

Africa's Struggles Today

Dennis Brutus

Africa is obviously very poorly covered in the U.S. media, in particular during the period around the war in Iraq. What was unfolding in Africa was ignored except for the Liberia crisis — although once it reached a certain stage, it began to get some attention. Of course, the Bush trip to Africa shed some more light on what's been happening. You've been there for several weeks, watching things unfold from the African point of view. What can you tell us about the overall picture?

It's quite true that the Bush visit put an enormous spotlight on Africa when Bush traveled with his 600-person entourage, journalists, etcetera. In many cases media events were carefully controlled so that only the American press were allowed at the press conferences. In fact, there were long articles in the

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South African press about journalists who finally sneaked in to stand at the back of the hall and were told they were not allowed to ask questions. Bush goes to Senegal, he goes to Gorrei, which is the island from which slaves were shipped to the New World. He comes to South Africa and meets with [Prime Minister Thabo] Mbeki in Pretoria and significantly does not go to Maputo where the AU is meeting — the new African Union heads of state. Then he goes to Botswana which is very rich in diamonds, does Uganda very briefly for a couple of hours, and ends up in Nigeria, which of course is Africa's biggest oil producer.

But I would say for the whole of Africa, if they look at the total visit, the event that they would say is the most significant was Bush meeting with Mbeki and announcing that Mbeki is his point man. Specifically, of course, on the Zimbabwe issue, where Mbeki's quiet diplomacy the British have been screaming about is now endorsed by the U.S. government, which says whatever Mbeki does is okay. But more seriously, the process is a signal to the rest of the continent that they have to take orders from Mbeki. His sub-imperial role is clearly defined.

I should mention that wherever [Bush has] gone there were protests. In South Africa, we had huge protests. In Johannesburg the protests were directed not at Bush but at Mbeki's embracing of Bush. So you had loyal ANC people, labor, workers, and so on joining in a march in protest against Mbeki's welcoming of Bush. But at the same time, ironically, the ANC put together a small protest saying, we're not protesting against our president, we are protesting against the U.S. president and the invasion of Iraq. So that you have a kind of tail attached to the protests. They come in with this little footnote.

The second issue I would focus on as being of major significance for me and for most Africans — apart from Bush's designation of Mbeki as his agent in Africa — was Bush's endorsement of NEPAD [New Partnership for Africa's Development] and saying this is the program which is being led by Mbeki and which has the U.S.'s endorsement. So simultaneously you have an allegedly African initiative together with a U.S. initiative coming together.

The two of them, of course, mainly focused on trade — doing two things and we should recognize both. On the one hand giving South Africa access to the U.S. textile market. Although interestingly, one of the conditions is that the manufacture of textiles has to be done with U.S. material. So you can manufacture the goods but the raw material has to be U.S. produced. So it's not really as advantageous even as it appears on paper.

The other more significant — and I think far more dangerous — element for the future is the creation of free-trade zones, where you would have U.S. manufacturers being able to produce without being taxed locally on the

products. And of course within these free-trade zones labor controls on wages are removed. So there is freedom to depress wages to the lowest possible level in order to increase the margin of profit on the product. And there are already several areas in Southern Africa that are free-trade zones. In one case on the island of Mauritius, they've gone from making a region of the island a free-trade zone to the entire island becoming a free-trade zone.

So the last point I should make is that I was very impressed to hear people talking on talk shows in Africa. One of the things they're saying was that there is no country in Africa where there is not some opposition to NEPAD. So maybe just a word about NEPAD. The notion is that Africa becomes an equal partner in trade either with the U.S. or the developed West — Europe and the United States. But others have compared it to the partnership between a rider and his horse. You know the African does all the work and the partner (the U.S. or Europe) is in fact riding on the back of Africa. The whole thing is unequal and we could go into it in detail, but I might as well focus on the one issue in NEPAD that seems the most damaging. If you read the document called the "New Partnership" you'll find that it says very explicitly that Africa will be brought into line with the requirements of the IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO. And that spells out more clearly than anything else the dependency relationship which Africa is being forced into. With South Africa leading that process. Now, as you know, Mbeki was the first chairman of the AU and in that way was directing the NEPAD process. But he's no longer chair as he's just handed over the chair to President Joaquim Chissano from Mozambique. But since there is a troika consisting of the three people who fathered NEPAD — that's Mbeki, Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, and President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal. The three of them really gave birth to NEPAD as we know it. They still are pretty much the power brokers, and although Chissano is the chair, the three of them still exhibit a very strong influence.

Prose poem: Visiting my father's birthplace

The landscape is familiar: gently sloping hillsides covered with Greenery — brown shrubs. I am going in search of my father in the country of his boyhood and though I'm in a car with family members, it is all intensely private — so private that I don't even allow myself the murmured converse I usually conduct with myself. This green-shadowed landscape troubles me. The hills have been slashed open, of course, so that there are red-raw stretches all along the wide asphalt roads — and I cannot suppress the knowledge that these wide swift roads were planned to ensure the rapid transit of military vehicles to any area where there might be “trouble” — the euphemism for unrest provoked by police brutality or the ruthless enforcement of inhumane laws. There is another reminder of the iron land of repression — the miles of gleaming wire and cable that conveyed instantaneous alerts about these same “troubles”; that sent helicopters or armored patrols — scorpions, hippos, buffaloes (these vehicles had animal names, sometimes because they evoked a resemblance) — with screaming sirens and flashing headlamps into the “townships,” as the segregated and menaced areas were called. They are a constant presence. And though they no longer carry the same menacing quality, they are a brooding reminder, a symbol not to be shaken off. So it is with the load pressing on my mind that we enter the small fishing village where my father grew up, after stopping at an information cottage near the entrance and picking up some material from a helpful but somewhat perplexed attendant. The sea stretches out, pale blue to silver at the horizon and the bay curves gently, with fishing boats in the foreground, and a bulky factory on the headland of the entrance. The town will, of course, have changed greatly, but the sea is the same sea, and this is pretty much the scene he would have looked out on. I try to see with his boyish eyes: try to feel what he felt, to enter somehow into the thoughts and feelings of the father who would never let me enter his mind. Nothing comes of it. Only the thought of that lingering military presence. And of the greed for profit that will bring more factories to destroy this landscape that can still tug at my heart.

2004

With NEPAD, is the view from the standpoint of South African capital and these three players to try to create a more economically unified Africa, to try to negotiate a position to play the U.S. and Europe off one another — to try to look for the better deals as opposed to playing separately?

My guess would have to be yes and no. Instead of regional agreements, you have one for a continent. But that's only half the answer because simultaneously there are agreements with Europe and the EU, including the Lomé Agreement. The catch here, why I'm kind of hedging my answer, is that when these three guys recently went to Evian to meet with the G8, and then they meet with the EU representatives, there is a sense in which what you suggest of them playing Europe against the U.S. is still going on. But it's almost as if the U.S. and Europe have already agreed on spheres of influence between themselves. So when the Africans go to Europe there are certain things they know they can get and certain things they can't get. Then they go to the U.S. for those.

I'll give you one example and a very dangerous one. In Evian, where the G8 met, they refused to give Africans anything. Even the promises they made in Canada, they didn't deliver on those. But guess what — they offered Africa \$15 billion to set up a military force, an RDF. So Africa is going to have a Rapid Deployment Force funded by Europe. Not by the U.S. So it's as if Europe is getting into the act in one way. Of course this means supplies of weapons. You've got to update your weapons and all that. But at the same time that Europe is taking care of the military side, the U.S. is taking care of the economic side. So the colonization of Africa is really going to be a two-fold process. The attack comes both from the United States and Europe.

The other news that we did get in the U.S., however briefly, was that during the world conference on racism there were actually sizable demonstrations that brought some focus on different social movements and different trade union struggles in South Africa in particular. Can you tell us about that and how that fits into the overall opposition to this program?

The agreement between the EU and African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries signed in February 2000. It contains provisions on the terms of access of European investors and businesses to ACP economies. For a detailed analysis of EU's Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with African countries, see Patrick Bond, *Looting Africa: The Economics of Exploitation* (London: Zed Books, 2006), especially chapter 4, “Unequal Exchange Revisited.” — Ed.

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Yes, I am glad that you mentioned that. Of course, there was the World Conference Against Racism in Durban, followed by the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. And you really should take the two together because the same forces are at work in both cases. You have your whole combination of government and corporations on one hand and you have the people in the streets. About 10-15,000 in Durban and over 20,000 in Johannesburg. And both of these really are the embodiment of the social movements we've seen in Seattle, Genoa, and Prague.

The focus in Durban was on the kind of glossy façade, which said racism in South Africa is over. Even while people are still living in shacks and their water was being cut off, electricity was being cut off. So you get the homeless and the jobless and people with AIDS and of course your activist movement, student movement, your labor movement coming together very powerfully in Durban. And as you may remember, one of the strongest elements in Durban was this demand for reparations, a demand for the cancellation of debt. So these two elements come into play in Durban. And then later they come into play in Johannesburg. Johannesburg was called the WSSD [World Summit on Sustainable Development]. And what is striking there is that Mbeki calls a rally in the stadium in support of the WSSD and gets under 5,000 people. And then the social movements — they group themselves under something called the SMI (Social Movements Indaba) — from the same stadium they put 20,000 people into the streets, marching from Alex (this is one of the worst slums in Johannesburg) to Sandton (which is your most expensive suburb).

Both of them, it seems to me — and I think you've made the point, I just want to reinforce it — reflect this kind of global opposition to the global agenda. It's taking on the corporate power and governmental power, the whole neoliberal project. The commodification of water, commodification of air, it all fits into this.

Night sequence

I

Ships at night: Bosphorus

Sailing across dark waters
under low glimmering stars
with a burden of centuries
murmuring through breathing air:
years crowd in, achievements,
sorrows, joys foregone in vain:
well, we must endure past years,
await, crumpled, some uncertainties:
on dark Bosphorus waters

II

Darkness closes in:
portent of horrors:
there is reason to despair:
evil men work their evil ways
wreak terror on our earth:
miscall it "shock and awe"
blinded by arrogance
or drunk on ichor of hubris —
its reek, acrid fumes, or —
simply, perhaps stupidity
their combat-boots pound our world
while we cringe, defenses inadequate
turn our faces to the wall:
it is time, perhaps for despair.

Silence in the still warm room
 silence pressured from the silent street
 snow-muffled, traffic-deserted:
 the self, in the stillness, poised
 a pivot around which nothing revolves
 looks inward, finds itself in flight
 from itself and the inexorable demand
 for surrender to the ocean of selflessness:
 this is what love is about:
 and it resists, hugs fiercely
 its self to itself:
 is doomed to loneliness.
 And still it cries out against aloneness.

January 14, 1997

Can you tell us about the lineup of forces? Certainly from Mbeki fronting for NEPAD and an imperialist project in Africa, the prestige of Africa's greatest liberation movement is being used for these purposes. We have seen tensions in the Communist Party [CP] alliance, the ANC and the trade unions. COSATU [the Congress of South African Trade Unions] has been much more critical. How is the legacy of the national liberation struggle and the politics of this opposition playing out? How are people defining themselves and what are they trying to put forward as an alternative?

It's not easy but I'll try. I have to start by stressing that the new struggles all emerged as initially local issues. People's water being cut off. People's kids dying because they don't have food. People dying in the streets. More homelessness, more unemployment than there was under apartheid. The gap between rich and poor has increased. And South Africa now has become the number one country in the world with the largest gap between rich and poor by their own statistics. Very significantly, recently they showed that real earnings for blacks have gone down by about 15 percent in the past ten years, just as for the white minority and few elite blacks it has gone up by 16

percent. So the gap actually widens there. I think one has to stress that it's a response to lived experiences that people build a new movement and new struggle. And then it takes different forms — the homeless, the jobless, the landless, the people with AIDS, people with water cut off, with lights off.

All those come together. Now in that context you get a tension developing on the Left — in ANC, in COSATU, and in the NGOs. It takes two forms and it's a little bit difficult to explain and even I can't satisfactorily explain it for myself. For instance, people recognize that one of the reasons they are homeless and waterless and lightless is privatization. The social services have become commodities and they can't pay. So they understand that the whole process of their immiseration is driven by privatization. When you understand that you have to ask why is the government doing this? And then you get a split within the Left — those who defend privatization and those who attack privatization.

This is where we find the dilemma being crystallized. Jeff Radebe, who is a member of the central committee of the Communist Party, is the minister in charge of driving the privatization process. So you have a man who is both a member of the Communist Party — which denounces privatization — and is also the minister who is driving the privatization process. Of course we challenge him. And the explanation is, "Oh, if you are a member of the Communist Party and you become a minister of government your first loyalty is to the government." You can claim to be loyal to the party but your first loyalty is to the government. COSATU identifies very clearly that privatization is why they are losing jobs. A million jobs lost. And they say this is what privatization has done.

So what do we do? Every year, at what is now called the annual general meeting, they call a strike against privatization. Then they meet with the government and they call the strike off. It's a ritual annual strike: "We're not going to take it any more." Then the government says, "OK, go ahead but don't do it again." Until it happens next year. It really has become a ritual.

So that partly explains it. But of course the CP now has 50 members in parliament. And they get really nice perks. They get free airfare, free hotels for themselves and their families, and so on. The perks, I hate to say it, I think are really quite important. And the government, I think, has the ability to disperse all these advantages. The resources are there. There may be a few people if you read the left literature (especially the CP) you'll find them coming up with a kind of tortured logic, which says in any case we're not really free. Of course this is also what George Soros says, that the ANC is a captive of the World Bank and IMF. But there are people in the CP itself who say we don't really like what we're doing, but we're not really free not to do it.

A dream

Still, they come, stalwarts with
 peaked faces shrunk by hunger
 shoulders caved with hours of
 labor, gathering to gather
 energies for a never-ending
 struggle, unobtrusively
 I slip away, seeming akin,
 my work known by few (my name
 by even fewer) till someone
 greets me, murmurs thanks mixed
 with praise, imprint of a kiss
 still woven on my hand as I leave.

May 4, 2003

Gull gliding against
 Gray-silver autumn sky
 sees a vast miasma of greed
 slowly encompass our entire planet
 cries out to unheeding stars
 to whom wails of children rise
 in shrill unending caterwauls
 Gull sees traps and snares
 lethal pellets of noxious lead
 noisome sewers of excreta
 dribbling across continents
 rivers of pesticide
 oozing from lush golfcourses
 Gull gasps, chokes on acrid billows
 from rainforests rampaging fires
 rancid with roasting flesh
 ashen with cindered bones
 Gull breasts with buckling wing
 fierce gusts of questions
 strives, resists against questions
 slowly droops against questions
 succumbs twisting against question
 submits to extinction: Questions

October 18, 1995

Seattle
 In the Tenderloin

Some last flicker
 of defiant vitality
 gutters in the collapsing husk
 a despairing lunge
 of shrinking sexuality
 reaching with skeletal fingers,
 disarticulated, arthritic,
 for my frissoning skin
 from a cavernous skull
 shrunk to a calcined thinness
 eyes glare, plead, twinkle
 in appeal, denunciation:
 halloween's pumpkin mask
 of play, horror and grisly humor
 All-Saints and the unavailing reprise
 of All-Souls, doomed and damned.

September 20, 1996

Flying, after Seattle

Eastward, with wings sun-silvered
 at sunset, flying after Seattle
 we dip into encroaching gloom
 a surge of joy irradiating darkness
 as a new youthful song proclaims hope:
 at a crux in time we made our choice
 beat back predatory ghouls
 who would devour our inheritance:
 big-shouldered we thrust through dusk,
 strong-voiced with deep throated snore
 buoyant on wings borne on sweet air
 after acrid stench, boots and concussions
 our searchlight glare disrobes their putrescences
 crouched under miasmas of confused lies.
 Arise, you billions to assert our will:
 We begin to construct a better world.

December 15, 1999
 Pittsburgh, PA
 (Flying to JFK November/December 1999)

There are many struggles. There is the beginning of protests but also an ideological challenge to this as well. How does the labor movement fit into this and the unions, the pressure from the rank and file?

Not yet. Not yet. There's talk of dissatisfaction. The way COSATU has dealt with it is rather clever. You do have these annual strikes of thousands in the street or you may have a stay-at-home or a one-day strike — and then after that there's just a massive shedding of jobs. The mines have just announced that another 18,000 are going to be fired. And the mining union says we're going to go on strike and then they make some compromise. I don't follow those negotiations closely because they're so repetitious. There's talk and threats and little action.

Interestingly, I've met with the head of COSATU, but I didn't meet him on those issues. COSATU is an ally of Jubilee South Africa with which I serve in filing the case for reparations [from corporations that benefited from apartheid]. COSATU is our ally and is also an ally of the ANC as part of the tripartite alliance. When they came over to our side on reparations, they went back to the government to check if they could do it, and the government said we will neither support you nor oppose you. But since then, under pressure from (a) corporations and (b) the U.S. government at Davos [Switzerland, the site of the World Economic Forum], the COSATU guys backed off. Suddenly they are no longer our allies in the reparations fight, although they started out as our allies. Now, apparently this happened in Davos. The U.S. government and of course the IMF and the banks said don't touch it.

Jubilee South Africa filed a suit in New York for reparations in the name of a collective of the homeless and jobless and it was OK'd by COSATU and by the churches. Suddenly the churches announce, "We don't like what you are doing." And this was quite remarkable because evidently Mbeki and people in the government contacted the churches and said get out of it. So at the moment it looks like Jubilee is alone in conducting the suit.

Now it's not really as simple as that because what they've said is not that they're getting out but that they don't like the way we're doing it and they'd like these changes and so on. So the fact of the matter is that they are trying to find a way of killing the action. They told us you can't have a conference so we went ahead and had a workshop instead. We had about 140 people coming from twenty-three to twenty-five organizations willing to buck both the churches and COSATU — saying in spite of those guys we'll go ahead. After that the churches and trade unions said go ahead, we can't stop you, so we'll go ahead and join you. My feeling is they'll either stack that one with so many church organizations that they'll either wipe us out or discredit us or maybe even instruct the lawyers to drop the suit. There is a whole range of

possibilities. What we are trying to do of course is to mobilize our allies so we will be there in force. The dates are August 20-21. The government has filed a countersuit in New York in opposition to our suit for reparations.

We think we can sue for \$100 billion. And we don't think we'll get it. But what we might get is a settlement out of court when we go after Ford, GM, IBM, Citibank, and these guys. They'll do what they did on the Holocaust issue. They settled out of court when they saw they were going to lose and the dirt was flying around. And we think that money should go into institutional reparations — schools, hospitals, clinics for people with AIDS, and so on. But the corporations have decided that they don't want to go into court and they want to kill this suit. And the way to kill the suit is not by themselves, but to get the churches and trade unions to say don't touch it.

At night, after Porto Alegre;
South African Airways 747

In this dim winged cathedral
soaring above oceans of silvery cloud
far beyond Atlantic's tumultuous heave
we move, star-girt, distant
from greed's debris, genocides, calcined bones
curled in our private shrines
or bent over light-pooled pages
to a new world, new earth, where finally
our dreams can be fulfilled.

April 1, 2001

When the blight of stillness advances
when songs and speech are silenced
when a light of life and laughter is gone,
the spirit still speaks and endures
like sparks that flash from silica —
tough stardust, common dust of the world.

June, 1995
For Mumia Abu-Jamal

Still they sing
sirens of insensate longing
driving us to shatter
on shoals of frustrated hope

Still they weave
patterns of disjunct design
stab pierce and slash
with random logicless shears

Still, blind fates,
they urge, awaken desire
for utopian dreams;
still we shipwreck on love.

September 30, 1998

The March

The march will be remembered
the march
from Alex to Sandton
the long march
the long march will be remembered
with all the other marches
the march in Sharpeville
the march in Sebokeng
the march in Boipatong
the march in Ginsburg
the march in Bisho
they will all be remembered
together they make the Great March
the Great March to Freedom
from Alex to Sandton
the Great March to Freedom.

August 31, 2002; revised October 31, 2002

X Parish, New Orleans

Corpses floating in that murk
of water, mud, debris, arms dangling
or stiff in death's rigor, breasts
bloated with congealed blood;
burly boatmen, bursting with vigor
in orange protectors, pole
their skiffs expertly, their tenterhooks
grapple with cadavers, impale thighs
exposed in death's indifferent obscenity;
in call centers data clerks enter ciphers
that record someone's loss:
there is no place for grief.

October, 2005

Cuba's Malecon:
waves fling their lacy spray
against obdurate rocks.

October 9, 2005
Havana

In recent weeks we've heard about demands for Western military intervention in Liberia. Groups like the Congressional Black Caucus, which has been quite good on African debt, are now calling for intervention in Liberia. What attitude should people in the global justice movement take toward that issue?

I was very interested in the debate that the Left has had on the future of the UN. I can understand people saying things like somebody has to do something in Iraq. And if it's not the U.S. then it better be the UN. And I say: Too bad. The one is as bad as the other. We'll have to find alternative ways to go in and clean up Iraq. But to ask the UN to do it is to ask it to go in as a surrogate for the United States. First of all, it's a U.S. mess you're asking them to clean up, and the UN has not demonstrated independence of mind or independence of values. Even if you ask why did the Security Council stand up to the U.S., you get a set of very mixed motives. The French and the

Germans were worried they wouldn't get a piece of the oil. You get a whole set of reasons that have nothing to do with ethics. This is not morality we're talking about. I would say Africa is an enormous mess mostly generated by the West — its diamonds, its oil, and its mercenaries. So when you get to a mess in Africa the wrong people to call for help are the people who caused the trouble. As desperate as the situation is, I promise you, if you get Charles Taylor out of the way, you'll get another American stooge, a Mobutu being installed to protect American interests — gold or diamonds or oil, or uranium. There are terrible killings and of course they must be stopped. But sending a killer to clean up the killing operation

Twenty-five or thirty years ago I think that debate would have been answered by a Left in solidarity with the struggles. The idea of national liberation and self-determination was at the forefront. Now there's formal independence — the formal colonies are virtually all gone, although Iraq may be something different. How can we get that politics back on the agenda?

The reality is that Africa has been re-colonized. It is the neocolonial process that is now paralyzed. And it is that neocolonial process that generates those conflicts, internecine conflicts in Africa. Genocide and fratricidal killings of people even from the same community. One side paid by the other side. Armed by both sides. The South Africans are selling guns to both sides like crazy. They don't care as long as the money comes through. Black diamonds out of Botswana. Blood diamonds out of Sierra Leone. And who profits? They are now selling diamonds on the streets of Amsterdam.

So the short answer, again, is don't send in the killer to clean up the killing. Find alternative solutions among themselves. I think we are in a terrible mess, but we aren't going to solve the disease by giving the patient poison.

Those women, desperate
 huddled over their knees
 in soundless weeping
 those scraps of torn washing
 stretched anyhow, anywhere

O, the night seems to come
 in slabs of cold blackness
 in slabs of black coldness
 here where people huddle
 under sacking, tarpaulin, rags
 huddle vainly against the cold
 (bare ruined choirs
 where late the sweet birds sang)

O, that staring frightened child's eyes
 the bundled pathetic belongings
 lost, forgotten, abandoned
 such a wail of misery
 rising in the night
 appealing,
 vainly appealing.

12:15 am
 November 8, 2007
 For Shauna

For the young, the buoyant young
 young men and women of our land
 boys and girls, our upstanding youth
 greetings and welcome.
 I feel that you belong,
 inherit the bounty that is yours
 and surge, surge to new hope
 bring your fresh energies
 to make our land ever better
 ever more bountiful
 more generous in gifts
 more open to growth, to fellowship.

October 11, 2008

Shimon Peres is honored by Balliol College, Oxford
 Nelson Mandela honors Cecil John Rhodes
 (on the occasion of Mandela's birthday)

Chorus Directions:
 For he's a jolly good fellow (3 times)
 and so say all of us (3 times)
 INCLUDING CECIL RHODES (3 times)

Yes, he skulked along all roads
 yes, he whipped folks with all goads
 he kissed princes, made them toads
 he burdened blacks with all loads
 disguised himself with various woads
 his gut swarmed with trematodes
 we condemn him, whatever bodes
 he's the worst of SOD's — or Sodes
 he's the robber-barron, free-booter, mercenary, soldier-of-
 fortune, colonizer, pirate,
 bully, servant, architect of imperialism CECIL RHODES

Bailed out by Old Balliol
 Haled (Hauled?) before old Halliol
 Sold out via old Sailliol
 Traded by old Trailliol
 Dismally failed by old Failliol
 Deserves jailing by old Jailliol
 Tyburn is the place where he should burn
 Terrorist of all the terrorists
 Shimon Peres is the tera of the terrorists
 Together we mourn these events;
 together we mark these betrayals
 together in shame and sorrow we mark these events.

Worcester, MA

We have had the rise of a global social movement. Africa is increasingly vocal and important in that. How do we take the issues out into the movement?

Glad you asked that. I think this is where the social movement globally becomes significant for Africa. Alliances form because other parts of the world are suffering from the same imperialism. We have allies at the same time we begin to construct our own opposition. And usually the very simple lesson is that we fight the oppressor where we find him and we define our resistance in terms of that oppression. So it varies from place to place. Just for the record, we now have an African Social Forum. We have a Southern African Social Forum and in South Africa we have SMI. People are suspicious in Africa about things not indigenous to Africa and they want to know that we do it in our own way.

One of our curious problems is that at the moment, parallel to the uncertainty people have about the UN, we have uncertainty about the AU. You must remember that the AU is the replacement of the OAU [Organization of African Unity]. It is perhaps good in one area, which is the emphasis on decolonization, on African independence. That was its strong point. It was full of intrigue and dishonesty and was infiltrated by the CIA. They were corrupt people in there so it really wasn't very good except on the insistence of an independent Africa. And eventually, of course, we pretty much won that struggle after a fashion. Most of Africa is in some way or another independent.

Then, along comes the AU. And the AU is not about independence. Ideally, it's about "good governance" if you like. It's certainly about trade relations and international stature. There's talk about the African Renaissance and so on. But for the left, radicals in Africa have been unable to define their attitude towards the AU. And you can understand why. We do need a continental body. It makes sense. The disappearance of the OAU was not regretted ... but once you have a vacuum you're in trouble. You need some sort of organization there. So we do need a coordinating body. Should it be the AU? The answer more and more is no.

Which is interesting because what people are saying is what is the AU all about? The heart of AU is NEPAD. Now if NEPAD is what the AU is about, it means we are going to be subjugated to the IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO. It means surrendering ourselves into bondage by believing that we were establishing an autonomous body. Interestingly, about two weeks ago when they were meeting in Maputo, the AU was discussing NEPAD, and there was a meeting with Bush in Pretoria, we issued a statement and for the

first time we denounced the AU. We said as long as the AU has NEPAD as its backbone, we must regard the AU as suspicious.

And again, out of the African Social Forum we may have to develop an alternative to the AU. It may take some time, but the AU is not in our interest and we need to build a new one.

For those of us who were active in the 1980s, the South African struggle was a touchstone. Today, there are all these contradictions and difficulties. I'm not asking for inspiration, but it seems to me that the struggles are repeating and beginning anew and drawing from the past.

I like that and I'll give you an interesting little episode. Last year, just before the World Summit on Sustainable Development, we got together to plan an action. And the place we chose was a house on a farm in Johannesburg called Rivonia. Now Rivonia was the house in which Walter Sisulu and Nelson Mandela had met to plot the overthrow of the apartheid government. So when we met there I said this is the beginning of a new struggle and it's appropriate that we meet in the place where the serious challenge to the apartheid regime began.

(Statement of Political Beliefs)

It seems to me
 it might be possible
 to put together a coherent statement
 of my political beliefs
 (or of how I see the world)
 by looking at my poetry —
 at least finding implicit statements —
 though these things — eg. my belief in non-violent struggle
 which may not come out clearly
 since I have not articulated them —
 some central ideas

- freedom is basic
- creative action is an assertion of humanity / freedom
- is necessary
- is heroic
- (but does not need
- heroic posturing / dogmatism — of any sort — is to be avoided
- (though one may occasionally be guilty of it)

slogans, sloganizing, sloganizing (and clichés) must be avoided
 like the plague (hmm!)

to assert one's full humanity is also to achieve one's full potential —
 it is what true freedom is about (as defined among others,
 by Karl Marx), but
 I arrive at definitions
 independently.

November 22, 2008

An erratic experience
 concrete wilderness
 a scrivener's jungle
 they will exclaim dismayed
 somewhat in pity, somewhat in horror
 while I chuckle amused
 buried in my predicament.

The Cubans are a proud people:
 admired by some, pitied by others
 they have endured terrible inflictions
 consequent on Yankee "manifest destiny."
 they are also showered
 with gifts from those who share
 their courageous opposition to
 imperialist designs:
 grateful for generous offers
 they still decline to become beggars:
 their courage is also a product of the pride
 that inspires them to resist.

The truth, I think, was different
 it may have been in that shelter
 where I prepared to spend the night with you
 when some drunk kissed my hands
 and thanked me for my services
 to the wounded suffering poor
 that I knew I could never leave
 it meant we would always be parted
 and I would always be
 dogged and stubborn, my
 country's servitor.