

Recent letters to the World Socialist Web Site

18 July 2001

Thanks for the intelligent analysis of the Balkan “problem.” [“Behind the Milosevic trial: the US, Europe and the Balkan catastrophe,” 4 July 2001]

The post-Milosevic situation is even more grave than you predict: hundreds of millions of dollars for “aid”? They are joking; that’s only promises. Ordinary Serbs know the Western ways. Now the bargaining begins. So much for this one, so much for that one.

If the West would just stay out. If they just did nothing, Milosevic would be tried as a crook, which he was, and would be treated as such.

Milosevic does know the Western ways. He does know the power of media. He does know the “laws.” He may yet become a national hero. A martyr for “his people.” The “problem” is: hundreds of millions of dollars will not come. Serbia will not be a member of the EU for decades, until it “cleans up its act.”

The Balkan situation in the post-Milosevic era is more grave than can be intelligently predicted. Thanks again.

DP

11 July 2001

Sirs:

Your articles relating to “Esso Australia convicted of safety breaches in fatal gas explosion” [12 July 2001] are a great description about what “Globalization,” “The Corporate Agenda,” “The New World Order,” or however it is described, is all about.

Unfortunately, too many of our politicians and union leaders are so self-serving as to have lost their souls to this sinister design.

My congratulations!—keep up your good work!

Sincerely,

RM

12 July 2001

Dear Editor,

Thanks for Chris Talbot’s article on the Bredell land invasions in South Africa. [“South Africa: ANC government evicts poor squatters,” 13 July 2001] I would like to offer some observations of my own.

The recent occupation of state-owned and privately held

land at Bredell by hundreds of indigent families has received an enormous amount of coverage in the local and international press. However, this is not the first time in South Africa that such a “land invasion” has taken place. Indeed, they have been an unreported feature of the “new” South Africa for a number of years. I have personal experience of such land invasions, some of which took place in the early to mid-1990s in the southern Cape. As in the Bredell case, thousands of indigent people occupied private and public land in invasions orchestrated by civic organizations, the ANC Youth League and other groupings. Some of the organizers were clearly con-artists, whilst others were motivated by more noble sentiments. However, the majority of those participating in invasions were backyard tenants or lodgers. Research amongst land invaders revealed that the conditions which they left were perceived as being much worse than the conditions which they faced in their new areas. Unlike the Bredell squatters, these people were not summarily thrown off the land. In most cases, these invasions (which involved thousands of people in some cases) did not even suffice a report in the local newspapers, let alone headlines in the national weeklies and dailies.

However, the treatment of the Bredell invasion has been markedly different. The corporate media in South Africa has adopted an almost hysterical tone in relation to the invasions and its possible effects on the South African economy, whilst crying crocodile tears over the suffering of the Bredell squatters. Images of Zimbabwe have been invoked, and the PAC, as organisers of the invasion, have been duly vilified. Talbot correctly points out that declining levels of foreign investment have generated much anxiety in ruling circles—this, in part, would account for the reaction of the press and the government. However, I would maintain that the strength of the reaction also indicates a hardening of attitudes within the South African ruling class. It is precisely this class which has benefited from the reincorporation of South Africa into the world economic system, whilst the majority has experienced a decline in real incomes and living

standards. The fate of the South African ruling class is inextricably bound up with the fate of international capital.

Over the past few years there has been a definite shift in state housing and land reform policies. An article from the *Financial Mail* by the director of the constitutional litigation unit at the Legal Resources Centre points out that neither the Department of Housing nor the Department of Land Affairs is able to meet the needs of the very poor. Neither of these departments sees the provision of undeveloped land for settlement as part of its core business. Many applicants who acquire subsidised houses find that they are simply unable to afford to live in these houses, as they become liable for municipal rates and service charges. In many instances, these houses are either rented out or sold to raise cash. The revised land reform programme has as its chief focus the creation of a class of black commercial farmers. This will lead to greater levels of inequality and poverty in rural South Africa, whilst adding impetus to the movement from countryside to city, thus exacerbating the urban housing problem. However, these policies are directly in line with the state's GEAR economic policy—much lauded by the IMF and the South African business community.

Although the South African state would have to devote considerable resources to address the problems of urban homelessness and rural poverty, this is not beyond its means. However, as the ANC government is beholden to international financial institutions and global capital, it is unlikely that there will ever be sufficient political will to effectively tackle these problems. It is clear that amongst the South African working class, perceptions of the Bredell land invasion are quite different to those being purveyed by the media and government spokespeople. Land invasion is viewed as a legitimate option in desperate circumstances, and as I have pointed out earlier—it is not a new phenomenon. This places the ANC government in a difficult position; how to retain the support of the masses whilst leading an attack against their standards of living? Their partner in the tripartite alliance, Cosatu, issued a cautionary statement just prior to the commencement of removal operations, urging the state to deal with the matter in a sensitive way. However, there is a realisation on the government's part that acceding to the demands of the Bredell squatters (and millions in a similar plight) would be viewed as an unacceptable sign of weakness by international capital. We can thus expect to see an escalation of increasingly harsh measures to deal with the phenomenon of land

invasions.

Yours truly,
EG
South Africa
13 July 2001
Dear Editor,

I wanted to commend your site again for its brilliant analysis of the race and class issue ripping the United States apart. Your analysis on the issue of Affirmative Action and its true objective, to divide the working class, was excellent. ["Affirmative action and the right to education: a socialist response," 3 May 2001]

Affirmative action is a race-based engine for the ruling class to exacerbate and inflame the racial tensions which exist in the US. It does not benefit all citizens, nor is it intended to. It is a vehicle to keep white, black and other minority groups busy fighting each other, while the ruling class strengthens its hold. Many blacks in the ruling class have no desire to elevate other poorer black workers, but to use affirmative action to carve out a ruling elite to keep them poor and themselves in office. All socialists should stand up against a chauvinistic vehicle like affirmative action and attempt to unite all American workers to demolish the ruling elite. Again, thank you for a great article!

GG
14 July 2001
Hello,

I just found your web site while perusing the web site of an e-mail friend. Seeing as how I have always been a socialist, it's strange that it took me this long to find you. But glad I am that I have. I will spread the news, you can count on it.

Keep fighting the good fight.
RBH
17 July 2001



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