



Extract of International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine

<http://app.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article1191>

Africa

# The Nairobi Social Forum

- IV Online magazine - 2006 - IV385 - January 2007 -

Publication date: Friday 19 January 2007

## **Description:**

The arrogance of neoliberalism, although certainly challenged in some Latin American countries, seems to face a cooling of opposition everywhere else, as if there was an exhaustion of the "expansive wave" of the movement for global justice. What can we expect from the second World Social Forum to be held in Africa (following its polycentric version in 2006, held in Bamako, Caracas and Karachi), where all the evils of globalisation in its different phases are concentrated? Will it give a second breath to the movement, a greater and firmer radicalism in the area of alternatives?

**Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights**

**reserved**

---

**The arrogance of neoliberalism, although certainly challenged in some Latin American countries, seems to face a cooling of opposition everywhere else, as if there was an exhaustion of the "expansive wave" of the movement for global justice. What can we expect from the second World Social Forum to be held in Africa (following its polycentric version in 2006, held in Bamako, Caracas and Karachi), where all the evils of globalisation in its different phases are concentrated? Will it give a second breath to the movement, a greater and firmer radicalism in the area of alternatives?**

## **The underhand dealings of Africa's leaders**

Successive conflicts, the AIDS drama, a rate of infant mortality that is still very high, malnutrition and food shortages, a low rate of access to drinkable running water and to electricity, a still massive illiteracy, the massive and hazardous exodus to the countries of the capitalist centre and so on, all give the image of an Africa which is the victim of its exteriority to globalisation.



Some experts have not hesitated to speak of a suicidal, masochistic drive on the part of Africa with regard to the opportunities offered to "develop" itself in the manner of Asia. To such a point that the generous donors from the West have lost interest, weary of seeing what is supposed to have succeeded elsewhere fail in Africa. Thus, they have chosen to ensure a minimum servicing in the area of aid and leave the African peoples to the incompetence of their leaders, with whom they are supposed to share suicidal practices, like corruption.

The underhand dealings of the African governing elites are not a fad, they are a fact. The democratisation of the 1990s has not eradicated the oligarchic virus. Much to the contrary, being neoliberal in character, it has instead developed the obsession with enrichment, including its illicit form.

Fortunes are being made or increased, whether in the post-Mobutu or the post-Houphouët-Boigny eras, to cite these major figures of sub-Saharan oligarchism. Heads of state like Dos Santos (Angola), Sassou Nguesso (Congo), Biya (Cameroon), Bongo (Gabon), although not classed by "Forbes" among the possessors of the biggest world fortunes, have accumulated as much as some multinationals through embezzlement of funds and other public property, commissions in the attribution of strategic markets and so on.

But they have also invested, as much in their countries as elsewhere (banking, real estate, mining, oil sector and so

on) thus becoming veritable capitalists, unusual only in the public source of their primitive accumulation. Even Mobutu was not only a hoarder of money. His fortune was placed not only in numbered bank accounts in the so called democratic countries, but also invested in real estate and in the form of shares in companies outside of Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo). Thus we see the constitution and consolidation of a class of local hucksters developing in Africa. Recently, for example, Idrissa Seck, former prime minister of the Senegalese president Abdoulaye Wade, stated, after the dropping of a lawsuit, that he had enriched himself by drawing on the coffers of the Senegalese state to become an entrepreneur in real estate, in Paris in particular. In South Africa, the arrival of the ANC in power has allowed some its leaders and those of its trade union ally, COSATU, to become heads or owners of private companies, in the name of "black empowerment", a so-called positive discrimination which amounts to putting a little more colour in the South African bourgeoisie.

These governing elites are thus, as entrepreneurs, attached to the neoliberal organisation of the world economy, hence their indifference to the consequences of globalisation on the people. They tolerate the "fight against poverty" of their peoples only when it is not incompatible with their individual and class interests.

## Corruption: a relationship

Without wishing to deny the reality of the phenomenon of corruption and its harmful impact on African societies, where adults and children die in the absence of not being able to oil the machine of corruption in the public care centres, the criticisms made here and there smack rather more of a moralism informed by racist considerations on the immaturity of Africans than of politics. Indeed, it is most often the minor forms of corruption which are targeted rather than those which determine the big economic and social, and thus political, orientations of a country.

And the African continent is not alone in suffering from the latter forms of corruption. It is rather the victim of a culture of corruption linked primarily to the system which has been imposed on it before being chosen by the elites formatted by the said system. It is enough to reject the fraudulent image of capitalism and its democracy propagated by economists and political scientists supportive of the dominant order, and relayed by media of the same stripe, in order to realise the structural nature of corruption in the capitalist system.

The orientation of the decisions of the US Congress by private capitalist interests is the norm rather than the exception, inasmuch as the deciders can also be economic entrepreneurs much more interested in laws and public projects to finance than by control of the realisation of the said projects financed by public money.

The cases of corruption in the political class, sometimes at the summits of the state, in the societies of the centre are enclosed in a quasi-pact of silence or, failing that, benefit from a guarantee of being forgotten as shown by the succession of French "affairs". This forgetfulness often has consequences for human lives in the societies of the periphery, as is the case for example of the Elf affair in France, with thousands of deaths in the Congo which remind us that the most harmful corruption for African societies is that which links the economic and political powers of the centre with the governing elites of the continent.

This seems to have been discovered by the NGO Transparency International, which previously had for a long time put the accent on the corrupt rather than the corrupters. "The big exporters compromise development by dubious practices abroad... In the economically weakest African countries, for example, those questions have designated French and Italian companies as being most frequently at the origin of these practices". (Summary of Report on Index of Corruption of Exporter Countries 2006). No western country is given a 10/10 mark by this NGO. In some countries, this foreign corruption is even encouraged and fiscally covered by the law, because it is necessary to compete with others. Thus the exceptional character of the inquiry carried out by Britain's Africa All Parliamentary

Group, denouncing British multinationals, although no action has resulted from it. [1]

The crusade against corruption waged by the World Bank thus smacks of a diversion, from the viewpoint of the struggle against structural social injustice. Its sole real concern was to establish the rules of competition between imperial powers. The US is sometimes blocked in its expansion on the African market by certain complicities built up in the course of history between African elites and their equivalents in the European multinationals, of which the consequence is the attribution of markets through negotiation.

This crusade against corruption has then a variable character. Thus, it is not surprising that the recourse to sanctions for backsliders in the area of corruption has been criticised by the French and British ministers in charge of cooperation. This rivalry is further exacerbated by the arrival of China on the African market. As the French foreign minister, Philippe Douste-Blazy, has put it "as this century begins, Africa has become a strategic stake of the first order". [2]

## Africa again a strategic focus

The officially sanctioned economists have their figures to prove Africa's virtual exclusion from the world economy, the project being to integrate it therein. Africa's GDP only represents 1% of the world total; its share in world trade is 2% (against 8% in the 1990s); its share of foreign direct investment is around 1% of the world total. But the use of these figures starts from the erroneous postulate of an equitable exchange between different partners.

The recent deal concerning copper in the Democratic Republic of Congo can serve as example: "The US company Phelps Dodge [3] has shares in the biggest mining project in Katanga. In Tenke Fungurume the most important reserves of copper of the world, still not exploited, are located... around 18 million tonnes of copper and 1.5 million tonnes of cobalt, which would yield around 100 billion dollars, according to the prices of recent years. Tenke Mining is part of the Lundin group based in Geneva.

Whereas Phelps Dodge has a shareholding of 57.75%, Gécamines has only 17.5%. Gécamines has received 15 million dollars in all from Phelps Dodge. How is it that a mine whose reserves are worth 100 billion dollars is sold at such a derisory price?" [4]

As was the case during the period linking the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th, Africa has since the end of the last century again become a strategic focus for the different capitalist imperial powers. In its report for 2006, the World Bank tells us on the one hand that "the increase of income per inhabitant in Africa is currently equivalent to that of other developing countries" [5] - which is unhappily only an average excluding great inequalities of real income and the very unequal division of wealth between the social classes - and on the other hand that "the productivity of the best African companies is comparable to that of their competitors in Asia (India and Vietnam) for example".

Foreign direct investment has increased, neoliberal reforms are well underway. The International Finance Corporation has praised Africa's progress: "Globally, the most popular reform in 2005-2006 has consisted in facilitating the formalities of creation of enterprises. Forty three countries have simplified them, and have thus reduced the costs and the time periods. The second most popular reform, implemented in 31 countries, has been to reduce the amount of taxes and steps necessary for the payment of taxes". [6] Thus, foreign companies made a turnover of 200 billion dollars in Africa in 2005.

Great Britain has been doing rather well, according to the British NGO Christian Aid. From July 2005, date of the G8 summit at Gleneagles, to July 2006, financial flows from Great Britain to sub-Saharan Africa were 17 billion pounds sterling (of which 1.35 billion was contributions; 6.8 billion direct investment; 7 billion imported commodities). But financial flows from sub-Saharan Africa to Great Britain were 27 billion pounds sterling (1 billion in repayment of the debt from Nigeria; 4 billion in profits of British companies; 4.5 billion in imports of commodities; 17 billion in capital flight). [7]

This is the picture which justifies the words of the French foreign minister: "It is a continent whose average growth is henceforth durably superior to world growth and is triple the European growth rate. In 2006, according to the IMF, the growth of sub-Saharan Africa will exceed 5% for the ninth consecutive year. The investors are moreover not ignorant of this, when international and financial flows to the African continent have doubled in the past three years... France does not intend to disengage from a continent which is near to it, and with which it has for such a long time had privileged relations". The recent bombardments (December 2006) of villages under the control of Central African and Chadian rebels by the Mirages of the French army are another confirmation of this.

## US expansion

However things are not as simple as in the past. For the end of the Cold War has involved a redistribution of the cards between imperial powers. Thus, jealous of its hegemony in the capitalist camp, the US has undertaken to strengthen it in the world in general. They were in no way absent from Africa, contrary to a fairly widespread opinion, as evidenced by the given to Mobutu in Zaire or apartheid in South Africa, or significant investment in countries like Nigeria or Liberia.

In the latter country, the permanence of the economic presence of the US is symbolised by Firestone/Bridgestone, which benefited from a concession (a half million hectares) for the production of rubber for 99 years in 1926, prolonged for 37 years in 2005. The working conditions of the workforce (men, women, children) remain practically unchanged since 1926, to such extent that this enterprise is currently the subject of a complaint filed in the US by the Labor Rights Funds for "torture" and "forced labour". [8]

The events of September 11, 2001, preceded by two bombings - in Dar es Salaam, in Tanzania and Nairobi, in Kenya - against US embassies also served as pretext for US expansion in Africa. Thus, G. W. Bush took over the bilateral policy set up by his predecessor, Bill Clinton, the African Growth and Opportunities Act (AGOA), entering thus into competition in the area of the so called preferential market with the European Union's Agreement with the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP), initiated under another name in the 1970s. Since oil and cotton are not the exclusive preserve of the former British colonies, which share a common language with the US, the latter has also penetrated the former French and Portuguese colonies.

Thus, they do not hide their will for hegemony on the continent. In this design, their absence of a colonial or neo-colonial past allied to an effective propaganda apparatus can make it seem that the AGOA and the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) are different from the scams traditionally proposed by the imperial powers. Thus, under the cover of the "struggle against poverty" the US is financing within the framework of the Millennium Challenge Corporation projects relating to the deepened neoliberal restructuring of the African economies, from which they hope to be beneficiaries, in the manner of recent agreements (October 2006) signed with Mali and Benin.

Concerning the first, "the most important element of the agreement is the Alatona irrigation project [234.6 million dollars] which should increase agricultural yields and food production while improving the land regime" and even "strengthen the property rights of the poor". Moreover "the Alatona project will introduce innovative techniques in the

area of credit and management of water, as well as reforms seeking to realise part of the potential of the Office of the Niger as locomotive of growth in the rural areas of Mali". [9]

It is this agreement that the Malian government, guided by the World Bank, is trying to sell to the poor peasants of Mali. This small peasantry is conscious of the aggravation of its situation promised by these "reforms". Moreover, numerous peasant families are already victims of it, to the profit of local private capital, often accumulated in the state apparatus. Moreover, among the innovations envisaged which are supposed to improve the yields of the cotton producers of West Africa, there is obviously genetically modified seeds, already experienced, with co-financing from multinationals, in the countries of the sub-region.

The offensive for the use of genetically modified seeds is led first and foremost by the university elites, through the financing of research on this basis. Education budgets having been strongly reduced, numerous researchers enter this breach to escape the breadline. Their talents are sought by multinational firms (Monsanto, DuPont with the US Rockefeller Foundation; Bayer of Germany; Syngenta of Switzerland and so on) for salaries which are individually profitable but very damaging socially.

Kenya, for example, is one of the laboratories for the US offensive against the small African peasantry, the goal being to create food dependency, even through famine. The same neoliberal themes are found in the agreement concluded in February 2006 with Benin, to "increase investment and private activity by improving the land regime, access to financial services and the legal apparatus as well as by suppressing obstacles to trade in the port of Cotonou". [10] The bilateral "cooperation" of the US government strengthens the agricultural policy of the international financial institutions inside of which it is hegemonic.

The "struggle against terrorism" helps and this expansion is accompanied by a military presence in Kenya, on the oil-producing coasts of the Gulf of Guinea, in the Indian Ocean where, in addition to the base at Diego Garcia, they have obtained from the government of Djibouti a coexistence with the French traditional base. The US oil interests in Algeria also benefit from an apparatus of protection.

French hegemony in this Sahelian zone is challenged by the "Trans-Saharan Initiative of Struggle Against Terrorism" and the African Centre of Study and Research on Terrorism which associates ten Sahelian states with the US. With the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA), the national security of the USA is assured in Africa.

The last manifestation of this hegemonic will in the area is US military involvement, through the Ethiopian state, in the Somali conflict against the Union of Islamic Courts, accused of belonging to the nebulous Al Qaeda. Ineffective logistic support is accompanied by diplomatic action through resolution 1725 of the UN Security Council on the deployment of a force in Somalia.

The version adopted on November 6, 2005 does not contain the provisions most expressive of US imperial will US, but there can be no doubt about the latter's wish to control the Somali subsoil. Silence on this motivation is a well-respected rule among analysts of the Somali crisis, who thus give credit to the lying justification concerning the US "war on terror". Thus, according to Eunice Reddick (director of the office of East African affairs at the State Department), "in this unstable context, the objectives of US policy in Somalia remain clear: to fight the terrorist menace, support the establishment of an effective governance and of political stability, to respond to the humanitarian needs of the Somalis and promote regional security". [11]

The same is true of the Sudan where, despite the structural racism of the US, its investment in the sending of an intervention force to Darfur, under the banner of UN-NATO, is supposedly motivated by the humanitarian desire to put an end to the "genocide" of the "black" population by the "Arab" militias in the service of the Khartoum

government. [\[12\]](#)

Nothing to do with the obsession with controlling African oil - US imports of the latter began in 2005 to be higher than those coming from the Near East and the proven reserves have been revised upwards. African Americans in the US establishment contribute to this patriotic mystification from which they also hope to profit. Racial identity is thus put in the service of the Corporate Council on Africa, composed of crusaders for imperial expansion like Boeing, Cargill, Citigroup, Coca-Cola, Exxon, General Motors, Halliburton, Microsoft, Mobil, and so on, the main beneficiaries of the neoliberal version of gunboat diplomacy in this period of sharp inter-imperialist competition.

## European imperialism

The presence of Europe in Africa has long been more visible than that of the US because of the colonial past of France and Britain in particular. Their national policies - often divergent until the Saint-Malo Accords for a joint diplomacy - of reproduction of colonial domination are accompanied by the construction of a "European" partnership with the African, Caribbean and Pacific states in the context of the EEC.-ACP agreements - of Yaoundé, of Lomé - currently the EU-ACP Cotonou agreement, establishing a preferential market.

This cooperation has not allowed the "development" of Africa, maintaining it in the production of raw materials useful for Europe, rather than favouring the setting up of infrastructures building its economic autonomy, which would have been a challenge to the international division of labour inside the world capitalist economy.

So as to be more in conformity with the passage to neoliberalism and the rules of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the European Union proposes Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), for free trade, whose consequences will be catastrophic for the small peasantry, the small local units of production and local finances: competition between subsidised products imported from the European Union and local products; suppression of customs duties, and so on.

The situation in rural areas will undoubtedly worsen, indeed, "despite its importance, agriculture has for some decades undergone a crisis whose main cause is the unjust measures of the Agriculture Agreement inside of the WTO. Taking account of the weakness of agricultural incomes, very few rural households manage to cover their food needs 7 months out of 12 and many do not even reach 4 months". [\[13\]](#)

The African governing elites, for the moment, drag their feet over these EPAs, on the one hand because they could lead to social revolts, on the other hand, and above all, because their own interests as local economic entrepreneurs, having invested in agriculture particularly, could be hit. Beyond the signatory states, the consequences of these free trade agreements will affect the non-members of the ACP group, on the one hand with regard to the sub-regional integration of the African economies, on the other because of the project of continental integration represented by the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

Meanwhile, the EU, without claiming to oppose the hegemonic project of the US in Africa, deepens its autonomous presence, and defends the image of European power, including on the military terrain by ignoring the existence of NATO. It should be said that it benefits from the experience of the French tradition in this area. The aggravation of the crisis in the Ituri, in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), in 2003, has thus been the occasion for a first European military intervention outside of Europe. The European Artemis mission, in support of the Mission of the UN in Congo (MONUC), has been clearly identified as an intervention of the French Army with regard to the compositions of troops and command.

The general elections in the DRC, in 2006, gave Europe the chance for a truly multinational military deployment: 20 of the 25 EU states provided the 1,500 soldiers of the military mission, without counting those already positioned in Gabon. On the other hand, this time, if the European Force (Eufor) cannot do without the African experience of the French Army, it has nonetheless had to take account of the architecture of European construction in the sharing of responsibilities.

Thus, command has been shared between France and Germany, with a French general as commander in the DRC and the installation of the headquarters of the Force in Potsdam. Each of the two states supplied the 1/3 of the troops, the last 1/3 being shared between the 18 others: a first European return, but also a first return of the German army in Africa since the colonial period, which has led to debate in Germany.

Unlike the French military expeditions in Africa, the German participation in Eufor was decided after a parliamentary debate. Prime Minister Angela Merkel presented the mission as being motivated exclusively by support for the democratic process and the concern to avoid a resumption of the war which would cause an influx of migrants into Europe. [14]

This idea was taken up by the German foreign minister, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, in response to a question from the magazine "Focus": "from the viewpoint of security and strategy we act because we know that failing states end up becoming exporters of troubles, terrorism and serious refugee problems. Our objective consists in preventing these dangers." [15]

There could be no question of motivation by material interests. An opinion not shared by his colleague at Defence, Franz Joseph Jung, who says frankly enough that "stability in this region rich in minerals is a benefit for German industry" and Eckart Von Klaeden, who says: "There is significant subterranean wealth there for security, like uranium and beryllium. They can fall into the wrong hands." [16]

Thus, Europe and the US articulate in the same way the relationship between the military and the economic, what Leopold II called "the sharing of the cake" and what some specialists in "post-conflict" situations call "economic return on military investment", valid for all the interventions, from Kosovo to East Timor. It was in order to have a bigger share of the cake that Europe forced the hand of the UN to obtain the Congo mission, without having first discussed it with the Congolese state or the African Union. To the great chagrin of South Africa also, where the post-apartheid state has not broken with the imperial ambition on the continent dreamed of by Cecil Rhodes. Given their involvement in the outbreak of war in Congo from 1998-2003, through Rwanda, Uganda and a part of the Congolese opposition, transformed for the episode into an armed opposition, the US seemed poorly placed to obtain such a mission. Nonetheless, being absent from the ground has in no way ruled them out of a "sharing of the cake".

Having undoubtedly drawn the lesson given in the US to his paternal predecessor (Laurent Désiré Kabila) as head of the Congolese state. [17] Joseph Kabila has not ceased to play the card of the candidate of equilibrium between different imperialist appetites, which seems to have succeeded with regard to the outcome of the last presidential elections.

The interest of the main imperial powers in the DRC will increase with the publicity now given to its oil reserves. The US seems to have already displayed interest in Congolese oil, sending a signal to the regime in Kinshasa between the two electoral rounds. By presidential decree of October 30, 2006, Bush froze the shares of the heads of the last pocket of armed rebellion and their accomplices, like the arms and precious stones trafficker Viktor Bout, long a US protégé, whose misdeeds were shown on screen in "Lord of War". It also shows awareness of the increasing complexity of inter-imperialist competition in Africa, with the arrival in the arena of China, which does not seem ready for a position of imperial power subordinated to the US, as is Europe.

## Chinese imperialism?

A spectre seems to haunt western imperialism in Africa. It is not unhappily the African movement for global justice. It is China, this hybrid country, led by a party still nominally Communist and deaf to calls for the respect of human rights, but with one of the most impressive rates of capitalist economic growth, propelling it to fifth world ranking in terms of its GDP. A performance which involves a significant consumption of raw materials, beyond the resources offered by the Chinese soil and subsoil.

Thus it has turned towards the African continent - which seems decidedly to be an obligatory passage for all imperial ambition - without even attempting to show discretion, like Japan for example, or indeed China itself during the Cold War. Yet it has created a capital sympathy among consumers of Chinese products, characterised by their accessibility for the poor in these times of drastic lowering of purchasing power in African societies, from the Cape to Cairo. Even if Chinese traders are accused, by small local traders, of unfair competition by offering cheaper commodities than those imported from Europe or indeed some African countries and the Chinese practice of exclusive use of its own workforce in its worksites is denounced.

Among states, very few manifest indifference towards the economic boom of this country still supposedly of the South, which seems to wish to share its fruits with the African countries which are necessary to it so as to realise its ambitions as a world power. A demonstration of this was the Africa-China Summit of November 3-5, 2006 in Beijing, a culminating point in the relations of "cooperation" recently established, very different from those of the Maoist period.

For growth, China needs wood, cobalt, cotton, copper, steel, manganese, oil, platinum, uranium and so on. All this can be found in Africa and is already being imported by China. This obviously does not leave the imperial powers, who have had exclusive control of these resources for more than a century, indifferent. The ogre-like appetite of the Chinese economy has, for example, already produced a rise in oil prices, which certainly doesn't displease the Western oil multinationals. Nonetheless, the Chinese bulimia could disturb the imperial order.

What seems to annoy these defenders of the western imperial order is the practice by the Chinese state and enterprises of another possible model of exchanges within the capitalist framework, called by the Chinese authorities "common development" or "shared development". In the area of aid, preferential loans, debt cancellation, market opening, support for agriculture, education (infrastructures and training), or health (infrastructures and anti-disease programmes), China (state and enterprises) has already shown in a very short time that it is resolved to do very much more than the western powers. Demonstration is thus made through agreements and exchanges with China that with a little will, it is possible in exchange of raw materials or at lower cost to give Africa certain infrastructures (railways social housing, bridges, roads, hospitals and so on) which it is cruelly deprived of, as well as to purchase African goods at prices which are considered equitable.

Thus, the results of the Beijing Summit are not unrelated to the low participation of African heads of state (17, as against 48 in Beijing) in the "European Days on Development", in Brussels, two weeks later. Something concrete emerged from the first, like for example the obtaining by the Ivory Coast of 3 billion francs CFA. Whereas Afro-European summits usually end with announcement, promises which are unfulfilled or subject to conditions which trample on the internal sovereignty of the states.

At the European "Days" Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni told his European "partners": "Do not force the people to do what you want them to do". The Chinese state has only one demand, the non-recognition of Taiwan by its African partners, apart from that the principle of non-interference is applied: "We respect the free choice of each of their road of development, we attach a high importance to the concerns of each". [18] Which allows some states, like Angola, to escape, relatively speaking, from the grip of the international financial institutions.

Moreover, in the name of the same principle and its own practice in the area, the Chinese state does not concern itself in any way with respect for "human rights" or "good governance" by its partners. This non-interference makes it the ideal partner for African autocrats-oligarchs, often appalled by the hypocrisy of Western use of blackmail on "respect for human rights" to strengthen their domination/exploitation while feigning sensitivity to the pressure of the associations.

Yet this Chinese pragmatism by its cynicism and indifference, can only disfavour the real democratic movements in Africa who do not adhere to the reproduction of the capitalist and neo-colonial order. Worse, Afro-Chinese co-operation could resemble Franco-African cooperation, in supplying not only arms to autocratic regimes, but also in participating in army training. The French press has already raised the question of support to the Chad rebels by China during their advance towards N'Djamena, which could smack of disinformation (outside the arming of the rebels) to justify the real participation of the French army in the combat on the side of the Chad army. China, it should be recalled, is part of the club of the major arms merchants, all permanent members of the UN Security Council.

This principle of non-interference is accompanied in the name also of South-South solidarity with often unflinching support to regimes confronted with the antipathy of some western power. For example, at the UN Security Council, resolutions proposed by the French state against the regime of Laurent Gbagbo in the Ivory Coast or the US against the regime of Omar El Béchir in Sudan are exposed to the threat of the Chinese veto if they are not revised in a more moderate version acceptable to China.

Its support for Gbagbo is explained by its interests in the Ivory Coast, where oil enterprises do not hide their ambitions. Moreover, to get round the embargo, the regime of Gbagbo can supply itself in Chinese weapons, to the great chagrin of French companies who had exclusivity in these different sectors. If his regime can escape the financial asphyxia so much desired by the Chirac government, it is also thanks to that. Nonetheless, French capital in the Ivory Coast remains dominant and the operating account of the Ivorian state at the French Treasury remains the most significant of the West African sub-zone of the franc CFA.

But, it is not excluded that in case of electoral victory, Laurent Gbagbo would rely on cooperation with China as the basis for his neoliberal nationalism, at the expense of the traditional French supremacy. Like the oligarchic regime of El Béchir in Sudan, where Chinese support, based on oil operations, favours strong growth which attracts more investors (from France, the Gulf, India and so on.) and allows him to stand up to the US, which suffers from not controlling the oil, although China, the main imperial beneficiary of Sudanese oil is one of the main supports of the US Treasury (1,000 billion dollars).

The Chinese march towards the realisation of its global ambition is accompanied, for the moment, by an official conception of cooperation according to "the correct principles of sincere friendship, of equal-to-equal treatment, of mutual support and of common development". [19] But it remains despite all motivated by capitalist interest which ends by limiting generosity and maintaining if not increasing inequality, as shown by the internal situation of China which does not escape "the historic law of combined and uneven development".

As Chinese capital reaches the summits of the world economy and produces a capitalist class and a middle class - very much in the minority among the 1,400 million Chinese - there is pauperisation of the peasants, the withdrawal of free access to public services, the abandonment of certain regions to themselves, the repression of social demands and so on. [20]

Moreover, if it is not reined in, Chinese adhesion to the religion of growth risks not only quickly exhausting certain natural resources of the African countries, destroying for example the so-called protected forests in Gabon for oil exploitation, but also constituting a serious ecological threat. The Chinese state, together with the US and some others, bears the chief responsibility for the threat currently facing the planet and is the least disposed to commit itself

to fighting this threat. Its friendship for Africa cannot be effective without awareness of the floods experienced, in a kind of irony, by Kenya, host country of the conference on climate change - a conference from which no real programme of struggle emerged.

## An Africa that struggles

Imperialism is not dead. It has become neoliberal. But as the features of the child remain in the traits of the adult, it remains recognisable. Africa remains a capital place of supply in natural resources necessary to capitalist growth at the price of the destruction of human lives, of the production and reproduction of poverty. This poverty has made Nairobi an area where gang violence develops, recruiting in the milieus of uneducated youth, without a decent job or a hope of finding one. A phenomenon familiar to the South African or Brazilian economies, and indeed the US with an evident ethnic/racial aspect.

At this neoliberal stage, Capital profits from the misery of Africa, developing a business from the images of poverty and misery. The tendency is even to promote charity as the horizon of solidarity. With, in the role of profane messiah, Mr. Bill Gates, who, with regard to his personal fortune, is the biggest beneficiary of the neoliberal order. And it is Africa that he has chosen as scène of representation of his generosity - rather than the zones of poverty in which millions of his US compatriots live - not only concerning AIDS, but also in financially supporting the Rockefeller foundation in its campaign of subtle imposition of genetically modified seeds on African agriculture. This continent thus seems condemned to the assistance of international capital. The responsibility of this latter being covered by the undeniable corruption of the African ruling classes.

Yet, as elsewhere, with less visibility and less effect for the moment than in Latin America, there is an Africa which struggles against neoliberalised neo-colonialism. Activists in the struggle against privatisation and for social justice in South Africa, the actors in the Social Forum in Niger, the peasants of the Office of the Niger, the employees of Gacilienne (a subsidiary of Yves Rocher) in Burkina Faso, the radical activists of Swaziland forced underground, the militants of Woman of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA), the trades unionists of the Union of Kenya Civil Servants (UKCS), or the Aviation and Allied Workers Union (AAWU)... the flame of struggle for the defence of social, cultural and political rights, the emancipation of the workers, the peoples who are victims of capitalist exploitation and various oppressions is not extinguished.

Despite the desertion of numerous anti-imperialists, anti-neo-colonialists and anti-capitalists of yesteryear and their integration, or attempted integration, by the neo-colonial regimes and the various institutions won to the perpetuation of the imperial order. For some of these the critique of the neoliberal order serves as a trampoline to the integration into this criminal order.

From the 1st World Social Forum (WSF) to the Polycentric World Social Forum (PWSF), this flame has become progressively visible. At the PWSF in Bamako, the small peasants of Mali, victims of the institutions of Bretton Woods, of multinational seed companies, of European anti-immigration policies and of the Malian government came together. Understanding of the dramatic situation of the African public debt and the social consequences of its repayment have ceased to be the concern of a small handful of individuals.

Peasants, in the majority on the continent, have set up regional networks to resist neoliberal attacks against small agriculture. Women's networks have been set up and show a great dynamism at each meeting. Youth organisations, conscious of the murky future which neoliberal capitalism holds for them, try to recreate the revolutionary Pan-Africanism symbolised by Amilcar Cabral and Thomas Sankara.

The voice of the trade unions is heard, but much less than would be necessary to change the relationship of forces between Capital and Labour, which is more unequal under the neoliberal regime. The victims of the policies of the capitalist centre and its periphery against the free circulation of persons, subcontracted by the African states, try to coordinate. Ecologist organisations are emerging in reaction to the plunder of forests, the pollution of coastlines by oil and the depredations in mining areas (gold, uranium and so on).

But these different struggles still suffer from a weak establishment of continental networks of the different organisations of the same sector, although they are often confronted by the same multinationals, whether it is Bi-Water, Suez or Vivendi for water, Chevron-Texaco, Shell, Total for oil or Anglo-Gold for gold. Chinese enterprises like Zhonging Telecommunications Ltd (ZTE, which has demanded a monopoly situation from Benin) have become competitive with western telecommunications in the acquisition of state telecommunications and should not be neglected.

A greater participation of trade unions and national trade union federations in the dynamic of the social Forums could favour the coordination of responses. That implies above all a clear demarcation from the campaign of promotion of a so-called responsible trades unionism, of "social partnership" with the employers and the governments. [

[Mouhamadou Tidiane Kasse seems to credit the idea of "the construction of a partnership with the governments and the multinationals" as one of the stages of the dynamisation of the African trade union movement \(See "FSM 2007: l'heure de sortir des sentiers battus pour les Africains " - available on: <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article2190>.\)\].](http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article2190)

In the case of the Congress of South African Trade Union (COSATU) - which has recently joined the African Social Forum - this has led to internal frictions between certain federations or sections and the leadership, accused of privileging its tripartite alliance with the ANC and the South African Communist party in power. Moreover, it is under the influence of this education in "responsibility" - which accentuates the bureaucratic and egoist interests - that the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC, originating mainly from the Zimbabwean trade union movement), while opposing the attacks of the autocratic regime of Robert Mugabe and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) on workers and other impoverished layers, seems to be moving to the right. That should worry the Labour Party of Nigeria, recently created on the model of the MDC, by, among others, Adam Oshiomole, president of the powerful Nigeria Labour Congress union federation. [21]

## Contradictions of WSF sharpened in Nairobi

Moreover, this African movement for global justice suffer from the financial heteronomy of numerous associations and social movements. For even in the struggle against the system, money remains a necessity. And a great part of the movements of the South in general, of Africa in particular depend on their partners in the western world, the charity organisations and states of the North, indeed multinationals presented as partners for the development of Africa.

This has an impact on the definition of their projects for global justice both in the local and international fields. Thus, for example, in a great part of the movement there prevails still the reductionist conception of an opposition between on the one hand civil society, considered positive in itself and on the other (political) society, negative by essence.

This is a conception promoted also by the International Financial Institutions and which explains the hostility to the participation of political organisations in the dynamic of the WSF. This translates in practice as an opposition to the open presence of the radically anti-neoliberal, in other words anti-capitalist, political organisations, The WSF in Mumbai, the ESF in Athens thus become what it is necessary to avoid in the future.

The WSF in Nairobi could be the theatre for an offensive by the NGOs who are partisans of the addition of a social dimension to globalisation, a charity-based movement for global justice, through the participation of associations that they support financially in Africa in particular, in the Third World in general.

With the development of poverty and misery, religion has become once again "the opium of the people". The Islamophobic campaign orchestrated by the US neoconservatives and relayed in Europe, in the name of a very selective secularism, tends to cover the reactionary offensive waged by the Christian churches in the world in general, in Africa in particular. Kenya is one of the African societies where, alongside the traditional Christianities (Catholic and Anglican) and traditional, indeed fundamentalist, Islam proliferate Christian fundamentalisms: the Pentecostals, the born again, "brothers and sisters in Christ" of G. W. Bush and millenarian televangelists, who surf on the poverty developed by the system that they co-manage.

For example, it is unsurprising to find the anti-capitalism of Caritas, a charity organisation as its name indicates, statutorily established in the Vatican [22]: "Caritas Europa considers the World Social Forum (WSF) as being a permanent world process, which groups together in an open meeting place the social movements, networks, NGOs and other bodies of civil society opposed to neoliberalism and to a world dominated by capital or by any form of imperialism". [23] Has it passed bag and baggage into the camp of Christian liberation theology?

Is this the sign of a radical progressive change of the Pontifical Justice and Peace Council, at the very time when the Vatican state is led by the former head of the Sacred Congregation of the Faith (an inquisitorial body, charged with among other things the clerical repression of the liberation theologians), Cardinal Ratzinger, alias Benedict XVI? One of the most influential members of the said Pontifical Council is none other than Michel Camdessus, former director general of the IMF, former adviser of Nicolas Sarkozy at the French ministry of the economy and finance, and said to be a member of Opus Dei.

Such a participation of reactionary Christianity, dressed up in anti-neoliberalism, is a threat to the gains of the feminist and LGTB movements. In Africa homophobic and anti-feminist prejudices remain fairly developed inside the movement for global justice Onyango Oloo, of the Kenya Social Forum, has drawn attention to the persistence of male supremacy in the dynamic of the WSF, during the preparation in Nairobi: "Of the seven commissions of the WSF Organising Committee, one alone is chaired by a woman despite the fact that women constitute nearly half the members of these commissions". [24] Yet the movement for global justice should be one of the main spaces of real education against phallocracy and for gender equality.

Beyond that, the movement is in no way immunised against the penetration of neoliberal values, as shown, for example, by the operation led against Babel (a translators network which is free because it supports the movement) to the profit of commercial translation networks. Democratic access to the debates will thus be subordinated to the financial resources of the workshop organisers, with an exclusion of languages other than those ordinarily practiced in the leading bodies of the "international community" The use of Swahili at the WSF 2007 could be without a follow-up. This episode should prompt the movement to pay more attention with regard to the integration within it of neoliberal values.

This 2007 edition of the WSF could favour the development of a permanent Pan-African solidarity in the fight against neoliberalism, current phase of capitalist globalisation. From Cape Town to Tunis, the rich diversity of peoples (Arab, Berber, Chinese, European, Indian, "black" and so on) of the continent, could organise, for example, the struggle against the Pan-African declaration of neoliberalism represented by NEPAD, for an alternative pan-Africanism, emancipatory, egalitarian, socially just and ecological And, so far as humanity as a whole is concerned, the consolidation of the dynamic of the global justice movement can favour the emergence and development of a new internationalism, whose effectiveness will depend on the capacity to democratically draw the lessons of internationalisms past and present. [25]

But this goal can only be attained in a dialogue or a permanent debate between the anti-neoliberal social movements and the anti-capitalist political organisations, in a democratic spirit of mutual cross-fertilisation. Which implies a refoundation of politics, no longer sacrificing the interest of the majorities or exploited and oppressed minorities on the altar of electoral interests, not diluting the strategic in the tactical, in other words a transformation of the radical political organisations.

---

[1] "The Other Side of the Coin: The UK and Corruption in Africa", March 2006, available at: [www.africaappg.org.uk](http://www.africaappg.org.uk).

[2] Session of October 5, 2006

[3] One of the biggest copper producers in the world.

[4] Kurt Pelda, "Wie Kongo-Kinshasa seine Bodenschätze verschleudert. Undurchsichtige Verfahren bei der Erteilung von Bergbaukonzessionen", "Neue Zürcher Zeitung", Samstag/Soontag 19/20, August 2006, p. 29 (translation M. J.)

[5] Press release number 2007/115/AFR

[6] Press release, "Doing Business 2007", Washington D.C. September 6, 2006

[7] Christian Aid, "UK profits from sub-Saharan Africa despite aid and debt pledges", 05.07.06

[8] Robtel Neejai Pailey, "Modern-day slavery in Liberia", 2006-02-02. Available on: <http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/comment/31756>.

[9] Charles W. Corey, "Le Conseil d'administration de la MCC approuve un accord avec le Mali". Available on: <http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html/utills>.

[10] Press release of press services of the US representative for foreign trade, "Entretiens entre Mme Schwab et quatre ministres africains du Commerce", October 27, 2006

[11] Bruce Greenberg, "Des africanistes discutent des enjeux sécuritaires de la Somalie", "Washington File", October 10, 2006

[12] Jean Nanga, "Darfour: les enjeux du conflit meurtrier", "solidarities", October 19, 2004

[13] Babacar Ndao, of the Réseau des Organisations Paysannes et des Producteurs Agricoles d'Afrique de l'Ouest (ROPPA - Network of Peasant Organisations and Agricultural Producers of West Africa), "Libéralisation des produits agricoles et injustice sociale", November 21, 2006. Available on: <http://www.pambazuka.org/fr/category/comment/38423>.

[14] See the articles by Raf Custers: "L'Union Européenne veut et obtient une force militaire au Congo" (April 8, 2006), available on: <http://www.indymedia.be/en/node/2014>; "Patrons allemands partisans d'une guerre des matières premières" (May 7, 2006), available on: <http://www.indymedia.be/fr/node/2375>.

[15] "Le monde entier peut y perdre", interview given by the federal minister of foreign affairs, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, to the magazine FOCUS on the questions of the Congo, Afghanistan and Iran, July 9, 2006

[16] See Bruce Greenberg, op.cit.

[17] Laurent-Désiré Kabila came to power in 1997, after a war against Mobutu's army, with the support of the US, via the Rwanda of Paul Kagame and the Uganda of Yoweri Museveni. He was assassinated in 2001, when confronted with a war against his former allies who had produced internal armed oppositions

[18] Hu Jin Tao, "Discours d'ouverture du Sommet Sino-africain", Beijing, November 3, 2006

[19] Idem

[20] "Alternatives Sud", "Le miracle chinois vu de l'intérieur. Points de vue d'auteurs chinois", volume 12 -April 2005. Richard McGregor, "China's poorest worse off after boom", "Financial Times", November 21, 2006

[21] Danielle Obono, "[Unions lead popular resistance](#)", IV 376, March 2006

[22] Article 5 of the Additional Protocol to the Statutes of Caritas Internationalis, May 16, 2002

[23] Caritas Europa at the World Social Forum 2007

[24] Onyango Oloo, "Équilibre du genre au sein du Forum Social Mondial - Nairobi" available on:  
<http://www.pambazuka.org/fr/category/comment/37892>.

[25] See Michael Lowy, "[Towards a New International?](#)" IV 348, March 2003