

# APPRAISING THE BAMAKO APPEAL: A CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEBATE

By *Peter Custers*

## 1. Introduction

This commentary is offered as a contribution to the ongoing debate on the *Bamako Appeal*. On the 18th of January, on the day preceding the start of the polycentric World Social Forum in Bamako, Mali, a Conference was held in the same capital, commemorating the holding of the Bandung Conference 50 years back. The event was sponsored by organisations known to be enthusiastic participants of the World Social Forum process, and was attended by over 300 participants. It resulted in adoption of a manifesto, the *Bamako Appeal*, which clearly is intended to promote programmatic debate on a common agenda against neoliberalism. Although some quarters of the WSF-process apparently have responded with scepticism, I wish to start this commentary by expressing my conviction that programmatic discussions regarding a common agenda of social movements struggling against neoliberalism should be welcomed, and that the initiative of the *Bamako Appeal* from this perspective is a welcome initiative. The WSF-process was launched to take the mass resistance against globalisation – Seattle, Prague, Genua – forward, not backward. And whereas participants in the WSF process are bound to respect the definition of the WSF as an open space, without predefined ideological borders, it is entirely legitimate that participants try to promote the formulation of a broad agenda against neoliberalism, so as to help deepen the worldwide resistance against globalisation and globalisation policies (1).

Further, in this commentary I do not pretend to offer a comprehensive assessment of the *Bamako Appeal*. I consider the 17-page document a rich document, and welcome its overall orientation. The document's emphasis on the building of people's internationalist solidarity worldwide, on the need for a re-organisation of the world economic system, on the need to end the US's military dominance, as also the non-dogmatic and democratic spirit of the *Appeal*, - these are all extremely positive features of the document, I believe. The *Appeal* may be criticised for not being fully consistent internally, but this simultaneously underlines the fact that the formulation of the document was the outcome of a relatively open process, in which a great diversity of opinions played a role. What I will do below is try to contribute towards the debate on programme, by offering my thoughts on some eight selected topics included or partly included in the *Bamako Appeal*, namely: \* the question of democracy; \* the building of a workers' united front; \* the question of women's rights; \* the peasantry and the issue of 'socialisation'; \* cultural diversity and the question of secularism; \* nuclear arms, and the consequences of nuclear production in general; \* militarism and the interpretation of African wars; and \* regionalisation in the serve of the people. Once again: my comments are not primarily intended to criticise, but rather to take the debate on programme

forward by suggesting inclusion of further elements in any revised version or second edition of, or follow-up statement to the *Bamako Appeal*.

## **2. The Question of Democracy**

One of the most significant and courageous departures from the thinking of the Marxist current which dominated the worldwide struggle for socialism from the period of the founding of the Soviet Union onwards until the late 1980s, is laid down in section 7, entitled 'For a Democratisation of Societies as a Necessary Step to Full Human Development'. The section states that 'the lack of political participation contributed to the fall of the socialist countries of Eastern Europe', and it proposes to recognize that 'the failures of the Soviet system and the regimes that arose from decolonisation resulted largely from their denial of freedom and their underestimation of the value of democracy'. The section goes on to assert that the anti-globalisation movement is carrying a fundamentally democratic project, asserting access for all to fundamental rights, including civil rights such as freedom of organisation and expression. It defines the following levels for democracy: + democracy in the enterprise, which constitutes 'the recognition of the authority of the workers, users and territorial and national collectives'; + local democracy which responds to the demand for 'proximity and participation'; + national democracy which 'remains the strategic level'; and lastly, regional and worldwide democracy 'in response to the widespread neoliberal policies'.

The *Bamako Appeal* offers a conceptualisation which is both very critical of the conceptualisation of democracy advanced by the United States and other Western powers, and is also critical of the conceptualisation of 'proletarian dictatorship' which previously used to be advanced by the Left as alternative to the bourgeois parliamentary system of democracy. The *Appeal* recognizes that there is a need for a strong dialectic between political democracy and social democracy, the former being necessarily incomplete, and the latter being a component part of people's struggles against oppression and exploitation. Whereas the *Appeal* does not refer to the historical debate on the question of democracy that preceded the victory of the Russian revolution in Europe, it is I believe relevant to state that the conceptualisation proposed in the *Bamako Appeal* is broadly in line with the view put forward by those sections of the European workers movement, which were 'sidelined' by the victory of the Bolshevik revolution. For whereas people unfamiliar with the history of workers' struggles in Europe may believe that Marxist currents are inherently undemocratic, there in fact did exist powerful voices stating that the democracy of the workers and of other sections of the oppressed should be an *extension* of parliamentary or 'bourgeois' democracy. A prominent proponent of this view was, for instance, Rosa Luxemburg (2). One of the tasks of the contemporary movement against neoliberalism indeed is to elaborate, on the basis of old and new experiences, more clearly how the relationship between political and economic/social democracy should be structured.

## **3. The Building of a Workers' United Front**

The labour chapter of the *Bamako Appeal* has been termed, by Peter Waterman, a chapter that 'may well be the most radical political statement on the topic to be found within or around the World Social Forum' (3). Undoubtedly, this section should be welcomed as an important reflection on the limitations of unionism as practiced by traditional trade union federations in central capitalist economies, i.e. in the US, Europe and Japan. The *Appeal* makes the observations that 'mass unemployment and the increasing proportion of informal working arrangements' are among the 'imperative reasons' demanding that we 'reconsider the existing organisations of the working class'. Further, it states that a world strategy for labour must consider not only the situation of workers who work under stable contracts, but also informal sector workers who form an increasing portion of the workers in industrialized countries, and the majority of the labouring classes in majority of countries of the South. A central challenge for contemporary trade unionism thus is how to extend organisational work from the formal sector, where the relatively most privileged sections of the working class are employed, to informal sector workers who are more severely exploited and more dispersed.

However, in arguing the need for a new strategy for the international labour movement, in opposition to narrowly focused unionism, the *Bamako Appeal* could have put forward a more profound analysis than the one that is offered. The *Appeal* states that the ranks of informal workers are growing in the South in consequence of high unemployment, decreasing availability of guaranteed employment, and continuous rural-urban migration. In reality, however, the growth of decentralized forms of labour and of subcontract arrangements within the framework of internationally operating companies is also, and directly, a consequence of conscious strategizing by corporations, and such partly in reaction to the struggles of formal sector workers. Partly as a refinement of, and partly as a successor to the taylorist/fordist mode of production, Toyotism or the Japanese style of management has been devised. Toyotism comprises both new ideas to tap the knowledge of the fixed workers employed in centralized factory compounds through quality control circles, - and a methodology to increase company profits via effective subcontract arrangements. I believe that it is possible to enhance the solidarity between guaranteed formal sector workers and insecure informal sector workers, through an understanding of the fact that they are both victimised by one and the same overall strategy of multinational corporations, of corporate capital (4).

#### **4. The Question of Women's Rights**

The *Bamako Appeal* further contains a separate Chapter on the question of male dominance over women, elaborating on the historical meaning of patriarchy. It proclaims that patriarchy originally referred to a family model dominated by men, having authority over all other members of the family. This model, the *Appeal* argues, was not universal, as a number of African societies have been matrilineal or dual; yet historically the patriarchal system has greatly expanded, in particular with the rise of monotheistic religions. Further, in the context of today's world system, patriarchy specifically designates the domination of men over women, and inequality between genders to the detriment of women. This imposition of a hierarchy of genders is supported by religious and cultural standards, and leads to the appropriation of women's productive and

reproductive capacities, i.e. of women's capacity to produce goods and commodities, and women's capacity to give birth to children. Capitalist states reinforce patriarchal structures through legislation, such as through the formulation of family codes. Despite a 'perceptible advance in women's rights' the *Bamako Appeal* states, male domination is still firmly in place throughout the world.

Yet whereas the *Bamako Appeal* proposes a valid perspective on the history of patriarchy, its propositions on the advancement of women's rights are biased, to the detriment of women without property rights. The *Appeal* justly argues that the question of gender cuts across many areas, and that it is wrong to practice *apartheid* and relegate women's issues to a separate sphere or space (as happened during the polycentric World Social Forum held in Bamako). The *Appeal* argues in favour of the need for women to control their own bodies, and it proclaims the need to struggle against an inferior image of women in cultural and religious discourses. While all these proposals are constructive and help to advance the worldwide struggle against patriarchy, it is rather surprising that the *Appeal* does not elaborate on the need to promote women's property rights. Experiences gathered by peasant women, for instance in South Asia, bring out forcefully, that the right to land and to other forms of property is considered central to their liberation by oppressed women themselves (5). In Bangladesh, the demand has been the very stepping stone towards the building of a national movement of landless peasant women and landless peasant men (6).

## **5. Socialism and the Peasantry**

The fourth thematic that I wish to address is that of socialism and the peasantry. Here my idea is to move beyond the confines of the programmatic contents of the *Bamako Appeal*, as stated in section 5 'For a better Future for the peasantry'. Undoubtedly, this section offers a very credible formulation of ideas in favour of food sovereignty, in opposition to the strategy pursued by agricultural multinationals aiming at global dominance of the food market. Undoubtedly, the program proposed is of immediate and overall importance, in view of the threats being posed by the agenda as pursued by the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The urgency of the need to oppose the WTO's strategy is underlined by the statement, worded in the *Bamako Appeal*, that Brazil and India have become proponents of neoliberal globalisation. Undoubtedly, the need to defeat the WTO's free trade agenda, and replace it with an agenda of localized and regionalized food production, is of great importance. Undoubtedly also, the programmatic points suggested by the *Appeal* in this regard are all welcome propositions: an effective protection against socially destructive imports; the elimination of all forms of dumping by prohibiting mechanisms of international price-distortion; institution of mechanisms for international price control; and the need to take agriculture away from WTO control and bring the sector under a UN institutions.

Still, it appears that the class orientation of the *Bamako Appeal's* section on the peasantry is rather weak. In many countries of the South, there has during recent decades been an increase in the incidence of agricultural wage labour, yet the *Appeal* nowhere discusses this phenomenon, and instead entirely concentrates on endorsing peasant family

farming. Moreover, the *Appeal* ignores the role which rural peasants can play in implementing its vision of (future) 'socialisation' of production. Historically, the most oppressed section of the peasantry, i.e. poor peasants, have shown on crucial occasions that they have a strong interest in the re-socialisation of agricultural/rural production. Thus, poor peasants in France, when struggling to overthrow feudalism during the French revolution (1789), consciously tried to re-institute common property relations (7). In many countries of the South today, the survival of the rural poor continues to depend on access to common resources, such as fish resources in large water bodies and rivers, and forest resources (8). Multinational companies, supported by the World Bank, are engaged in a worldwide war to undermine the access of the world's poor to common resources. If we wish to do justice to those who constitute the most marginalized section of the world population, we need to include the question of common property rights in a programmatic document for the struggle against neoliberalism.

## 6. Rethinking Secularism

I now wish to briefly discuss section 9, entitled 'For the Democratic Management of the Media and Cultural Diversity'. I shall not comment on the positive points mentioned here, on education, on the media and on the struggle against the domination of English as world language. What I wish to focus on rather is an issue, which is not at all addressed in this section, yet which is undoubtedly a burning issue in today's world context: the question of religious tolerance/intolerance and of secularism. Capitalist states historically had formulated policies to counter religious fanaticism in Europe, seen as detrimental to the interests of the bourgeois class. Such policies were not systematically applied. Britain, France, and other colonial powers did not apply a policy in favour of religious tolerance in their own colonies (9). Further, the Soviet Union and its satellite states in Eastern Europe had presumed that religion would wither away as socialism advanced. Against this background, there today is a great need to re-reflect on the theme of secularism, for there exists a striking policy void. An important section of the Western elite is not countering the growth of religious fanaticism through a policy of religious neutrality and the respect of people's right to practice the religion of their own choice, but through a policy of outright hypocrisy. Meanwhile, the Left appears to be incapable of addressing the question of religious intolerance via an agenda that is up to date.

Religion being a crucial part of the world's diverse cultural heritage, a cultural paragraph such as the section on cultural diversity of the *Bamako Appeal* formulated in the context of the WSF, necessarily needs to refer to the question of religion. Further, there is a great need to distance ourselves from the anti-religious temptations of the socialist Left in the past, temptations which themselves were largely inspired by the conflict between science and religion, and between the Church and people's aspirations of the French-revolution period. Instead, there needs to be full recognition of the people's right to freedom of religion, on a par with and in line with the right of freedom of speech. At the very same time, however, there is a need to explain that imperialist states throughout history have frequently patronized conservative currents within the world's religions, to the detriment of tolerant currents, such as mystical trends. The worldwide movement around globalisation needs to question and oppose the misuse of religions and

religious scriptures for political ends such as is now being practised in many countries of the world, including the United States. A secular policy at the state- and global level needs to combine the respect for the diversity of people's beliefs with the observance of genuine neutrality (10).

### **7. The Need to Question Nuclear Production**

A serious omission in a program aimed at promoting the survival of humanity and of the planet, also, is the lack of a demand for the abolition of nuclear production. In section 4, entitled 'For the Democratic Management of the Planet's Natural Resources', the *Bamako Appeal* discusses environmental issues. One of the issues mentioned is that regarding 'pollution rights' being handed out by governments of rich countries in the name of countering the global threat of green house gases, foremost carbon dioxide. The institution of pollution rights as part of the 'regulation' of green houses well brings out the incapacity of the global capitalist system to develop consistent environmental policies. The policy, however, can equally well be cited to show how Northern states are trying to dupe their public. For in the name of countering pollution by industries which emit carbon dioxide in consequence of the use of non-renewable energy resources - spokespersons of corporate capital are vigorously advocating resumption of construction of nuclear reactors, specially in countries which since the Chernobyl nuclear accident have refrained from doing so. And in advocating nuclear production, they conveniently overlook the fact that military and civilian nuclear industries belong to the most dangerous polluters on earth.

Although the reality has for long been 'overlooked' by economic science, all industrial sectors that have emerged since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution have generated polluting by-products, which can best be conceptualized as *non-commodity waste*. These by-products have taken a variety of forms, i.e. solid, fluid and gaseous forms. Now, the military and civilian nuclear production sectors are not only characterized by the fact that they result in different forms of waste. More ominously, the waste produced at the various links in the nuclear production chain – the chain running from uranium mines up to and including reprocessing factories – is 'perennial waste', for the radioactivity contained in many cases persists for extremely long stretches of time. Nuclear production is so dangerous to the health of present and future generations and to our natural environment, that only a principled stance in favour of the complete abolition of this form of production is acceptable. And whereas implementation of such an agenda is only possible on the basis of sustained educational work regarding the dangers of nuclear waste, - the issue decidedly needs to be included in any agenda on alternatives to neoliberalism (11).

### **8. Globalisation and African Wars**

My next point on the *Bamako Appeal* is the question of the wars that have been and are raging in the African continent. This question is briefly referred to under the excellent section of the *Appeal* on regionalism, on regional economic integration in the service of the world's people. For Africa, the section amongst others recommends the

launching of peace campaigns to put an end to existing conflicts or to prevent the eruption of new ones. Deplorably, however, the section with which the series of proposals of the *Appeal* starts, i.e. section no.1 on war and peace, does not explicitly refer to African wars. The section naturally prioritises the struggle against the war in Iraq, against military bases outside of national territory, and against interventions by NATO. Its thrust is to question the US's global military hegemony, which from the standpoint of solidarity between the world's peoples is only logical. Nevertheless, given the fact that the polycentric World Social Forum of Bamako was held in the continent of Africa; given the fact also that the African continent has been beset with a whole series of wars in which many millions of human lives have been lost, - it is essential that the need to end ongoing wars be more forcefully raised.

Moreover, the African wars invariably are linked to processes of globalisation. In some cases, such as in the case of the wars fought in Western African countries, in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Ivory Coast, there is a definite relation between the implementation of policies imposed by World Bank and IMF on the one hand, - and the eruption of these wars on the other hand. In the great majority of cases, including the exceedingly costly wars that have beset Angola, Congo (DRC) and Sudan, the mechanism of the financing of the wars was/is structured around the exports of minerals and other raw materials (12). An analysis of African wars easily brings out that the African continent suffers more from processes of globalisation than any other continent of the world. An analysis of some of the armed conflicts, eg. those in Ivory Coast and in Chad, also brings out that former colonial powers such as France *anno* 2006 still have not relinquished on their desire to exploit Africa's rich natural wealth via direct military dominance. In short – a programmatic document aimed at building worldwide solidarity between people's movements necessarily needs to take on the issue of the gruesome African wars, which affect the very most deprived and exploited section of the world's populace.

## **9. Regionalisation in the Service of the People**

The section of the *Bamako Appeal* on 'regionalisation in the service of the people' already mentioned above, is of special importance for Africa. It proposes the need for Southern countries, i.e. the countries of Africa, Latin America and Africa, to pursue the road of regional integration, and such independent from control and dominance by Western powers. 'Free trade', the declaration states, supports 'strongest countries and multinationals' and is 'the enemy of regional integration' which 'cannot be carried out according to the rules of free trade'. The *Appeal* thus suggests the need for Southern countries to create alternative means of cooperation, and draws special attention to the initiatives which are under way in Latin America, to develop links of regional integration on the basis of the principle of 'cooperative advantage'. In this context it mentions the oil-initiative Petrocaribe, it mentions Telesur, as well as the new regional configuration ALBA, being constructed in opposition against the US's free trade initiative ALCA. Clearly, the authors of the *Bamako Appeal* believe that these Latin American initiatives need to be supported and emulated by countries elsewhere in the world.

For Africa and for other ACP-countries, the section on regionalism is of immediate relevance. In the name of enhancing regional integration, the European Union is currently engaged in negotiating 'free trade' agreements with groups of ACP-countries, the so called 'Economic Partnership Agreements' (EPAs). If the EU succeeds in imposing EPAs as visualized, ACP-countries will be forced to liberalise the greater part of their external trade, will be flooded with cheap European goods, and will not be able to pursue the path of regionally oriented industrialisation. Whereas previous to the initiation of the negotiations towards EPAs, incipient forms of regional integration existed in different parts of Africa, - the EU is *disrupting* the process of integration through artificial new configurations, such as ESA (for East Africa) (13). Given the fact that there is an irreconcilable contradiction between the aims the European Union intends to achieve under EPAs, and the fundamental ideas underlying processes of regional integration in the South, civil society organisations participating in the ongoing international campaign on EPAs have no other option but to question the EU's negotiating agenda *in toto*.

### **10. Continuing the Debate on a Programme Against Neoliberalism**

How to take the programmatic debate against neoliberalism promoted by the *Bamako Appeal* forward? The World Social Forum was launched as an open process, as a forum in which many diverse views and opinions could be voiced. As such, the WSF offered and offers the possibility both to take the global resistance shaped in Seattle, Prague and Genua forward, - and to take that same resistance backward. For potentially it can also emanate in the weakening of resistance against neoliberalism, since the meaning of an open space is that many people argue their case, including people whose opposition against neoliberalism is weak. Against this background, the *Bamako Appeal* is of eminent significance, as it forcefully argues the need for the construction of a common programmatic perspective. While there is a need to protect the scope for voicing diverse views within the WSF, - there at the very same time is a need for the formulation of common starting points, for putting into writing basic principles and concrete demands broadly shared by participants of the WSF. We need to see how a programme can be formulated that can be embraced by all currents of the WSF-process - from Neo-Keynesian to Feminist and Old Left.

Has the *Bamako Appeal* succeeded in promoting such a debate? To some extent, it has. Nevertheless, it needs to be admitted that the holding of the Bandung Conference in January, 2006, which resulted in adoption of the *Bamako Appeal*, was not fully representative - in this sense that very many Southern and Northern movements and organisations struggling against neoliberalism were not present during the Conference, nor could participate in its debates. The adoption of the *Appeal* was not accomplished through a fully representative process. The question that thus needs to be posed to the International Council of the WSF, is whether it itself can play a role in facilitating a programmatic discussion on alternatives to neo liberalism - whether it is in a position to take the debate facilitated by the formulation of the *Bamako Appeal* forward. With all its limitations, contradictions and defects, the *Bamako Appeal* has forcefully posed the need for a programmatic document against the still hegemonic model of neo liberalism. Only

by taking this debate forward constructively, can the WSF ultimately succeed in defeating the neoliberal forces which continue to impose destructive policies on most countries in the world.

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### *References:*

- (1) for the text of the *Bamako Appeal*, see eg. [mrzine.monthlyreview.org/bamako.html](http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/bamako.html) ;
- (2) Rosa Luxemburg's defence of civil liberties and of political democracy at the time of the Russian revolution, are stated in Rosa Luxemburg, 'Die Russische Revolution'(1918); for her commentary on the 'ultracentralist' viewpoint that according to her dominated the thinking of Lenin and of other leaders of the Bolshevik party, see Rosa Luxemburg, 'Organisational Questions of Russian Social Democracy' (in *Selected Political Writings*, edited by Dick Howard, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1971, p.283); for a sophisticated viewpoint on the building of workers' councils in factories, based on the experience of the Italian workers' movement, see Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Political Writings. 1910-1920* (Lawrence & Wishart, London, United Kingdom, 1977; another advocate of workers' councils was Anton Pannekoek, whose book *Workers Councils* was republished by AK Press (with an introduction by Noam Chomsky), Edinburg/London/Oakland, 2003;
- (3) Peter Waterman, 'The Bamako Appeal. A Post-Modern Janus?' (p.waterman@inter.nl.net);
- (4) for my analysis of Taylorism/Fordism and Toyotism/Japanisation, see Peter Custers, *Capital Accumulation and Women's Labour in Asian Economies* (Zed Books, London, 1997, Chapter 11, p.295); on industrial subcontracting in Japan, see also J.C.B. Annavajhula, 'Japanese Subcontracting Systems' (*The Economic and Political Weekly*, February 25, 1989);
- (5) see eg. Bina Agarwal, *A Field of One's Own. Gender and Land Rights in South Asia* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge/New York, 1996);

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(7) see eg. Peter Propotkin, *The Great Revolution. 1789-1793. Volume I* (Elephant Editions, B.M.Elephant, London, United Kingdom, September 1986);

(8) Peter Custers (1997), op.cit., Chapters 8, 9 and 10, p.201, 228 and 257 respectively;

(9) for Britain's patronisation of conservative trends in Hinduism and Islam during colonial rule in Britain see eg. Ramkrishna Mukherjee, *The Rise and Fall of the East India Company* (Monthly Review Press, New York, USA, 1974); for a South Asian perspective on secularism, see also Amartya Sen, 'East and West: The Reach of Reason' (*The New York Review of Books*, New York, USA, Vol.XLVII, No.12, July 20, 2000, p.33); also Special Issue on Secularism, Modernity and the State of *The Economic and Political Weekly*, Mumbai, India, July 9, 2004; for the example of French rule in Algeria and the patronisation of conservative Islam, see eg. Xavier Ternisien, 'Lecon d'Histoire sur la Laicite et l'Islam' (*Le Monde*, Paris, France, December 10, 2005);

(10) a reflective and open minded essay on the theme of secularism/religious tolerance is Rustom Bharucha's essay, *The Question of Faith* (Orient Longman Limited, New Delhi, 1993);

(11) for a comprehensive theoretical analysis of nuclear production, see Peter Custers, *Questioning Globalized Militarism. Nuclear and Military Production and Critical Economic Theory* (Forthcoming, Tulika, New Delhi, India, 2006), Chapters Two through Nine;

(12) Peter Custers, 'Systems of Disparate Exchange' (*The Economic and Political Weekly*, Mumbai, May 2001) – see as 'Raw Materials in African Civil Wars and the Debate on 'Free Trade' on my website, [www.petercusters.nl](http://www.petercusters.nl) .

(13) a detailed discussion on the question of regional integration and EPAs is offered by Gottfried Wellmer, *Die Handelspolitik der Europaeischen Union mit den AKP-Staaten am Beispiel der Entwicklungsgemeinschaft des Suedlichen Afrika (SADC)* (Koordination Suedliches Afrika (KOSA), Bielefeld, Germany, 2005);