In 1979, 900 construction projects were under way in Moscow – only 78, less than 10%, were Olympic projects.

In 1979 Moscow acquired over 100,000 new flats, 60 kindergartens, and 21 schools. By the end of 1980, 19 new stadiums, 200 gymnasiums and 36 swimming pools had been added to Moscow's facilities. Only ten of these projects were to be used for the Olympics and afterwards they, too, would be at the disposal of Muscovites.

The Games did require some plans to be accelerated and others to be changed. Roads had to be built or rebuilt, and new hotels added. There was a new telephone exchange and expanded

telex exchange. A new air terminal was constructed to take larger aircraft – also new.

In 'The 1980 Olympic Handbook' (publisher Arthur Barker, 1980), Norman Giller had this to say: "Unofficial estimates put the entire Moscow

Olympic construction costs at around \$400 million, less than half the totals for both Munich and Montreal."

Moscow already had extensive sporting facilities. Every fifth inhabitant regularly attended a physical training group. Every new neighbourhood in the city, typically about 60,000 inhabitants, had its own stadium for athletics and football, as well as a swimming pool, gymnasium and other sports facilities. The city already had 60 stadiums, 1,340 gyms, 22 swimming pools, two bicycle tracks, a rowing canal, eight palaces of sport and hundreds of open-air sports fields.

After visiting the Soviet Union, Peter Sutcliffe, member of the British Sports Council, said: "What I saw with my own eyes fully coincided with what one can read in authors usually marked down in the West as pro-Soviet ... the quantity and level of equipment in the sports centres of Moscow, Leningrad and Minsk is simply marvellous. But what particularly attracted me was not so much their equipment as the extent to which they were accessible and how they were run.

"Trade unions administer the centres, but they are open for the use of local residents and schoolchildren from nearby schools that do not have their own sports facilities, as well as for members of the union. The Trade Union sports centre has running tracks both indoors and outdoors, swimming pools, athletics and gymnastic halls which are open all day and evening, summer and winter. Back in Britain we have some of the best sports facilities within schools or universities, but for the most part they are inaccessible to 80% of the local population. What a loss!"

Fees for participation in all sporting activities in Moscow as in the rest of the USSR were purely nominal – a 30-kopek admission fee and a 30-kopek annual membership fee. The fees were the



Marathon runners pass Moscow's Saint Basil's Cathedral

same even for an expensive sport such as flying, riding or yachting.

Compulsory twice-weekly physical education classes were part of the curriculum in all Soviet schools, with other voluntary sports activities available in every school. First and second year students also had to participate in physical training, and again there were sports clubs as a voluntary extra.

In plants and factories 36 million people took part in exercises following a radio broadcast every day at 11.00 a.m., and here too voluntary sports clubs were organised at places of work, as well as in residential districts. In the USSR the physical culture movement had 330,000 permanent staff, plus almost four million voluntary coaches and instructors.

### Spartakiads

There was a whole network of sports competitions, the Spartakiads, which led up to a national Spartakiad in the year before each Olympic Games.

The general level of sporting facilities and activity was the basis for the USSR's successes in competitive sport. In 1974, when Moscow was chosen for the 1980 Olympics, there were 238 Olympic champions living in Moscow, more than in any other city in the world.

The Soviet Union had come equal top with the United States in the unofficial 'points table' published in the 'Olympic Bulletin' on their Olympic debut in 1952 in Helsinki. Except in 1968 when they came second in the summer and winter Olympics, the Soviet Union had never failed to come top in the unofficial 'points table'.

There were no sports backwoods in the vast Soviet Union. Members of the Soviet team at the 1980 Olympic Games came from everywhere, from Irkutsk to Leningrad, from the Komi Autonomous Republic to Central Asia and Transcaucasia.

The new Olympic installations were built mainly in districts where there was a shortage of such amenities, rather than, as in Munich and Montreal previously and in London now, being placed next to each other and close to the Olympic Village. After the Munich and Montreal Games, the former main Olympic area turned out to have too dense a network of sports installations. It remains to be seen what will happen to the Olympic site in London.

Eleven major sports installations were built in Moscow for the 1980 Olympics. In January 1982 Soviet magazine Sputnik published a report on what had happened to them since the Games.

The Sports Palace had hosted competitions in 20 sports including football,

ice hockey, boxing, figure skating and gymnastics. The Druzhba Gym was the site of two All-Union tournaments, in gymnastics and fencing and contests for hair-dressers and ballroom dancers.

At the equestrian centre in Bitsa Park competitions in horsemanship and a dog show had been held. At the aquatics centre in 1981 54 health-building and six general training groups were being attended regularly by 60,000 people every month. The new sports facilities enabled every third person of Moscow's eight million population to go in for physical training and sports regularly.

The Moscow Olympic Village for the athletes was made up of eighteen 16-storey blocks of flats which after the Games housed about 15,000 Muscovites. The blocks were laid round six spacious courtyards – small parks with trees, grass and flowers.

**The US President ignored a petition opposing the boycott presented to him by Eric Heiden, winner of five of the six American Winter Olympics gold medals, and signed by nearly all the members of the US Winter Olympic Games team.**

The Village itself was surrounded by Moscow's green belt, but with excellent transport links. Buildings for a school and kindergarten were put up first with the complex's post-Olympic use in mind, and used temporarily as storage premises. Medical, sports, cultural and shopping facilities were all on hand.

Like every other new housing complex in the USSR, after the Olympics the Village housed people of all different jobs and professions side by side. There wasn't any unemployment so every able-bodied person of working age had a job.

Rents had not changed since 1928 and comprised an average of three per cent of the working family's earnings. The right of the tenant to their home for life was enshrined in legislation, and if the tenant died, the authorization of the flat was automatically reprocessed in the name of one of the family members who also lived there.

Allocation of flats was made by the executive committees of the local Soviets with the participation of deputies and members of trade unions and the public. At the time the Soviet Union was building 2.2 million flats a year – as

many as in all the West European countries combined. But still the demand for comfortable housing was not being fully met, in great part because six million buildings were completely destroyed in the Second World War – by 1945 housing availability had fallen to the 1918 figure. The USSR aimed to provide every family with a separate modern flat by 1990. 80% of the urban population had such flats by 1982.

### Western Boycott

The Moscow Olympic Games were boycotted by several countries, including the United States, on the pretext that Soviet troops were in Afghanistan, having been there since December 1979.

As we approach the London Olympic Games, 10,000 British troops are on active service in Afghanistan and British warplanes were bombing Libya for several months.

The US President ignored a petition opposing the boycott presented to him in February 1980 after the Lake Placid Winter Olympics by Eric Heiden, winner of five of the six American gold medals, and signed by nearly all the members of the US Winter Olympic Games team.

Despite the opposition of the British government, the British Olympic Committee accepted the invitation and British athletes competed despite the political pressure at home.

On 20th July 1980, Christopher Brasher wrote in the Observer: "The truth is that the Russians have not put a foot wrong. On the material side, they have provided everybody concerned with everything they need to do the job they came here to do. The athletes have the most comfortable living quarters that I have ever seen ... and it is the same for the international officials."

Despite the boycott, the Moscow Olympics reached a high athletic standard. In the first week, 28 world and 47 Olympic records fell, while national records were broken in their hundreds. Throughout the second week, world records continued to be broken at an average rate of four a day.

Among the spectators in the Lenin Stadium were 8,000 boys and girls who had been given free tickets for the Games.

In the Encyclopedia of the Modern Olympics Movement the entry on the Moscow Olympics concludes: "...for those who attended the Moscow Olympic Games the overriding memory is of a magnificent sporting and cultural spectacle, an efficient if sometimes rigid organization, and an extremely joyful Games. And it did not rain once."

# The USA's wall of paranoia and profit

The construction of a wall is both a defensive and offensive act. Walls define what is 'inside' and 'outside'; 'mine' and 'yours' - the physical and symbolic embodiment of division.

**JIM BRODLOVE investigates the USA's explanations for the construction of their border wall with Mexico.**

These dividing lines are manifest in a multitude of scales, materials and strengths according to the nature of what is required to be protected, the level of perceived threat and the local geographical conditions and resources.

Whether it be the waist high fence demarcating a suburban garden or the fortifications of medieval walled cities, the act of building a wall is a conscious and deliberate action to physically demarcate one's territory through choice or necessity.

Walls also have the ability to transcend their often benign composition to become emotionally and politically charged devices. This is no more true than in border walls, walls built to express a barrier based on opposing nations, ethnicities, religions or politics.

From the rubble and mortar barriers of Hadrian's Rome and Dynasty Era

China to the concrete panels of Cold War Berlin and the Israeli West Bank Barrier, border walls have been utilised as tools of protection and imperialism becoming symbols of oppression and security on both sides.

This is evident too, in the American built wall which now divides large swathes of the USA from Mexico. Completed at the end of 2008 at a cost of over \$3.6 billion the US governments' Department of Homeland Security (DHS) commissioned the construction of a border barrier with their poorer Latin American neighbours, with little opposition from those outside of Mexico and the more liberal sections of the US media.

The Secure Fence Act was introduced under George Bush's Republican administration in 2006 with an aim to gain

'effective control' of the US border with Mexico as a 'critical element of national security' by constructing a physical and virtual 'fence' at strategic locations along its shared border with Mexico.

The title of the act is deliberately misleading to imply a less obstructive structure - this is no fence. At 5.5 metres high and 670 miles long this 'fence' of steel mesh, barbed wire and concrete augmented by radar, CCTV and around 20,000 armed border patrol guards is by any standards, a wall.

By comparison the Berlin Wall was only 3.6 metres high and 91 miles long, a wall which the President Ronald Regan at the time decried as 'an instrument to impose upon ordinary men and women the will of a totalitarian state'.

But why in a time of relative peace between the two nations, and with no barriers at its northern border with Canada to speak of have the US decided to construct this dividing wall with Mexico and South America?

According to the Department of Homeland Security website the reasons are as follows:

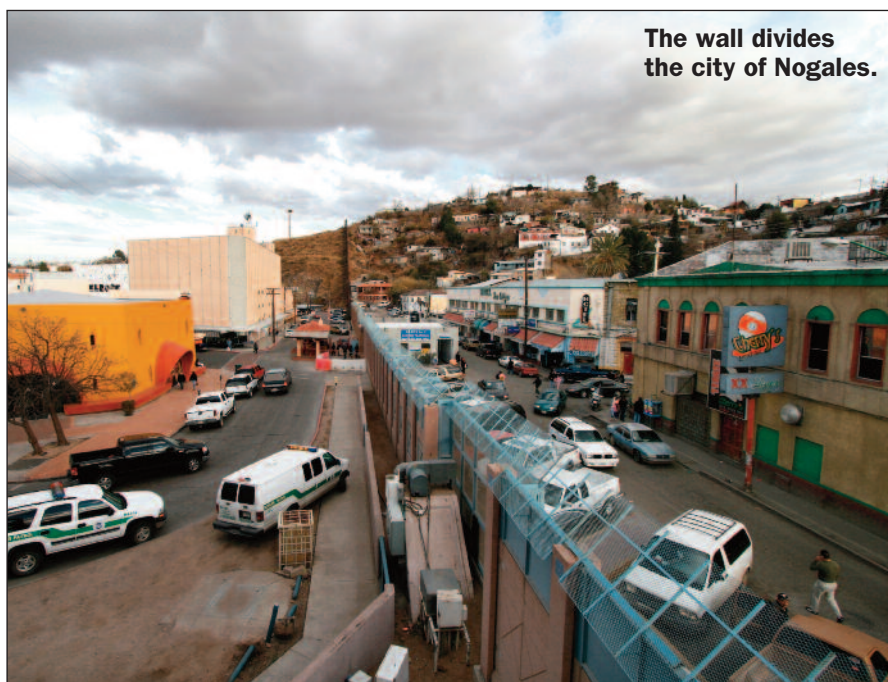
1. Establishing a substantial probability of apprehending terrorists seeking entry into the United States
2. Disrupting and restricting the smuggling of narcotics and humans
3. Preventing violence against border residents and illegal immigrants.
4. Promoting better environmental health along the Southwest Border
5. Restricting potentially harmful diseases (both human and agricultural) from crossing the border."

Yet through analysis of each of these official reasons for the construction of the fence it becomes apparent that in every area the wall is either irrelevant, harmful or inadequate.

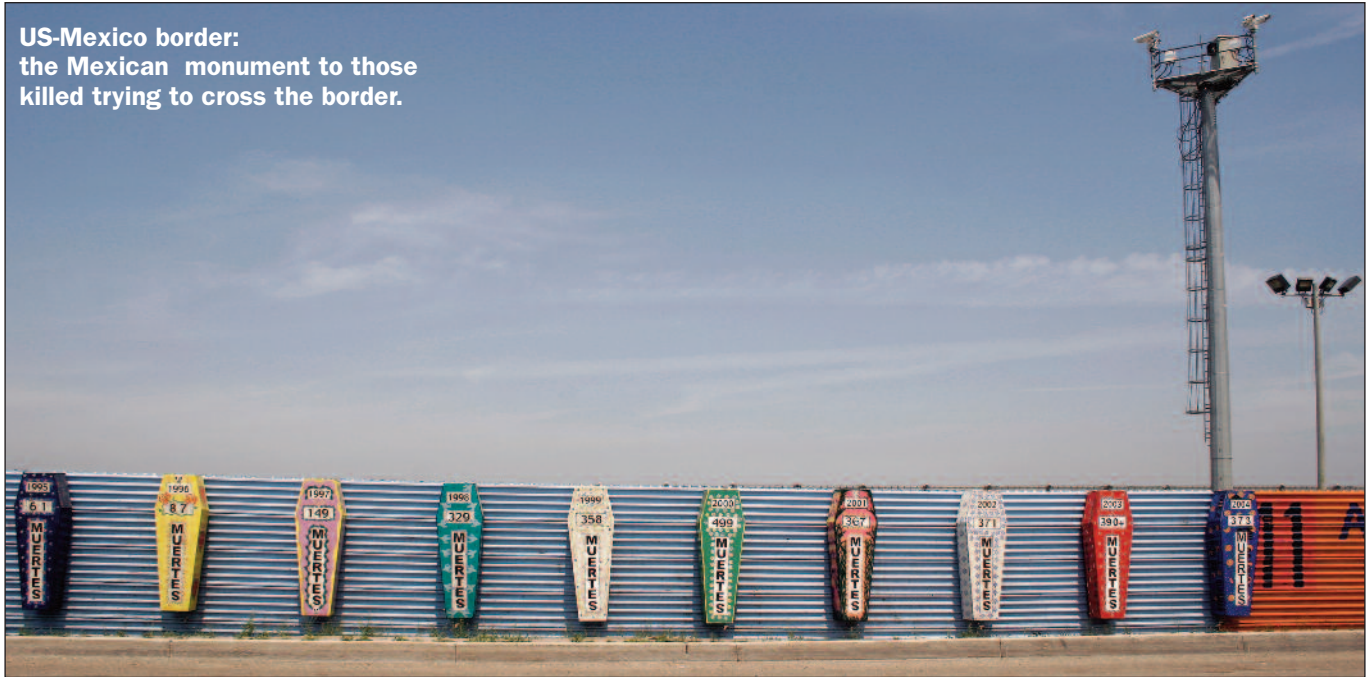
## 1. Apprehending Terrorists

In 'La Barda (The Fence)' - a recent documentary by journalist Rory Kennedy, it is clear that US government's attempts to prevent terrorism from the Mexican border are completely unfounded.

Kennedy states, "Since 1993, a total of 29 people have committed terrorist



**US-Mexico border:  
the Mexican monument to those  
killed trying to cross the border.**



acts on US soil. 24 arrived by plane, the other 5 were born in the US. Of the 24 who arrived from elsewhere... the number of people who travelled over the US border from Mexico is 0."

Based on this evidence it appears that the US Government's use of the wall to combat terrorism is utterly bogus.

## 2. Smuggling of Narcotics

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton herself has stated that "Our [America's] insatiable demand for illegal drugs fuels the drug trade", and that "the United States bears shared responsibility for the drug-fueled violence sweeping Mexico."

America's solution to this 'shared problem' is to deny all responsibility for its own multi billion dollar drug habit, instead calling the illegal drug trade in Latin America 'a national security threat', a denial manifest physically in the border wall.

Without the American population's desire for cocaine, heroin and marijuana, it is arguable that the bloody battles between Mexican drug gangs would not exist. It is no coincidence that the cities which have seen the most violence have been those on the border - Juarez, Tijuana and Nogales which share borders with the American cities of El Paso, San Diego and Nogales, Arizona.

## 3. Illegal Immigration

Figures from the independent Pew Research Center show that there are now a further 200,000 Mexican illegal immigrants (as of 2009) since the construction of the wall.

In this, the greatest recession since the 1920s, the immigrant population has not

subsided, even though jobs and opportunities for economic migrants have significantly decreased.

The wall is an irrelevant onlooker to the cross border flow of migration. Additionally, the concentration of the border wall at major population centres has meant that immigrants have been forced to cross the border at inhospitable desert areas.

These remote arid conditions mean that the risk of immigrants dying at the border was 1.5 times higher in 2009 than in 2004 prior to the construction of the wall according to the American Civil Liberties Union. The wall not only displaced illegal immigration but also increased migrant fatalities.

## 4. Environmental Health

There is no tangible evidence of how the construction of a steel and concrete fence has 'promoted better environmental health along the South West Border'.

In fact, many environmental groups have criticised the border wall as it restricts the natural migratory patterns of a number of species such as ocelots, jaguars and wolves.

Information on the DHS website indicates that the then Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff signed an environmental and land management waiver covering 470 miles of the south west border meaning that the Department no longer had any specific legal obligations under 30 environmental laws and regulations.

## 5. Disease Prevention

The DHS offers no evidence of how the construction of a steel and concrete

fence has restricted potentially harmful diseases.

On all fronts - terrorism, narcotics, violence, immigration, environment and disease - this \$3.6 billion border wall is a failure, notwithstanding the moral and humanitarian issues. So with a multitude of reasons not to waste American taxpayers money on this 'wall of hate', why was it built? As with much of recent American foreign policy, the reasons are twofold: Paranoia and Profit.

For nearly a decade the US Government have embarked on a global 'War on Terror', since the events of 9/11 sent shockwaves throughout the globe.

Fueled by large sections of the American media, this campaign of fear and paranoia has helped justify its imperialist actions in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Horn of Africa, the Gaza Strip, and now its own border with Mexico.

Since 2005, Republican congressmen and the right wing media have been busy convincing the senate and American public that a border wall would be a vital instrument against the self styled War on Terror.

In particular, the Murdoch-owned Fox News coverage has ranged from the paranoid to the preposterous with stories of Al-Qaeda plans to infiltrate the US via Mexico, Islamic militant plans to smuggle anthrax across the border and even using the relative similarities of Latino and Middle Eastern skin colour as proof that Islamic terrorists could infiltrate the border undercover as Mexican migrants.

This incessant campaign of hate has left an indelible mark on the psyche of the American public and its politicians, who have both backed the construction

of a border wall with Mexico in majority numbers. Indeed, with the recent drug fueled violence in Mexico the focus of this campaign of paranoia has shifted, now being labelled as a war on the 'the third front' (along with Iraq and Afghanistan) against 'narco-terror' by both the right wing media and prominent Republicans.

In parallel with this media and government fueled culture of paranoia, 670 miles of the wall have been completed by private contractors.

In 2006 the DHS awarded the \$3.6 billion contract for the border security project to contractor Boeing over Lockheed Martin and Northrop Grumman. Boeing headed a consortium of sub-contractors selected to develop and deliver both the physical and technological aspects of this gargantuan project comprising steel mesh, concrete, radar, CCTV and multiple surveillance towers.

One of Boeing's main sub-contractors Elbit, (who have deployed sensors, alarms and unmanned vehicles for the border wall project), are the largest non-governmental defence company in Israel.

Elbit also has extensive experience in developing similar systems for Israel's 'Apartheid Wall', which divides the zionist state from the remainder of the Gaza strip. This, allied with recent WikiLeaks revelations that United States diplomats were acting like marketing agents for Boeing in order to secure foreign investment ahead of its main European rival, Airbus suggests that the US Government is committed to lining the pockets of its corporate cohorts with public money. With estimated repair costs of \$49 million during its 25 year lifespan (pushing the total costs to around \$53 billion) it is expected that the pockets of Boeing, Elbit and its 100 or so sub-contractors will be positively overflowing.

Despite being introduced by the previous Bush administration there is strong support for this barrier from both De-



**A Mexican family on the beach beside the US wall at Algodones.**

mocrats and Republicans, with 71% of the Senate approving the motion in 2006.

Among this 71% was current president Barack Obama, while in August 2010, the Obama administration pledged a further \$600m for border security. Allied with a recent seismic shift to the Republicans in the House of Representatives this a worrying indication that the reactionary border control policy of the Bush administration has not been reversed or halted by Obama but rather continued and reinforced.

With no international outcry and no significant domestic political or media opposition to this ineffective and inhumane barrier, it appears that from the beaches of Tijuana, to the deserts of Arizona and border cities of El Paso and Juarez that this wall of paranoia and profit will remain.

The USA was founded on immigra-

tion, a nation whose iconic Statue of Liberty once welcomed the 'tired, poor and huddled masses' yet it is now erecting miles of steel, wire and concrete at its borders in a phony attempt to refuse the same masses that have built and continue to sustain the country's insatiable appetite for services, capital and exploitation.

This nation of immigrants is now disregarding their collective past in the name of protectionism - starkly exhibited in the form of the border wall. It begs the question, who is free?

Those enclosed by this perverse form of insular imperialism or the large swathes of land and people south of the border?

Perhaps only when 'the land of the free' realises that freedom does not constitute walls and barriers; paranoia and private profit, will this inhumane, ineffective and divisive device be torn down.

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# Arthur Goldreich and the ANC's secret HQ

Arthur Goldreich, born 1929, died 25 May 2011.

**When I met Arthur in May 1963 he appeared to be a well off, handsome, strongly built man in his thirties with a certain self confident swagger.**

**A personal account by DENIS GOLDBERG (Rivonia trialist, jailed for 22 years) of the part played by the late Arthur Goldreich in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa.**

Arthur (pictured) liked to wear jodhpurs and riding boots with a well fitting tweed jacket and open weave riding gloves with leather palms and fingers, all colour coordinated in shades of brown and tan.



He drove what was then a seemingly exotic Citroen DS19 car with an avant garde shape. He was a designer for one of the large department chain stores.

He was also a prize winning artist and dressed the part. He had designed and constructed the sets of the hit South African musical King Kong. That was in itself an indicator of his character for it was a theatre piece with story, music and lyrics written by black South Africans about black South Africans at a time of ever deepening apartheid repression.

His social contacts were with musicians, artists and performers. He was consciously opposed to the apartheid policies of the time. In part, I believe his opposition was shaped by growing up in Pietersburg (now Polokwane) in the then Northern Transvaal (now Limpopo Province) near to an asbestos mine and his family being of Jewish origin faced open anti-Semitism from the predominantly Afrikaner mining and farming community.

Experience of discrimination can make one oppose the dominant forms of discrimination even though the majority of whites simply went along with apartheid racism and benefited from it.

Arthur told me he had been a soldier in the Palmach and fought against Arabs and Palestinians for the independence of

the State of Israel, newly formed by UN resolution as a way to compensate European Jews for the decimation of the holocaust.

He learnt soldiering during that time but like so many Jews of left wing political persuasion came to oppose the militaristic oppression of the Arab and Palestinian people by the Zionist state. All of this helped to shape his active opposition to apartheid.



In later life, while living in Israel he became a vocal founder member of the anti-apartheid movement opposed to Israel's pro-apartheid South Africa policy.

He also became vocal in his opposition to the Israeli repression of the Palestinian people. He insisted that architecture, the design and building of illegal fortress-like Jewish settlements on Palestinian land was itself not abstract design, but fundamentally political. He railed against this trying to get his students at the Bezalel Design Institute to understand their role in the oppression.

## Underground HQ

My personal connection to Arthur started in May 1963 when Joe Slovo, Central Committee Member of the South African Communist Party as I

then (correctly) assumed, and a co-founder with Nelson Mandela of Umkhonto we Sizwe introduced me to Arthur who lived with his wife Hazel and two sons Nicholas and Paul on a large small holding called Liliesleaf Farm (pictured below) on the outskirts of Johannesburg in the semi-rural area of Rivonia.

The house and 28 acres (12 hectares) of grounds were for their time palatial, or at least like a country manor. Though the outbuildings were somewhat dilapidated, the lawns around the manor house were beautifully manicured.

The rooms were large with hardwood parquet floors and the Goldreich family maintained the façade beautifully. They appeared to be part of the huntin', ridin', and shootin' set.

Clearly nothing untoward appeared to be happening there. Behind the façade

however, everything was not as it seemed to be. The property was in fact owned by the SACP through a front company and was used as the underground headquarters of the SACP.

One of the outbuildings had been the home of one 'David Matsumayi' in reality Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, who posed as a farm worker and 'house boy.' The whole family was at risk for sheltering the Black Pimpernel as he was known in the media at that time. To the Security Police he was the 'most wanted person', and like Alexander Dumas' Scarlet Pimpernel it was said: "they seek him here, they seek him there, they seek him everywhere."

When I realised that Liliesleaf was also the underground headquarters of the African National Congress and Umkhonto we Sizwe, the Spear of the Nation, the growing armed wing of the

liberation movement, I admired the courage and commitment of Arthur and Hazel even more for they were sitting on a barrel of dynamite that could destroy their lives and those of their children if the security police should discover where we were hiding out - Ahmed Kathrada, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Raymond Mhlaba, Wilton Mquayi, and me too. But in addition Bram Fischer, the famous advocate, Joe Slovo also an advocate, Bob Hepple an academic lawyer, Rusty Bernstein and others would arrive there for meetings of their various organisational committees.

Arthur was the convenor of our Logistics Committee of the High Command and he passed to me the designs for home made military weapons such as hand grenades and landmines he had brought back from China where he had been sent by the MK leadership.

Arthur designed and executed my disguise which turned me into a rather rabbinical looking character with small wire rimmed glasses and a full beard. He disguised Ahmed Kathrada rather well using his swarthy skin and hair bleached to make him look quite different on casual inspection. Arthur revelled in the clandestine activity. Indeed we all did, feeling we were on the verge of momentous events when we would overthrow the apartheid state.

### Arrest and Escape

Our security was seriously compromised by the number of openly politically active comrades who visited Liliesleaf Farm. I was instructed to buy a new small holding at Travallyn Agricultural Holdings in Krugersdorp and we moved there leaving Arthur and his family and Ahmed Kathrada behind.

Because a new alternative secure venue had not yet been found, one last meeting of the MK High Command was to take place on 11 July 1963 in the afternoon. The meeting started and then the Security Police raided the farm arresting all of us, including Arthur and Hazel when they returned home from work.

Under 90 days detention the police interrogators sought to turn Hazel against Arthur and the movement by showing her love letters to him from a lover. He had kept them in his desk at work. She resisted the police. Arthur and Harold Wolpe were detained in police cells at Marshall Square where Mosie Moolla and Abdulhay (Charlie) Jassat were also detained. They successfully bribed a young policeman to allow the four of them to escape. As it happens, Hazel was also detained there and so was my wife.

My story is of Arthur, and he and Harold escaped from the prison in the evening and found that their getaway car was not awaiting them. They walked towards Hillbrow in the dark and by chance the famous theatre director Barney Simon happened to stop at a traffic light near them.

Arthur persuaded him to drive them to safety. He took them to his own flat and at their suggestion went off to Denis and Hillary Kuny, waking them up at two in the morning to ask for help. Denis asked their neighbour Ivan Schermbrucker, a leading communist activist, to ask for help to hide them.

In the meantime Hillary made a packet of sandwiches for Barney to take back home for the escapees instructing Barney to make coffee for them. Hillary told me that Ivan took over and Arthur and Harold were taken into hiding.

**Arthur Goldreich and Harold Wolpe were detained in police cells at Marshall Square ... They successfully bribed a young policeman to allow them to escape.**

They spent a short time in the garden cottage of Leon and Maureen Kreef in Mountain View where they were disguised as priests in long cassocks and driven to Swaziland by Ted Fram where they crossed the border on foot.

I believe they were given asylum by the Rev Hooper until a chartered flight took them to Botswana where, for their safety, the British colonial authorities locked them up in a prison.

Charlie Jassat and Mosie Moolla also successfully escaped but because of the nature of our media with its biases, their key role in the escape has always been neglected.

In Botswana, a plane sent from Tanzania by President Nyerere to fetch them was blown up on the runway by South African agents. The threat to Arthur and Harold was very real. After several attempts a second plane was chartered and they were flown to Dar es Salaam with other South African political refugees.

Arthur and Hazel were divorced and Arthur moved to Israel where he became a Professor of Design and Architecture. I referred earlier to Arthur's stand against the Israeli oppression and domination of the Middle East in alliance mainly with the USA but the Western powers in general.

At the time of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 in which the notorious

massacres took place in the Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps, Arthur led a mutiny by several reserve officers of the Israeli Defence Force who refused to participate in the invasion.

They could have been tried by a military court but the authorities did not prosecute them. The additional publicity would have done the military even more harm. Arthur was consistent in his opposition to racism and oppression whether in South Africa or Israel or elsewhere.

My personal contact with Arthur was renewed when I was released from prison in 1985 and went to Israel to visit my daughter who lived on a kibbutz at that time. On arriving in Israel I was driven away from the airport and found myself at Arthur's home in Herzliya, near Tel Aviv.

On arrival he remarked with pride that the last house I had been in when we were arrested was his home, and the first house I was entering after my release was also his home. I responded with a question: Is it safe this time?

I had sporadic contact with Arthur thereafter. One notable event was in Helsinki at a meeting of anti-apartheid movements organised by the Cairo based Afro Asian Peoples Solidarity Organisation. Arthur represented the Israeli AAM and I spoke for the ANC and also as an independent expert.

He made a brilliant speech and most delegates said that he and I made the politics of oppression easy to understand and set out logical steps to destroy it. Of course, we had the solid policies of our liberation movement to rely upon and our own years of experience.

Other contacts followed through the mutual support we gave to the anti-apartheid movements. My last real contact with Arthur was at Liliesleaf Farm in December 2001, when then President Mbeki launched the Liliesleaf Trust which was given the task of turning the farm into a museum to the determination of committed freedom fighters to achieve the end of apartheid and the building of a democratic, non racist, non-sexist state.

The Trust and its Liliesleaf Museum has a distinguished board to back up the dedicated and highly successful work of Nicholas Wolpe, the son of the late Harold Wolpe, Arthur's comrade in politics and in arms.

I enjoyed knowing Arthur, a larger than life character who was a marvellous raconteur. Sometimes one wondered if there was a touch of poetic licence in his telling of essentially true stories of the life and times of a political activist. His passing leaves an emptiness in our lives.



# KW Kgosisile: South Africa's Poet Laureate

**Below is the speech by South Africa's Minister of Arts and Culture, Mr Z PALLO JORDAN, at the inauguration of KW Kgosisile as Poet Laureate, Bloemfontein, December 2006.**

The poet whom we are honouring tonight is among a generation of African writers, poets and scholars who came into their own in exile.

Though he regularly boasts about his age, we consider each other contemporaries. Our generation had the good fortune to have experienced our adolescence during a decade when the crisis of colonialism in Africa and Asia was fast maturing.

In both our own country and in the rest of the colonised world the oppressed peoples were asserting themselves through mass struggles of an unprecedented scale. In a number of instances these culminated in wars of liberation in Malaya, in Vietnam, in Kenya and in Algeria. South Africa was no exception to this trend.

Over a 10-year period commencing with the adoption of the programme of action by the African National Congress (ANC) in 1949, the liberation movement mounted successive waves of mass struggles, the Defiance Campaign of 1952, the Congress of the People in 1955, the stay at home strikes that came virtually every year, the bus boycotts in Evaton and Alexandra, the women's anti-pass campaign, the pound a day strike and others with a lower profile.

The leavening of this upsurge was the growing self-confidence of the oppressed peoples, "the wretched of the earth" as Franz Fanon termed us, were visibly casting off the subservience of ages and taking their destiny into their own hands.

No intelligent young person worth his/her salt could stay aloof from such momentous events. Willie joined the ANC Youth League (ANCYL) during these stirring years.

On leaving high school he found employment as a journalist with "New Age," a weekly that had been serially banned by the racist regime. It had first been known as "The Guardian"



until it was banned in 1952. It re-appeared as "The Clarion," retained that title till 1953 when it was banned only to re-emerge as "Advance" which was published until mid 1955 giving way to "New Age" when it was again banned.

Under a superb editorial team that included Brian Bunting, Ruth First, Govan Mbeki and MP Naicker, working alongside names that would become legendary, Joe Gqabi and Robert Resha and rubbing shoulders with the likes of Can Themba, Bloke Modisane, Lewis Nkosi and other emergent African writers, Willie Kgosisile was initiated into the craft of journalism in Johannesburg.

I have no doubt that it was that rigorous apprenticeship that moulded him into the gifted wordsmith he matured into in later years.

Kgosisile left South Africa in 1961 travelling through Botswana to what was then Tanganyika where he was drawn into the external mission of the ANC under Oliver Tambo.

In Dar-es-Salaam he was among the fortunate few who were able to find employment, working as a journalist for the newsletter, "Spearhead" edited by Frene Ginwala.

It is testimony to the prescience and foresight of the editor and her team that many of the issues of an African Renaissance, African economic independence and political unity that appear on the continent's current agenda

were flagged in "Spearhead" as early as 1962 and 1963.

From Dar-es-Salaam Kgosisile travelled to the United States of America (USA) on a scholarship. That is where I first encountered him. As I recall it was a Saturday afternoon during the Easter vacation in 1964. I had driven from Madison, Wisconsin - where I was studying - to New York.

The focal point for virtually all South African students in the USA was a basement flat which may one day deserve a blue plaque as some sort of heritage site, 310 West 87th Street, in Manhattan.

I rang the bell and out came an elfin figure with a wisp of a beard: "So, who are you?" he enquired. Recognising him immediately as a South African I responded, "Heyt daar briekid, ek soek ou Gwangwa." And thus began a relationship which has endured more than four decades. We still have to record those decades we spent in exile in various parts of the world.

The chapters covering the United States (US) could well be amongst the most colourful. The contingent, who arrived in the US as students during the early to mid-60s, was probably the first large group of South Africans to arrive in the US. And there is no doubt about it we took the US by storm!

Scattered among a number of universities and colleges most of them clustered along the east coast wherever we were the South Africans left an indelible impression. Assertive, some would even say pushy, politically engaged and with a fierce sense of identity we inserted ourselves into various facets of the US cultural and political scene with the primary purpose of mobilising solidarity with the struggle at home.

I am not about to divulge any of the truths that will emerge when we finally write the definitive account of the exile years. Suffice it to say that Willie Kgosisile what he said, wrote and did during those years in the US will feature very prominently both for the mirth it occasioned and as a record of the growth of one of South Africa's leading poets.

The 1960s in the US and in other parts of the world were years of political ferment. The struggle of the African-Americans for their basic human rights was reaching a crescendo; the struggle for world peace had become particularly acute following the Cuban Missile crisis and in the midst of the American war of aggression in South East Asia.

The universities we were attending were the sites of much of this activity. These movements in turn stimulated complimentary cultural movements, affecting music, theatre and especially literature. It was the sort of fecund environment that encouraged budding talent to blossom. Kgositsile found a niche among a throng of African-American literary and cultural figures who were wrestling with the strategic and aesthetic dilemmas thrown up by the struggles raging all around us in the Americas and the third world.

Among them were figures such as the poet and critic, Leroy Jones, who later took the name Amira Baraka; the cultural activist, Norman Kelley; the writer, Lawrence Neal; the jazz aficionado and historian, AB Spellman and many others.

It was in that literary milieu that the poet who had been struggling to come out first showed his head. In poetry readings, literature workshops and the interminable discussions so loved by young intellectuals, he honed his skills and produced his first anthology, *Afrika is my Name* in the late 1960s.

From then on the ever active and open mind of Kgositsile was regularly visited by the muse, inspiring a stream of poetic eloquence that has earned him laurels not only in the USA but in Africa, Asia, Latin America, as well as Europe.

But Willie Kgositsile was not only a poet. He was also a political activist of long standing. To say that his poetry was always highly political is not to suggest that he sacrificed aesthetics for politics. All too often the quest to express oneself politically has tempted writers and musicians to descend to the level of the political propagandist. Kgositsile sarcastically dismissed a few such efforts of the late seventies as "MK, AK bullshit!"

He could afford to say so because after his return to Afrika after 1976, he was probably one of the best examples of a truly engaged poet who like Mao Zhedong and Pablo Neruda had mastered the art of producing politically inspired poetry that did not compromise poetics to make a political statement.

Willie's return to the continent coincided with the rising tide of mass mo-

bilisation here at home. He arrived in Dar-es-Salaam shortly after the Soweto uprising which produced a stream of young people in search of education and or the political and military skills required to overthrow the apartheid regime.

He was immediately drawn into the nascent Department of Arts and Culture of the ANC. It was that Department working in close co-operation with the internal reconstruction unit of the Politico-Military Commission (PMC), that later had him posted to Botswana having secured him a post at the university there.

It was in the latter location that Willie was able to creatively combine his varied talents, as political activist, poet, professor of literature and under-ground organiser.

He was central to both the trend setting Gaborone and Culture in Another South Africa (CASA) conferences that the ANC organised in 1982 and 1987, respectively. We shall be marking the 20th anniversary of the latter CASA conference in Amsterdam next year.

The title "poet laureate" has an ancient lineage in African society. This is a title its recipient earned not solely by poetic excellence but also by his/her public spirited contribution to society at large. I have regularly had occasion to wince when hearing reference by the uninformed to 'praise poets,' the incorrect and culturally charged mistranslation of the term "Imbongi."

I find this particularly disturbing when committed by Africans themselves who seldom weigh the hidden meanings in such mistranslated terms. The traditional "Imbongi" was anything but a praise-singer. True, poets would heap praises and laurels on the historic figures whose actions they thought praise worthy. But an imbongi could be more scathing and denigratory than even the sharpest modern political cartoonist!

The examples of this are legion and for the life of me I cannot understand why African literary critics appear

to have missed it. An imbongi had the unquestioned licence to employ every known literary and poetic device to mock, jeer, castigate and criticise anyone in his community from the king down to the lowliest subject.

Pre-colonial African societies accepted this as one of numerous checks on the power of rulers. An imbongi who shirked that responsibility would be regarded as either weak or lacking in public spirit.

Willie Kgositsile has more than

### NO SERENITY HERE

by Keorapetse Kgositsile

An omelette cannot be unscrambled. Not even the one prepared in the crucible of 19th century sordid European design.

When Europe cut up this continent into little pockets of its imperialist want and greed it was not for aesthetic reasons, nor was it in the service of any African interest, intent or purpose.

When, then, did the brutality of imperialist appetite and aggression evolve into something of such ominous value to us that we torture, mutilate, butcher in ways hideous beyond the imagination, rape women, men, even children and infants for having woken up on what we now claim, with perverse possessiveness and territorial chauvinism, to be our side of the boundary that until only yesterday arrogantly defined where a piece of one European property ended and another began? In my language there is no word for citizen, which is an ingredient of that 19th century omelette. That word came to us as part of the package that contained the bible and the rifle. But moagi, resident, is there and it has nothing to do with any border or boundary you may or may not have crossed before waking up on the piece of earth where you currently live.

Poem, I know you are reluctant to sing when there is no joy in your heart, but I have wondered all these years why you did not or could not give answer when Langston Hughes, who wondered as he wandered, asked: what happens to a dream deferred?

I wonder now why we are somewhere we did not aim to be. Like my sister who could report from any place where people live, I fear the end of peace and I wonder if that is perhaps why our memories of struggle refuse to be erased, our memories of struggle refuse to die we are not strangers to the end of peace, we have known women widowed without any corpses of husbands because the road to the mines,

earned the title we bestow on him today. Like the traditional bard he has been unsparingly and rigorously critical when it was necessary about the performance of Africa's leadership and statesmen.

Thanks to that sharp tongue he has often been characterised as an "un-guided missile." But he is at the same time one of the most enthusiastic advocates and defenders of political tolerance, rooted in an appreciation that truth is elusive and that it can only be

like the road to any war,  
is long and littered with casualties – even  
those who still walk and talk  
when Nathalie, whose young eyes know things, says:  
there is nothing left after wars, only other wars  
wake up whether you are witness or executioner –  
the victim, whose humanity you can never erase,  
knows with clarity more solid than granite  
that no matter which side you are on,  
any day or night, an injury to one  
remains an injury to all

somewhere on this continent  
the voice of the ancients warns  
that those who shit on the road  
will meet flies on their way back,  
so perhaps you should shudder under the weight  
of nightmares when you consider what  
thoughts might enter the hearts of our neighbours,  
what frightened or frightening memories might jump up  
when they hear a South African accent

even the sun embarrassed, withdraws her warmth  
from this atrocious defiance and unbridled denial  
of the ties that should bind us here and always  
and the night will not own any of this stench  
of betrayal which has desecrated our national anthem,  
so do not tell me of NEPAD or AU,  
do not tell me of SADC  
and please do not try to say shit about  
ubuntu or any other neurosis of history

again I say, while I still have voice,  
remember, always  
remember that you are what you do,  
past any saying of it

our memories of struggle  
refuse to be erased  
our memories of struggle  
refuse to die.

My mothers, fathers of my father and me,  
how shall I sing to celebrate life  
when every space in my heart is surrounded by corpses?  
Whose thousand thundering voices shall I borrow to shout  
once more: Daar is kak in die land?\*

**"No Serenity Here" was published by:  
flipped eye publishing,  
under the Defeye series in 2009.**

\* There is shit in the land.

sought in an environment of untrammelled contestation and debate among differing opinions.

Like any sensible 20th century intellectual he is also a secularist who nonetheless values pluralism for its intrinsic value. Speaking at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, two years ago, amongst other things I remarked that, "Many modern African writers have portrayed the dilemma posed by modernity as tragic. But the most far sighted among the generation of writers, artists, poets and playwrights who came into their own immediately before and after the Second World War demonstrated how to resolve this contemporary riddle of the sphinx. Rather than wallowing in

their alienation or seeking refuge in the past, they reintegrated themselves with the common people by active engagement in political and social struggles for freedom, independence and progress."

As we march into the third millennium that is the object lesson that African intellectuals must derive from our 20th century experience.

Keorapatse Willie Kgositsile is firmly rooted in that tradition. He has dedicated himself to the struggle for freedom and his poetry to the creation of a better world. Such a man deserves the title Poet Laureate.

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## Changes that cannot be wished away

**Keorapatse Willie Kgositsile (KWK) was in Britain for the Edinburgh International Book Festival. During his visit, Brian Filling (BF), Honorary Consul for South Africa in Scotland, met him and the following is a distillation of their conversations.**

**BF:** *Could you describe your introduction to literature and politics and what has influenced you?*

**KWK:** I grew up with a love for reading and playing around with language. My reading habits were grounded in the Setswana classics at an early age. Though I did not think of myself as an aspiring writer I used to scribble quite a bit to entertain myself and some of my friends.

At high school a group of us keen to gobble up the word on any printed page used to read and discuss all kinds of stuff we could lay our hands on. Then at some point we came across a copy of "Black Boy", Richard Wright's autobiography. An African American sailor had given the book to someone in Cape Town. To this day I do not know who that person was. This book had an immediate impact on us because we could relate to, and identify with the life of this black boy growing up in a racist society similar to ours. Perhaps for that reason that single copy travelled around the country from reader to reader. No one was ever selfish enough to keep it!

In terms of writing in English, I think "Black Boy" was my earliest influence; it showed and convinced me that I could tame it to speak my language; tame it to name the aspects of my social reality I was most responsive to; tame it to name my being in the world; that is, tame it to say who I am.

The banning of the South African Communist Party by the apartheid maniacs in 1950 soon after they came into power led to, among many other things, the formation of the Congress of Democrats. In Johannesburg the



Willie Kgositsile and Brian Filling beneath the statue in Glasgow of Spanish Republican leader, La Pasionaria.

Congress of Democrats had lunchtime meetings every Wednesday. That was where my political education and the development of my consciousness took root.

After the "Treason Trial" I joined "New Age" as a young reporter on general assignment under the tutelage of Ruth First, its no-nonsense, hard-nosed Johannesburg editor. The SACP understood the centrality of culture to the struggle for national liberation and gave me exposure to progressive writers from all over the world. Later in exile, as a result of this, as a young aspiring poet, when I met Pablo Neruda in New York and I thanked him for his contribution to our understanding of the world and how much I admired and valued his work, tears rolled down his face and he kept saying: "The Party in South Africa must be doing a lot more than we know."

Late in 1961 the leadership of the liberation movement instructed me to leave the country. In 1962 I worked for "Spearhead", a political and economic monthly owned and edited by Frene Ginwala in Tanzania (the newly independent Tanganyika at the time).

From Dar-es-Salaam I went on an African-American Institute scholarship to the United States late the same year and remained there until 1975. Travelling and meeting a lot of different people strongly influenced me and helped me to retain some semblance of sanity in a madhouse like the United States, as did music, especially jazz.

Jazz breaks down a lot of barriers and remains, true to its origins, always revolutionary. (BF: Willie's collection of poems, "This Way I Salute You", is a celebration of jazz artistes).

Take Billie Holiday: Capitalism makes profit out of the misery it turns your life into; or James Baldwin, when it turns the expression of your frustration and anger into a profitable commodity in the book chain marketplace.

**BF:** *What do you think of the current situation in South Africa?*

**KWK:** Our detractors, without anything that even vaguely approaches a critique, come up with idiotic comments like "nothing has changed" or "it's worse than the old days of apartheid".

What they fail to realise is the stubborn fact of the changes that cannot be denied nor wished away. Mistakes have been made, of course. Only a fool or some criminally arrogant ignoramus would deny that. Anyone who tries to do anything of value is bound to make a number of mistakes. I've argued elsewhere before that the only ones who cannot make any mistakes are those who

**FOR BILLIE HOLIDAY**

by Keorapetse Kgositsile

Lady Day Lady Day  
Lady Day of no happy days  
who lives in a voice  
sagging with the pain  
where the monster's teeth  
are deep to our marrow

Lady Day of no happy days  
carried in a voice so blue  
she could teach any sky  
all about the blues

Lady Day of no happy days  
Mrs Scag still roams  
the treacherous ghetto streets  
of white design wasting  
the young bloods who think  
themselves too hip to learn  
from your hurt

Lady Day  
them that got power  
wealth and junk  
are still picking your pain  
for profit and fun

Lady Day Lady Day  
Of no happy days  
The willow still weeps for you  
Though now we should know  
That all tears are stale  
Though now we should know  
That tears ain't never done nothin for  
nobody

"For Billie Holiday" was first published in "The Present Is A Dangerous Place To Live" (Third World Press, Chicago, 1975, 2nd edition 1993). It was more recently published in the collection, "This Way I Salute You" (Kwela/Snail Press, Cape Town, 2004)

do not do anything because they are themselves a huge blunder.

One of the mistakes has been to create a new so-called elite, unproductive even at the level of ideas, without consideration of the impact this would have on society as a whole and thereby ending up failing to create any mechanism to manage this process, as Palo Jordan has pointed out. Access to resources has been created for a few but this clearly could not possibly change the quality of life of the majority.

South Africa got to where it was in 1994 on black South African shoulders. Affirmative action, a brainchild straight out of the United States racist crucible bag of tricks, was meant to pacify the African American and other "minority" groups who were restless and ungovernable in the 1960s. In contrast, as unpalatable as the comparison might be,

the post-1948 Afrikaner affirmative action programme was very uncompromising and very militant. But we are unquestionably an overwhelming majority. So what are the implications of a concept like affirmative action with reference to us?

There is also this business of delivery. You know, the word "delivery" entered the landscape of South African politics via "The New York Times" in 1994, 100 days after Madiba's inauguration.

And the United States was dealing with its own interests, which I won't get into. But now some people do not hesitate to destroy even a library because "the government is not delivering".

We need to accept the fact that the transformation of this society is our collective responsibility; to fold our arms and wait for government to deliver is suicidal. The responsibility of Government is to legitimate and give full support to the social transformation process.

Anyone who folds their arms and tries to hold Government at ransom is a danger to our future. I'm allergic to slogans but here I would be tempted to shout: Away with Obscurantism!

Another contradiction is that a number of yesteryear's trade union leaders have become bosses and they now employ their former colleagues. What are the implications of this? And, believe me, there are many more contradictions we have to confront with honesty to be able to resolve.

**BF:** *What about corruption?*

**KWK:** When elected to positions people have opportunities for access to resources. After 1994 and the end of apartheid people got paid for things which they did as volunteers before; deployment was not synonymous with lucrative employment.

I concede that there's nothing wrong with being remunerated for the work you do, even as a politician, provided your ideas and values don't change. However, many of the people I'm talking about moved away from their constituencies and not only physically. At the level of praxis they moved away a political distance as well, visiting their constituency only with an eye on elections. A quick reality check here would reveal an absence of any dynamic interaction with the constituency in many instances. However, at the same time, being cynical would be a dangerous luxury.

In the past the lines were clearly drawn. Who and what the enemy was, was clear. Now it is very tricky. It is the biggest challenge we've ever had. It calls for interventions which we've never had to make before.