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BRICS Bloc: No Alternative to the US Imperialist World Order

Meeting amid the gleaming glass towers of Johannesburg's business district, the mostly billionaire heads of state had no clear agenda other than perhaps a major expansion of BRICS membership aimed at increasing its influence on the world capitalist marketplace.

China's President Xi Jinping mysteriously skipped the opening session, but appeared earlier in the day at an official state visit with South African's apartheid era trade union leader, now multi-billionaire president, Cyril Ramaphosa. Casting himself as an international statesman and his country as the voice of Africa, Ramaphosa, today on the Board of Directors of the leading US corporations that exploit South Africa's wealth, invited more than 30 African heads of state to attend the BRICS summit.

But China's commerce minister, Wang Wentao, did read Xi's prepared speech, insisting that "BRICS is not an exercise of taking sides, not of creating bloc confrontation. Rather, it is an endeavor to expand the architecture of peace and development."

The five BRICS nations comprise 40 percent of the world's population and 25 percent of its economy, but to date, since its 2010 formation, its accomplishments on a world scale have been negligible.

BRICS did create the New Development Bank based in Shanghai, with collective contributions of some \$100 billion in its Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) from its members, to be made available for loans to poorer countries. But the terms and conditions for these loans were negotiated by BRICS with World Bank and IMF officials so as not to undermine the latter international financial institution. All BRICS nations partake in these institutions and largely abide by its rules. BRICS nations that want to access more than 30 percent of their borrowing quota from the CRA, for example, must first sign up to a

usually onerous IMF structural adjustment program. The IMF's routine discrimination against poor countries' sovereignty and its imposition of neoliberal austerity and privatization measures are rarely challenged by BRICS.

No prospect of challenging US dollar domination

Similarly, the prospect of BRICS moving to establish an alternative currency to the US dollar for world trade has not proceeded beyond idle chatter, with the finance ministers of all BRICS nations, usually the direct representatives of the nations' ruling class billionaire elite, openly rejecting this option. (See Patrick Bond's "The BRICS Johannesburg Summit's Hype, Hope and Helplessness.")

Indeed, BRICS emerged as a combination of some of the world's leading capitalist-imperialist and sub-imperialist powers. Brazil and South Africa, in the latter category, are their continent's leading economic powers, consistently using their financial and productive capacities to extract surplus value and otherwise dominate their regions. Any notion that the five BRICS nations constitute a progressive alternative to US imperialism is pure fantasy. Need we note that yesterday's Brazil, before its recent election, was headed by the neo-fascist Jair Bolsinaro, while today's India is headed by the neo-fascist, Narendra Modi?

Trump admirer Bolsinaro, presided over Brazil's ongoing deforestation of the Amazon rain forest, the frequent slaughter and dispossession of its indigenous people and the routine imprisonment of its opposition leaders. Modi routinely attacks and disenfranchises India's Moslem minority, persecutes its women as inferiors and damns Kashmiri people to ceaseless encroachments on its historic constitutional rights and territory.

Expansion of BRICS

A key issues to be discussed at the BRICS summit is which applicant to include in an expanded BRICS, that is, a BRICS+ club that would allegedly have the potential to more effectively act as an alternate to the US-dominated world order. The debates over this question revolve not around any conception of a radical or socialist or progressive program for this loose association of capitalist nations, but rather which of the potential new members will align with this or that economic priority of the current five, that is, who will control BRICS's future to ensure the profits of one or another of the leading players.

The full list of first-round 24 candidates submitted by Ramaphosa to be considered for admission is instructive. It includes Algeria, Argentina, Bangladesh, Bahrain, Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Egypt, Ethiopia, Honduras, Indonesia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Morocco,

Nigeria, State of Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, Venezuela and Vietnam.

Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Egypt and Argentina are among those considered to be at the top of the list.

BRICS's Oil Monarchs, Oligarchs and Dictators

With the exception of revolutionary Cuba, this diverse association of capitalist nations are headed by an assortment of the super rich capitalist elites or pro-capitalist leaders and parties. They include billionaire oil monarchs, oligarchs and dictators as well social democratic reformers heading nations, as in Latin America, beleaguered by US imperialism. Even within the framework of capitalist-imperialist politics, the potential new members have conflicting interests, alliances and priorities, making any serious common ground impossible. But again, a socialist-oriented or “progressive” BRICS, is an oxymoron if there ever was one!

While Brazil, India and South Africa have been criticized by the US for not sufficiently condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine, all want to remain on good terms with the US and Europe, as well as with China and Russia. Modi's India, at war with China over disputed borders, was feted by President Biden last month to a rare White House state dinner.

The “State of Palestine” is included along with Israel's near Middle East partner, Egypt, headed by the US-backed coup mass murderer, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

Ukraine War

There is no agreement among the potential newcomers on Russia's role in the US-instigated war in Ukraine, although most of the African nations abstained on the UN General Assembly resolution condemning Russia. Russia's Vladimir Putin, was not present in Johannesburg, but delivered a recorded video message over the convention center's giant screen. A spurious warrant issued by the International Criminal Court, which by treaty South Africa holds membership in, designating Putin as a war criminal, required his arrest had he attended. This led South Africa's Ramaphosa to suggest that Putin appear only virtually, although Russia's foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, was present.

While not taking sides on the Ukraine War, Ramaphosa called for the resumption of the grain deal negotiated between Ukraine and Russia and for the return to Ukraine of children allegedly stolen by Russia and taken to Ukraine. Both of Ramaphosa's charges were blatant lies.

Origins of the War in Ukraine

The 2014 US-instigated fascist-led Ukraine coup, backed by the US, coupled with the Ukrainian coup government army's immediate move to obliterate the broad opposition to the coup in Ukraine's east and south, over time led some 700,000 ethnic Russians and others to flee to Russia for their lives. These refugees inevitably included ethnic Russian children whose parents had been slaughtered by Ukraine's coup government.

Some 14,000, mostly ethnic Russians, were murdered by the Ukrainian Army, whose forces were frequently led by the fascist Azov battalion and related US-backed pro-Nazi armed forces. With the February 2014 storming of the Ukrainian Rada (Parliament) and the physical exclusion of the majority parties, the openly fascist parties, Svoboda ("Freedom") and the Right Sector, were formally and forcibly integrated into the Ukrainian coup government, ceding to themselves several top posts. [See: Socialist Action's March 18, 2022 website article, "Ukraine: U.S. Out Now! Our Antiwar Credo"]. Putin's video speech aimed at defending Russia from the charge of abandoning the recent grain deal that initially allowed shipments of grain and other foodstuffs from Ukrainian ports to Africa and other regions. It was abandoned by Russia, however, as the US-backed Ukrainian forces violated several key aspects of the agreement. But Putin stated, "Our country has the capacity to replace Ukrainian grain both commercially and as free aid to needy countries, especially as our harvest is expected to be perfect this year."

Brazil's Lula Talks Left, But...

Brazil's new coalition-capitalist government, headed by President Luiz Inacio Lula Da Silva (Lula), joined the parade of "left" posturing BRICS leaders who took the stage at Johannesburg, stating, "We cannot accept the greedy neo-colonialism that imposes trade barriers and discriminatory measures under the guise of protecting the environment." He neglected to explain why Brazil under his watch sent troops to Haiti to enforce US imperial policies and the US-backed UN invasion. . Needless to say, the leaders of China and the Middle East oil monarchies present – along with the US, the world's greatest polluters – as well as those from fossil fuel rich African nations present at Johannesburg, had zero intention of leading a fight to literally save the world from the impending and irreversible consequences of fossil fuel induced catastrophes attendant to global warming.

China's brokered deal with Iran and Saudi Arabia

Among the nations considered for BRICS admission are Iran and Saudi Arabia, previously arch enemies during the US/NATO/Gulf State monarchy ten-year and still ongoing war against Syria, a war that murdered 500,000 Syrians. That war saw Saudi Arabian and US-

organized, financed and trained jihadist mercenaries occupy almost 80 percent of Syria. The invaders openly aimed at Syria's dismemberment. Then Secretary of State John Kerry effectively presided over the Saudi-sponsored 2015 Riyadh conference that envisioned the partition of Syria between the various and diverse US-backed forces.

Syria, facing imminent collapse at that moment, with imperialism's "coalition of the willing" financed and trained forces poised to take its capital city of Damascus, exercised its right to self-determination and called on Russia for help. That assistance, plus Iran's military support accounts for Syria's very existence today. (See Socialist Action pamphlet, "Syria: Anatomy of Another US Imperialist War," By Jeff Mackler and Michael Schreiber.")

Today, China is credited with brokering a rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran, both members of OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries), a textbook example of a cartel-like formation whose members cooperate to reduce worldwide competition and maintain high oil prices.

Other OPEC members under consideration for BRICS membership are Algeria, Venezuela, United Arab Emirates, Nigeria and Kuwait. No doubt Saudi Arabia and Iran's previous fierce antagonisms, including being on opposite sides of a monstrous US imperialist war against Syria (where US troops still occupy and preside over Syria's major oil reserves in the northeast), are capable of establishing new "bonds of friendship" should they join BRICS!

That Saudi Arabia continues its near-genocidal war against Yemen and that its Crown Prince leader Mohammed bin Salman approved the internationally-condemned execution and "bone-saw" dismemberment of dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018, were not under discussion at Johannesburg!

BRICS COVID Era Failures

BRICS incapacity to resolve difference during the three-year COVID pandemic was also not on the agenda. Brazil's Bolsonaro at that time refused to waive the patent rights over key vaccines, thus blocking critical access of the Global South and beyond to life-saving medicines. World Trade Organization (WTO) proposals calling for the waiver of these patent rights were vetoed, mainly by European countries, including Germany and England on behalf of their largely monopolized pharmaceutical industries. But Prime Ministers Angela Merkel and Boris Johnson no doubt appreciated Bolsonaro's rejecting repeated appeals by BRICS's Modi and Ramaphosa, who spoke for more than 100 countries in demanding that vital pharmaceutical products be considered "global public goods."!

South African socialist and climate activist Patrick Bond's article cited above accurately summarizes BRICS relations with the US-dominated largely unipolar world order. He writes: "The BRICS' reticence to fight imperialism's core basis of financial power should have come as no surprise, because in case after case, including the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – starting in 2009 at the Copenhagen summit where Barack Obama joined Lula, Wen Jiabao, Manmohan Singh and Jacob Zuma for a *status quo*-oriented deal that they then imposed on everyone else – the BRICS spent the 2010s playing *into* and not rebelling *against*, the so-called Washington-Brussels-London-Tokyo 'unipolar' order." (Emphasis in italics in original.)

Need we conclude that the "private profit rights" of the superrich invariably trump the social needs of the earth's people? This core capitalist principle is undeniable for BRICS's fossil fuel magnates, for whom the continued, if not expanded extraction, production and distribution of deadly fossil fuels is central to the well-being of the capitalist systems they preside over.

BRICS history, past and present portends no significant advances for humanity. But tragically, there is little agreement among leftists today on this assessment. Counterposing BRICS as a "lesser evil" or even a progressive alternative to the US-dominated international economic order is often justified with the same US election time "lesser evil" arguments that aim at supporting the capitalist Democrats Party wing of US imperialism's billionaire and trillionaire elite rather than the Republican's dominant ruling class forces.

Socialist Alternative to BRICS and Capitalism

Socialist Action's alternative to capitalist politics is based on the historic lessons of Marxism, pioneered, among others, by Karl Marx, his lifelong collaborator Friedrich Engels and the historic 1917 Russian Revolution leaders, Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky. Today's revolutionary socialists in their tradition, participate in all social movements with the basic proposition that *all* the evident evils in capitalist society, increasingly recognized by the world's people, are no accidents to be remedied by the election of this or that capitalist party or candidate. Rather, they are inherent in the very nature of the capitalist system, based on the private ownership of the basic means of production and their organization and deployment to maximize private profit rather than the meeting social needs of the vast majority.

Racism, sexism, poverty, endless wars, environmental destruction, LGBTQI+ discrimination, anti-immigrant persecution, attacks on social services, healthcare, public education, affirmative action, abortion rights, student debt cancellation, etc., are the

inherent stock-in-trade of a capitalist system perpetually in crisis that must seek resolution at the expense of working people. In our view, any real solutions to these crises rests solely in the hands of capitalism's victims, the vast working class majority and their allies, organized democratically and independently of all capitalist parties.

Education and action via fighting for mass united front type protests on the key issues of the day that demonstrate in fact that working people are society's real majority and motor force, are our priorities. Independently and democratically organized working people in struggle account for every major social gain in history, as opposed to the largess of capitalist parties. Subordinating our movements in any form to the periodically "elected" representatives of the rigged billionaire-dominated electoral system and its parties or candidates, or to international capitalist formations like BRICS, is a path to disaster.

Critical Lessons of Marxism

The rebel Karl Marx, exiled from his native Germany to England for most of his political life, founded the first worldwide organization aimed at challenging capitalist rule in 1864, the International Working Men's Association, sometimes called the First International (1864–1876). It excluded capitalists.

Marx's international party championed every revolutionary struggle against feudal autocracy and capitalist oppression in his day, including the Irish freedom struggle and the Abraham Lincoln-led civil war against Southern slavery. Indeed, Marx was perhaps the most prolific international anti-slavery writer of his time, while his party organized a European boycott against "King Cotton," among the chief export products of the Southern Confederacy's slave economy.

Marx's collaborator, Engels, founded the Socialist International (Second International) in 1879 that won the allegiance of fighting trade union and socialists around the world, while building mass independent working class parties that championed workers' interests as never before. Again, all capitalists were excluded.

Lenin and Trotsky, co-leaders of the 1917 Russian Revolution, founded the Communist International (Third International) in 1919. Their 1917 revolution inspired the world's working class in ending Czarist and capitalist rule in the world's largest country. It instantly initiated the most massive land reform in world history, granting free Russia's vast capitalist and feudal estates to Russia's poor peasantry, some 90 percent of the population. It immediately decreed the right to self-determination and freedom, including the right of succession, of Russia's Czarist-era conquered and oppressed nations. It instantly established a new government based on the institutionalized rule of workers,

peasant and soldiers (soviets, or workers councils). Its unprecedented breath of revolutionary social reforms encompassed full democratic rights for women, including the right to abortion and divorce. It championed LGBTQI rights, free public education, health care and a universal focus on raising the cultural level of the masses in every field of human endeavor. Art, literature, music, theater and literature flourished as never before in history. Again, all capitalists were excluded from the new government!

All these exclusions were based on the historically established fact that the capitalist system of minority rule cannot be reformed. It must be abolished by the independent and consciously organized massive mobilizations of its working class victims led by a massive and deeply rooted revolutionary party whose program and membership embodies the lessons of all previous anti-capitalist struggles.

The first three international were in time defeated, as we recount in our previous article on the Biden administration's delegation to capitalist China. (See socialistaction.org). The defeats all resulted from a combination of imperialist-imposed isolation and intervention that in time took its toll on important sections of the original revolutionary leadership and the masses themselves.

With the coming to leadership of Joseph Stalin and his bureaucratic machine in the mid-1920's and the related expulsion and murder of the original 1917 Revolution leaders, the exiled Leon Trotsky assembled the remaining core of revolutionary socialist individuals and groups to form the Fourth International (FI) in 1938. Socialist Action today collaborates with the FI in a fraternal manner only due to US reactionary legislation that prohibits formal affiliation. But Socialist Action maintains a critical attitude to the current course of the FI, whose leadership, under the immense pressures in these difficult times, as is the case for the entire left, is moving toward abandoning its historic revolutionary perspectives. We will return to this and related critical issues in a future article.

All the international socialist formations of the past were born of revolutionary upheavals around the world, where working people united and successfully mobilized in massive numbers – in the millions and tens of millions – to challenge and bring down the oppressive governments of the minority ruling elite of their era. All aimed at inspiring the world's workers and all the oppressed that they could and must rule in their own name! In accord with the inspiring lyrics of the working class anthem, "The Internationale," they sang in harmony, "Tis the final conflict. Let each stand in their place. The International Party Shall Be the Human Race."

Capitalist-Imperialist BRICS or a BRICS+ can never be a component of the inevitable coming world freedom struggles. A new revolutionary socialist mass party of today's best fighters, a party deeply involved in every struggle fighting for a better world is on the order of the day. It is a prerequisite to ending capitalist rule and ushering in the socialist future.

Join us!

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