

### In this edition

- South Africa and the BRICS  
Leonard Gentle
- The war in Mali  
Shawn Hattingh
- The Western Cape Farmworkers' Strikes  
Mthetho Xali
- Rape and the war against women  
Nandi Vanqa-Mgijima
- My Organisation  
Citrusdal farm workers' forum

## SOUTH AFRICA AND THE BRICS: ITS ABOUT THE DOLLAR

The BRICS is the name for an alliance of countries, Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. At the end of March 2013 South Africa will host the next meeting of the BRICS in Durban. The countries intend to launch a BRICS Bank – a rival to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

When the latest global crisis of capitalism started in 2008 the Chinese Central Bank called for a new reserve currency to replace the dollar. Recently there have been two attempts to circumvent the dollar. They both ended in tears. Saddam Hussein wanted to do the Iraqi oil trade in euros – shortly afterwards the USA invaded Iraq. Gaddafi's Libya was not a member of the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) – through which world trade takes place, in dollars – forcing countries to buy its oil in Libyan dinars. Gaddafi was reduced to cowering in a sewer while NATO overthrew his regime.

A battle is being waged over the roll of the dollar.

### Debates on why SA joined the BRICS

We are so used to regarding South Africa as a “third world” country dominated by rich countries from the North. So when South Africa first joined the BRICS in 2011 many people questioned SA's inappropriateness for membership.

Many commentators claimed that the BRICS is just SA acting as a “gateway to Africa” for investors. Its role is, therefore, as a means to ends pursued by other agents – notably China.



But South Africa is by far the biggest “foreign investor” in the rest of the continent. SA Transnational Corporations and parastatals dominate investment in SADC countries – by 80% - and at 40% for the continent, as a whole. It simply dwarfs the USA and the EU, not to mention China, India and Brazil.

People in Ghana, Tanzania and Malawi work in gold mines owned by South Africa's AngloGold Ashanti or in sugar plantations and mills owned by Tongaat Hulett or Illovo. Nigerians watch their soaps on DSTV, owned by Naspers, whilst juggling cellphones linked via South Africa's MTN or Vodacom. When the wealthy ones get sick they go to a private Netcare hospital. Wealthy Angolans fly for their holidays to Mozambique where the legendary Polana Hotel is managed by SA's Protea Group. Standard Bank is the biggest supplier of investment loans on the continent, whilst Zambia's new president had to reverse the sale of Zambia's national bank to FNB. SA Mutual is the biggest investor on the Harare Stock exchange. SA's Anglo American and Mvelaphanda dominate the scramble for the Great Lakes mineral wealth in the DRC.

So SA is not a weak partner in the BRICS or a mere conduit. The rationale for its membership needs another explanation.

### The dollar and US imperialism

The early 20th century saw the transfer of power from Great Britain to the USA as the dominant imperial power. The Bretton Woods agreement in 1944 completed this process when the world's finance ministers gathered to shape a post-War world. With the USA dominating world trade it had the political authority to shape the capitalist world as it saw fit. Its currency – the dollar – became the world's trading and reserve currency and it was the controlling shareholder in the IMF and the World Bank.

With the dollar as the world's currency the USA is the only country in the world that can expand its buying power simply by printing its currency. Any other country doing so in a world of global trade would simply cause rampant inflation and currency collapse. At the same time any act of devaluing its currency immediately lowers its

Continues on page 3...

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The site will allow viewers to find out more about ILRIG, its history, staff and board. It provides an interactive space for interested people to engage with ILRIG's work on globalisation – read articles, contribute to discussion, and order publications. Website members will receive regular updates on issues of interest.

ILRIG website – [www.ilrig.org](http://www.ilrig.org)

# WAR COMES TO MALI

Politics, business and war have always been dirty and inseparable from each other. France sending troops into Mali once again proves this. The French state claims that it has sent its military into Mali in order to secure peace, uphold people's rights, ensure democracy, and combat terrorism. The truth is not that simple, nor that noble.

## Background

France has always played a major role in the modern state of Mali. During the scramble for Africa, it claimed the territory as its own and forced a colonial state on the many different people that lived in the territory. Many groups were also split by artificial borders. Even when Mali became an independent state, France continued to play a major role in its political and economic life. Today, there are over 170 French companies still operating in Mali and they have interests in almost every sector of the economy, including gold mining, retail, and oil and uranium exploration.

When Mali became independent in 1960, a number of groups wanted greater autonomy. Amongst these were the Tuareg people who live in northern Mali and all across parts of Algeria, Niger and Libya. The reason the Tuareg people want greater independence was that they were oppressed by the central Malian state, and few resources were directed to the north of the country. In fact, human rights abuses of Tuareg people have littered the history of Mali, but the French worried little about that so long as the Mali state and ruling class remained relatively loyal to it.

## Struggles of the Tuareg people

When the Tuareg people rose up again in 2012, a number of political groups were involved – including Tuaregs that had served in Moumar Gaddafi's army (which had been overthrown by NATO in 2011). In some cases Arab people also joined the uprising. Although the Tuareg people have suffered a common national oppression, there have been divisions amongst them, including gender, class and caste divisions. These



too have played themselves out in the present conflict.

Initially, the uprising was led by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA). The aim of the MNLA has been to establish an independent state for the Tuareg and its outlook is more secular than religious.

By March 2012, the MNLA had largely driven the Malian army out of the north of the country. Due to dissatisfaction around the inability of the ruling party and president to put down the uprising, military officers staged a coup in southern Mali. The military has always been a powerful force in Malian society and many of the officers involved in the coup had received military training from the USA. These military men redoubled their efforts to put down the rebellion in the north.

## MNLA overshadowed

While the MNLA initially led the uprising, they became overshadowed by a number of other groups, including extremely right-wing Islamist groups, like Asar Dine and Al-Qaida of the Maghreb (AQIM). While Ansar Dine is made up of mainly Tuaregs, the AQIM also consists of Arab and Tuareg fighters from Mali and across the region, with

a large contingent of fighters coming from Algeria (AQIM's main base).

Tensions have simmered between these different groups. Nonetheless, the rebels continued to drive the Malian troops south, capturing a number of cities, including Timbuktu. When the Malian capital of Bamako was threatened in early January the France sent in troops and their airforce.

## Why has France intervened?

The French state got involved in Mali to defend the interests of the 170 French companies operating in Mali, and also those operating in Niger (where Tuareg rebellions have also occurred and where groups like AQIM also have some presence). French companies have oil interests in Mali, and a short way across the border in Niger there are large French-owned uranium mines. These mines supply France's nuclear industry with the majority of its uranium, and many of the companies involved are now also looking to mine uranium in Mali.

With the USA setting up its strategic military command all over West Africa France also wants to ensure its future political hold on the region. It also has concerns that China is making political

Continued from page 1...

and economic headway in the region, undermining French imperialism. To stop these developments it is willing to uphold the military government, which is compliant with its agenda.

## Collateral damage

The French invasion has seen civilian deaths climb rapidly. France has bombed and strafed residential areas across the north of Mali. While it claims these attacks were aimed at 'weeding out' rebel fighters, the reality is that they have terrorised civilians into submission. Its allies in the Malian military have also been accused of murdering Tuaregs as 'revenge' for the uprising.

Companies from Canada and the US also have interests in gold mines and oil in Mali and they don't want these interests to fall into the hands of groups that maybe 'unreliable'. They too wish to maintain their influence over the region. The US airforce has been conducting in-flight re-fuelling for the French attack aircraft that are bombing northern Mali via bases in Chad. The USA has reportedly already sent military advisers to the Malian military.

## What is South Africa's stance?

South African corporations, such as AngloGold Ashanti and Goldfields, are big players in the gold mining industry in Mali. The South African parastatal, Eskom, also has major interests in the country via its business wing, Eskom Enterprises. The South African state has sent in troops into neighbouring Central African Republic. They appear to be saying that the best way to ensure business continues is to back the central state, its military rulers and the French invasion. The price to pay is the continued national oppression of the Tuareg people.

foreign debt and lowers everyone else's reserves. This is a source of enormous political power – as much as its economic and military power.

## The USA is in economic decline

Today the USA is in effect relying on "borrowing" \$1 billion each day to cover its deficit in trade. Much of the debt is treasury bonds owned by the Chinese state, which is the main buyer of US Treasury Bonds. China is lending the US money it needs to buy Chinese goods.

The "Chinese goods" are often components of US Transnational Corporations taking advantage of China's cheap labour. The Chinese-US relationship is thus a symbiotic one – marked by growing tensions and yet inextricable linkages.

But tensions have been exacerbated by US initiatives such as the two rounds of Quantitative Easing - which are driving down the dollar and flooding all countries with cheap dollars. China therefore wants a new global financial architecture, but one which does not come about through direct confrontation with the USA.

## New imperial rivals

In India a growing national bourgeoisie has been at the helm of a new India, aggressively pursuing wealth for its steel, car and pharmaceutical interests. It is historically closer to its cold War ally – China – while the USA favoured Pakistan. Under ex-President Lula Brazil has become a force in global affairs promoting its own capitalists in relations with Lusophone Africa, intervening militarily in Haiti and taking advantage of the new independent path taken by Latin American countries.

Russia, under Putin, is another example of such a bourgeois nationalist project seeking independence from the West. After the collapse of the Berlin Wall the whole of Eastern Europe became open season for Western TNCs eyeing the car

companies, the oil and the gas fields. But, in Russia, a class of oligarchs got in there first grabbing the privatised oil and gas companies and rebuffing the BPs and the Standard Oils.

## What about South Africa?

South Africa's super wealthy are white and unpatriotic. These are the people who benefited from decades of apartheid's white rule and only went along with majority rule when the ANC negotiators guaranteed their investments. Even with these assurances the spectre of democracy was enough to send them scurrying off to shield their operations from political interference by setting up shop in London, Amsterdam and Sydney.

They joined the "shareholder value" movement globally where they have been successful. Today SA has the world biggest resources company – BHP Billiton; the biggest paper manufacturer in Europe – Mondi; and the second biggest beer company in the world - SAB Millar.

Because their main assets in SA are Rand-denominated, successive ANC governments have had to pursue policies of maintaining a strong rand and lowering exchange controls (so that they can get their money out easily).

South Africa also wants a new financial architecture that moves away from the dollar and makes the rand less volatile. That is also why they want a BRICS Bank. But whereas in each of the other BRICS countries there is continuity between the objectives being pursued by the political leaders driving the project and their social base – their own national elite - this is not so easily the case in South Africa.

Faced with this tension between a project seeking to shift world power relations and the character of the national elite the ANC government is faced with a political contradiction... the tension between talking African nationalism and yet having to satisfy a rich, white, globalising elite.

## WESTERN CAPE FARMWORKERS' COURAGEOUS STRUGGLES

The strikes by farmworkers in the Western Cape took centre stage from late August 2012 to January 2013. Inspired by the national strike wave unleashed after the Lonmin strike and the Marikana massacre about 300 farmworkers at De Doorns walked off their workplace after the new farm owner asked them to sign a contract reducing their wages. This act inspired other farmworkers around De Doorns, and the strike quickly spread to other farms in 16 rural towns. At the forefront of the strike were seasonal workers. Out of this struggle the confidence of farm workers was raised and, in some farms, self-organised farmworkers' committees were formed.

### Forms of struggle

- Although some people in the media tried to claim that the strike was illegal and that the workers were being manipulated, farmworkers actually made many tactical choices in their forms of struggle:
- Strikes are not illegal in SA. But the workers decided to defy the procedures which the Labour Relations Act (LRA) prescribes for workers to be protected from dismissal.
- Some of the farm workers established their own farmworkers' committees and held meetings to discuss various ways of taking forward their struggles.
- They also called meetings in communities where scab labour was sourced - to persuade the unemployed not to replace them in their jobs and held mass meetings bringing together farmworkers from various farms.
- They built alliances with the members of the community. Communities from informal settlements around the many small towns played an important supportive role in the farmworkers' struggles.
- They built unity in action between local farm workers and immigrant farm workers from Lesotho and Zimbabwe.
- They timed their actions knowing when harvesting was to take place and even burnt vineyards.
- They used the hearings organised by the Department of Labour for the Sectoral Determination, to demand that government set R150 per day as a minimum wage for the sector.
- They organised pickets and assembled at the points where farm owners picked up scabs.
- They barricaded the N1 highway in De Doorns, while in other towns they blocked roads with stones and burning tyres.
- They embarked on protest marches to submit their demands. The protest marches targeted specific farms, Western Cape Agri SA, the local offices of the Department of Labour and police stations. Farmworkers marched to a police station in Wolseley where a farm worker was killed by the police.
- They established links with trade unions and with NGOs that work with farm workers

### Farmworkers' demands

- The key demand was for a minimum of R150 wage per day. This was a rejection of the starvation minimum wage of R69 per day set by the Minister of Labour after consulting with farm owners and organised labour
- An 8-hour working day
- Basic services such as water, electricity, housing and transport.
- Paid maternity leave and equal pay for equal work for women.
- An end to labour brokers and piecework.
- Permanent and seasonal workers should have the same rights and benefits.
- Rent-free housing.
- No additional rent for children over the age of 18 and family members who are too old to work.
- A Moratorium on evictions.





## Organisations that were involved in supporting the farmworkers' strike

The Coalition for a Living Wage and Good Living Conditions for Farm Workers brought together the following organisations:

- The De Doorns workers' committee
- The Black Association of the Wine and Spirit Industry (BAWSI)
- The BAWSI Agricultural Workers Union of South Africa (BAWUSA)
- The Commercial Stevedoring Agricultural & Allied Workers Union (CSAAWU)
- Women on Farms
- The Surplus Peoples' Project
- The Food Sovereignty Campaign
- The Mawubuye Land Rights Forum
- The Trust for Community Outreach and Education (TCOE)
- The Citrusdal Farm Workers' and Dwellers' Forum
- The United Democratic Front (UDF)
- The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU)
- The Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU)
- Sikhula Sonke (initially part of the coalition but later pulled out.)

In one of its meetings it took an important decision to assist in the formation of worker committees on every farm and in every town. However this was not realised in all the farms.

The coalition supported the call for direct representation of worker committees in the negotiations.

The coalition was critical of how COSATU suspended the farm workers strike and also how it conducted negotiations on behalf of farm workers.

## The role of COSATU

- COSATU became involved at the invitation of striking farmworkers in De Doorns.
- Just as the strike was spreading to other farms in other towns, COSATU called for a suspension of the strike on the 14th of November 2012 until 4 December, after it met with government representatives.
- COSATU defined its role as "trying to avoid a Marikana situation where workers act without guidance from unions, and resolutions are not found in negotiations".
- On the 4th December - the day on which the farmworkers' strike was to restart - COSATU again declared the strike to be over citing an agreement they reached with Agri SA to embark on farm-level negotiations. The strike nevertheless resumed on the 9 of January after the failure of negotiations at the individual farm level.
- COSATU reached an agreement with some farmers in Clanwilliam of R105 per day minimum wage, which is lower than the R150 minimum wage demanded by farmworkers. As it was signing this agreement COSATU also announced its intention to suspend the Western Cape wide strike if a similar agreement could be reached with other farm-owners. In terms of the agreement, workers covered by the Clanwilliam agreement were expected to return to work.
- The COSATU affiliate, FAWU, reached an agreement with the Keurboschkloof farm in De Doorns of between R100 and R137 which was also lower than the demand of farmworkers
- COSATU finally announced the conclusion Western Cape farm workers strike on the 22 January 2013 without the demands of farmworkers being met.
- COSATU promised to coordinate a strike against what it called "bad" farmers if there was no agreement reached with farmers around a living wage, decent conditions on farms and comprehensive land reform

# THE WAR AGAINST WOMEN: RAPE, MISOGYNY AND PATRIARCHY

The rape of a 23 year-old paramedic student, who was severely tortured, shocked many in India. The woman was accompanied by a male friend, boarded a bus on a busy road in New Delhi. She was brutally raped by a group of men and then savagely beaten, stripped and thrown onto the road. The girl and her friend, who was attacked for trying to protect her, were returning home after watching a movie. She died in a Singapore hospital after battling for her life in hospital. This is not the first rape case that Indian women have been subjected to, but the challenge is that they go unreported or failed by India's patriarchal justice system.

What followed her rape were widespread demonstrations throughout India as thousands came out in anger and disgust at this brutality and at the systemic corruption and growing inequality that is modern, "successful" India. The demonstrations were themselves severely suppressed by the Indian state.

## Women's reality in India

India today is one of the fastest growing capitalist countries and a member of the BRICS – together with Brazil, Russia, China and South Africa. Yet Indian society remains deeply and firmly patriarchal, with men dominating from the boardroom to the bedroom. For decades, rape victims in India have endured an ancient, poorly funded, under-resourced and insensitive criminal justice system, which has failed both to care for them medically and to deliver justice, human rights groups and lawyers say. There were 24,206 rapes reported in 2011 by the National Crime Records Bureau, equivalent to one rape every 20 minutes. Indian police estimate only 4 out of 10 rapes are reported, largely because of the deep-rooted conservatism of Indian society, in which many victims are scared to come forward for fear of being "shamed" by their family and community.

What stirred so many Indians to rise up and demonstrate at the murderous gang-rape of the 23-year-old woman on a bus in Delhi on a mid-December evening? Not just the fact of the crime. Nor just outrage at her fatal internal injuries, inflicted by an iron bar allegedly wielded by the six men charged with the attack: Indian women are far too vulnerable to violent assaults. The

reason people took to the streets is that they are uniting to make their voices heard. The hope is that their protests will at last advance the cause of India's vulnerable women.

## Acts of violence against India's women

A teenage girl killed herself after police reportedly pressured her to marry the man who had violated her. A married woman was partially stripped and forcibly chopped off her hair while a young man said to have extra martial affair with her was tied and badly thrashed by the mob of over 1000 people after the orders to 'punish' them was released by the village's Caste Panchayat in Sarada area of Udaipur.

A woman was gang-raped within the premises of a police station in Khadda area in Kushinagar in Uttar Pradesh, police said on Monday. The woman was taken to the police station by a man from her village promising her help in getting a job but she was forcibly given liquor and a number of policemen allegedly raped her in a room.

Indian feminists have fought against culture-specific issues within India's patriarchal society, such as inheritance laws and the practice of widow immolation known as Sati. Sati is the ancient Indian practice of burning a widow on her husband's funeral pyre, or burying her alive in his grave. This practice is claimed as associated with Hindu tradition.

Women are forced into sex-selection abortions by family members. The sex-selection abortion is a practice of terminating a pregnancy based upon the predicted sex of the baby. The procedure

is most common in areas where cultural norms value male children over female children.

Complaints by female workers at the Indian hospital are quite frequent that they are sexually abused and those who refuse to cooperate are tortured or their lives are made miserable. This is the true face of India, where women do not share such incidents with their fathers, brothers or even mothers and sisters, with a fear that they may lose their lives if they challenge powerful men or their source of income would be exhausted.

## Patriarchy and the fight over women's bodies

In highly patriarchal societies, many of these cases never make it to the mainstream media. Men tend to view women as their personal property and this sense of entitlement fosters the commodification of women and girls. Girls are viewed as economic burdens whose only value lies in their labour and in their ability to produce sons.



The Associated press 2013

# THE CITRUSDAL FARM WORKERS FORUM



That is why the burning of brides for dowry is common in India, as is female infanticide. Millions of Indians continue to believe that women invite trouble on themselves by being careless. Mothers often scold daughters for wearing provocative clothing, in most cases a sleeveless garment or a pair of hip-hugging jeans.

Men's loss of power and control over women has made women particularly vulnerable, especially in male-dominated work environments and in public spaces. Sexual harassment and rape are men's responses to this loss of power and control. The rape and death of the student and barbaric actions against women are not just tragedies for the victims' families but it's a deep shame for the Indian government, which has superpower ambitions and which views itself as a progressive, modern democracy.

There have been numerous cases of girls and women being turned away by the police when they try to report a rape. Officers do not take the crime seriously or they blame the victim. India's police force is male-dominated – it is reported that there are only 6.5 percent of women police officers. Deep-rooted patriarchal beliefs mean that the police force, like many other institutions such as government bodies or parliament, is insensitive to the challenges faced by women.



We bring together the workers on all the farms around Citrusdal. We started with mainly permanent workers and it took us three years to get a core group of about 70 and a membership base of about 300 together. Now after the strike our members and supporters include seasonal workers from migrant and immigrant communities. We started the forum because workers needed a platform to speak out about their problems and mobilise for their demands. We felt the trade unions were not playing that role for farm workers. We are affiliated to the Food Sovereignty Campaign because we want to build a movement of the rural poor that includes emerging farmers and the unemployed youth. Through them we are part of La Via Campesina, a global movement of small farmers and landless, rural workers.

## Key issues we take up

Our main issue over time has been evictions. Farmers continue to evict farm workers on a mass scale and the laws like the Extension of Security of Tenure Act do not protect the workers; all it does is to set out the procedure that farmers must follow to evict. We have also been involved in fights for better housing for farm workers and for access to services such as electricity, transport and water. When there were cases of violence against women and children we have organised protests to stop it. We have fought for access to land for farm workers and in this we have been quite successful.

## Our role in the farm worker strike

The Food Sovereignty Campaign (FSC), The United Democratic Front, Mawubuye Land Rights Forum and the trade unions CSAAWU, Sikhula Sonke, COSATU, FAWU, BAWUSA and NGOs like Surplus People Project, Women on Farms, and TCOE formed the Coalition for a Living Wage and Decent Living Conditions for Farm Workers to co-ordinate support for the strike. Years ago we realized that there is a need for more farm worker/dweller decision making power so that struggles can be controlled, run and manoeuvred by the farm workers themselves. The FSC was represented by its secretary Petrus Brink who made it very clear at a meeting in Stellenbosch, "We cannot allow COSATU to play a leading role in the strike, because there's no certainty that COSAU will drive through the mandate of the farm workers".

Since early December, towns across the Western Cape like Grabouw, Wolseley, Ceres, Villiersdorp, Porterville, Piketberg, Clanwilliam and Citrusdal joined the strike. We were the main organisers of the strike in the Citrusdal and surrounds area where we organised mass meetings, pickets and marches during which our supporters got shot and arrested by the police. During December, the farm worker strike spread beyond borders to Lady Smith and even isolated farms where no union or any NGO were working. Some workers on the farm Heimat in Piketberg, the

majority female, met with us at the Citrusdal SPP office because they decided to strike, demanding R150/day. They struck for 2 days, but the far owner refused to listen to their demands. Then he offered R110 per day, but they said no, they wanted R150 per day. On the farm Helderview in Piketberg workers struck for days, playing games at the entrance of the farm. We tried to bring out more workers but the police and farmers blocked us with guns.

The strike was constantly called on or off by Tony Ehrenreich of COSATU without consultation. The Coalition was disappointed; FSC and the farm workers felt that they were not consulted. On the other hand, Tony Ehrenreich felt that the strike was driven on emotions

in the street and that workers and their families could not maintain them in these conditions without an offer on the table for months. FSC organized as the Citrusdal Farm Workers/dwellers Forum decided strategically to focus on mobilising in areas such as Citrusdal farms, Citrusdal squatter camp (Stofpad), Piketberg farms (Heimat and Helderview), Porterville, Saron and Clanwilliam. We also decided not to emphasize signing up of members, but rather to assist, support and to strengthen our relationship with farm worker committees and similar groups.

The unions have captured the strike and what we did not want is them controlling it. When it became a union mandate worker control fainted.

Our position was very clear, the strike must be controlled by the workers, not the unions. The demand of R150/day is only a conditional demand but we must demand to get our land back that was stolen by imperialists and capitalists. We want land, water and food sovereignty... it should be the next step...

Even if we did not win everything we wanted, one thing is absolutely sure, farm workers, migrants and minors have lost a certain degree of fear against the bosses, and we will capitalize on that, building our structures and movements on this faith!

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## New Forms of Organisation: Movement building after Marikana

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All public forums are held every last Thursday of the month at Community House, 41 Salt River Rd, Woodstock from 6-8:30. Transport home and refreshments are provided.

#### UPCOMING PUBLIC FORUMS

- |              |  |
|--------------|--|
| 31 January:  | The Farm workers strike                      |
| 28 February: | South Africa and the BRICS                   |
| 28 March:    | What does the budget say about the SA state? |