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WE FIGHT IDEAS WITH IDEAS

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## 90 SECONDS TO MIDNIGHT ...

The Doomsday Clock is a symbol that represents the likelihood of a human-made global catastrophe. Set at 90 seconds in January 2024, it means that we are 90 seconds away from a global catastrophe of historic proportions.

“Founded in 1945 by Albert Einstein, J. Robert Oppenheimer, and University of Chicago scientists who helped develop the first atomic weapons in the Manhattan Project, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists created the Doomsday Clock two years later, using the imagery of apocalypse (midnight) and the contemporary idiom of nuclear explosion (countdown to zero) to convey threats to humanity and the planet. The Doomsday Clock is set every year by the Bulletin’s Science and Security Board in consultation with its Board of Sponsors, which includes nine Nobel laureates. The Clock has become a universally recognized indicator of the world’s vulnerability to global catastrophe caused by man-made technologies.” ([https://thebulletin.org/doomsday-clock/#nav\\_menu](https://thebulletin.org/doomsday-clock/#nav_menu) accessed 21 August 2024)

In 2021 and 2022, the clock was set at 100 seconds, and in 2023 and 2024, at 90 seconds.

What is the likelihood of it dipping below 90 seconds in 2025?

A key determining factor is the risk of nuclear war. Until recently, the main drivers of such risk were the Russia/Ukraine conflict, and the spread of nuclear capability to Iran, India and Pakistan. Since October 2023, the deepening conflict in the Middle East will certainly be a major consideration when setting the clock in 2025.

On the climate-related front, 2023 was the hottest year in recorded history. 2024 could certainly trump that. While the risk of corona virus infection might have receded, a new virus, mpox, now threatens to run rampant.

And then there is AI. In a January 2023 article by the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, the following point was made:

*Military uses of AI are accelerating. Extensive use of AI is already occurring in intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, simulation, and training. Of particular concern are lethal autonomous weapons, which identify and destroy*

*targets without human intervention. Decisions to put AI in control of important physical systems - in particular, nuclear weapons - could indeed pose a direct existential threat to humanity.*

The Bulletin Editors restrict their considerations to the threats posed by nuclear weapons, climate change, biological events, and the misuse of disruptive technologies. They do not directly address issues of political economy and the class struggle.

Over the past forty years, neoliberalism has accelerated the development of cost-saving technologies - but at the expense of working class jobs. The global economy is more and more rapidly able to churn out goods and services, but increasingly unable to find markets for them. And so we have over-production accompanied by masses of people in all countries who are surplus to requirements.

We are able to produce goods and services faster than we can consume them, and this exacerbates the problem of over-accumulation. This is the nature of capitalism. The concept is succinctly captured in an article by William Robinson and Hoai-An Nguyen in January:

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*The transnational capitalist class (TCC) has accumulated obscene amounts of wealth, well beyond what it can reinvest. The extreme concentration of the planet's wealth in the hands of the few and the accelerated impoverishment and dispossession of the majority has made it increasingly difficult for this TCC to find new outlets to unload enormous amounts of accumulated surplus. Transnational capitalists and their agents in states have relied on debt-driven growth, wild financial speculation, the plunder of public finance, and state-organized militarized accumulation to sustain the global economy in the face of chronic stagnation.*

And so, we have a world where the bottom half of the world's population owns 2% of global wealth, while the top 10% owns 76% of it, and the top 1% owns 38%.

The International Labour Organization reported in 2019 that “a majority of the 3.5 billion workers in the world either eked out a living (or attempted to) in the informal economy - that is, swelled the ranks of surplus labour - or worked in precarious arrangements, including informal, flexible, part-time, contract, migrant, and itinerant work arrangements.”

In addition: “Over the past four decades globalization has brought a vast new round of global enclosures as hundreds of millions (of people) have been uprooted from the Global South countryside and turned into internal and transnational migrants.” (William Robinson, 2022).

Seen in this context, the Zionist destruction of Gaza makes speculation of the following kind more credible:

- Israel has awarded 12 licences to six companies to explore natural gas off the Mediterranean coast as part of its strategy to become a major energy hub, and as an alternative supplier to Russian gas for Western Europe.
- Jared Kushner (Donald Trump's son-in-law) has praised the “very valuable” potential of Gaza's “waterfront property” and suggested Israel should remove civilians while it “cleans up” the Strip
- Harey Zahav, an Israeli company notorious for building settlements in the illegally occupied West Bank, in December 2023 placed an advertisement which read, "A house on the beach is not a dream," proposing the construction of Jewish homes in an ethnically cleansed Gaza Strip.
- The Ben Gurion Canal Project, originally proposed in the 1960s, envisages the building of an alternative to

the Suez Canal that would run from the Gulf of Aqaba across the Negev desert and Gaza out to the Mediterranean.

- According to a U.N. report released in May if Gaza is going to be rebuilt for Gazans it will take at least until 2040 but could drag on for many decades,. Who will get these contracts? As we know, tens of billions of dollars' worth of contracts were awarded to US companies to rebuild Iraq after 2003. Enough said.

So, ethnic cleansing in Palestine must be seen as a global capitalist imperative, driven by the designs of the TCC. As global capital seeks to find outlets for over-accumulated capital investment, it will stop at nothing to accomplish its goals.

If predatory global capitalist expansion is added as a risk factor in the Doomsday Clock, there is certainly every reason to expect the time to midnight to be reduced to below 90 seconds.



## MARIKANA: 12 YEARS ON

Twelve years have elapsed since the shocking massacre of 34 striking mine workers at Marikana, and yet calls for accountability and for the prosecution of those responsible continue to be bogged down “in the pipeline.” In addition, the lack of socio-economic upgrade of the area keeps the town of Marikana in a state of abject squalor, with many residents still living in shacks, with no running water, with pit latrines, and lack of electricity. The mine workers, whose labour produces billions in profits for the mine bosses and shareholders remain an ultra-exploited class.

The ANC government had preferred to treat the massacre as a public-order issue, with policing coming under the spotlight. Thus, the main focus has been on how to improve police response to crowd management. In a report to Parliament, the so-called “Panel of Experts” and the South African Police Service Transformation Task Team had the following to say:

*The appointment of senior command personnel must be audited, and there seemed to be confusion between the rank and roles in the SAPS. The use of force in public order policing needed to be reviewed. Weapons of an automatic nature had no place in public policing.*

In 2012, current SA president, Cyril Ramaphosa, was not in government; he was a wealthy businessman who, among his many directorships, was a non-executive board member of the Lonmin Mining Company, owners of the Marikana mine.

On 15 August 2012 (the day before the massacre) Ramaphosa addressed an email to the police minister (yes, *directly* to the police minister—even though he wasn’t in government at the time but “only” a non-executive board member of Lonmin) in which he said, referring to the striking mine workers at Marikana:

*“What is taking place is criminal and must be characterised as such. In line with this characterisation, there needs to be concomitant action to address the situation.”*

In July 2022, the families of the killed mine workers approached the High Court in a bid to hold Ramaphosa liable for the police response at Marikana. According to the High Court:

- It had not been established how Ramaphosa bore any legal duty in respect of the tragedy;
- It could not be established that he was “behind the killings”;
- There was no factual bases connecting him and senior-police officers.

Today, Ramaphosa is president of South Africa, and (with a fortune in excess of R6 billion) one of the wealthiest people in the country. He heads a government whose first interest is to satisfy the demands of the masters of global and local capital. He played an instrumental role in negotiating the post-apartheid constitutional order in the 1990s, and in numerous

public speeches over the years has repeated his belief that the solution to poverty in South Africa is foreign and local investment. That our unemployment rate and our Gini coefficient have for years continued to be among the highest in the world has left him undeterred. He simply sticks to his mantra.

Are we to believe he is not familiar with Einstein’s famous quote: “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results”?

The Global Wealth Report for 2024 was released on 10 July 2024, highlighting where wealth inequalities have grown the furthest. South Africa tops the list, scoring 82 out of 100 on the inequality index, where 0 indicates total equality and 100 indicates absolute inequality.

Clearly, real change will not be ushered in from above. We will be insane if we continue to trust the ruling class to be our liberators. Class struggle “from below” is the way forward.

In his presidential address to the New Unity Movement in 1991, RO Dudley cited the Communist Manifesto:

. . . Marx and Engels set out in the “Communist Manifesto” some of the most brilliant conceptions of the historical development of society. In their concluding paragraphs they declared that the workers of the world had an historic task to put an end to the exploitative economic order that had succeeded the feudal order. The ruling class and its satraps wish to hitch the loyalty of the workers to their exploiters. We have nothing in common with them.

And so, the struggle continues.



## Women and the Working-Class Struggle

by Carmel Chetty

**Another 'Women's Month' is drawing to a close in South Africa and the state-politicians have droned on, unconvincingly, about improving the lot of the women in society. The ANC-controlled South African government had chosen to observe August 9<sup>th</sup> each year rather than the International Women's Day set by the United Nations in 1975, primarily to remind citizen-voters of their 1956 Congress-aligned women's march to Pretoria. Over the past 34 years the ANC alliance has all but erased the history of other, and earlier struggles such as the 1913 Satyagraha resistance march of women (against the poll tax and provincial travel restrictions on Indians) from the then Transvaal into Natal, resulting in the imprisonment and death of a youth-woman activist, 16 year old Valliamah Moodliar, barely 11 days after being released sick from prison. In addition, the present regime does not even attempt to address the gross centuries-old oppression that working-class women in South Africa continue to endure**

The need for the emancipation of women from patriarchy and social exploitation is as old as humankind. Chris Harman in his *A Peoples History of the World* estimates that with the emergence of states, about 5000 years ago, began a tendency for women to be seen as inferior to men.

*Women everywhere lost out with the polarisation of society into classes and the rise of the state. There was a shift in their status, described by Frederick Engels more than a century ago as 'the world historic defeat of the female sex'. From being co-decision makers with men, they were thrust into a position of dependence and subordination. The exact nature of the subordination varied enormously from one class society to another, and from class to class in each society. But it existed everywhere that class existed. So universal did it become that even today it is usually treated as an invariant product of human nature.'*

The burden of family care has always been the lot of women, worsened by regional conquests, continental colonial invasion and plunder, slavery, industrialisation and the capitalist factory system. Socialists however maintain that society should provide communal childcare, dining halls and laundries, paid maternity leave, free health care so that women can participate fully and equally in all aspects of our social and political life (Frentia & Gaido, 2017)

Women's struggles for emancipation had already raged from before the French Revolution in 1789, through the 1800s and straddling Europe and America.

The first Women's Day in the United States was initiated by socialist women in 1908, on the last Sunday in February, when large demonstrations took place calling for the vote and the political and economic rights of women. The following year (1909), 2,000 people attended a Women's Day rally in Manhattan. It was that same year that women garment workers staged a general strike. 20,000 - 30,000 shirtwaist makers went on strike for 13 cold, winter weeks for better pay and working conditions.

International Women's Day was, from the very beginning, a Working Women's Day. At the second *International Conference of Working Women* held in Copenhagen in

1910, Clara Zetkin (leader of the 'women's office' for the Social Democratic Party in Germany) tabled the idea of an International Women's Day, which was agreed to unanimously by over 100 women from 17 countries. While its immediate objective was to win universal female suffrage, its aspirations were much grander: the overthrow of capitalism and the triumph of socialism, abolishing both the wage slavery of workers and the domestic slavery of women through the socialization of education and care work.

Cintia Frencia & Daniel Gaido (2017) quote the first International Women's Day resolution:

*In agreement with the class-conscious political and trade union organizations of the proletariat of their respective countries, socialist women of all nationalities have to organize a special Women's Day (Frauentag), which must, above all, promote the propaganda of female suffrage. This demand must be discussed in connection with the whole woman's question, according to the socialist conception.*

Joyce Stevens (1985) reminds us that the flames of revolution were kindled as a consequence of the wretched conditions under which women worked in textile and manufacturing industries. This led to the emergence of trade unions at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She says, "Their jobs were sex segregated, mainly in textiles, manufacturing and domestic services where conditions were wretched and wages worse than depressed." During this wretched time women organised themselves in countries across the world. They organised around the call for women to have the right to vote.

On 18 November 1910 the suffragette demonstration of 300 women in London became known as Black Friday when hundreds were badly hurt, and the police violence resulted in some deaths.

Mary-Alice Waters (1989), a leading feminist, maintains that the early struggles of bourgeois women were 'thoroughly progressive'. Those struggles opened up the fight against social norms that had prevented women from getting an equal education and the right to vote. The rights that were won opened the possibilities for all women. She

wrote as follows in a publication called 'Women and the Socialist Revolution':

*The widespread acceptance of sex discrimination as 'natural' is one of the most profitable things capitalism has going for it. Sexual inequality is built into the very foundation of capitalism; thus a struggle against that discrimination on all levels is an indispensable part of the struggle for socialism*

Religion is also used to maintain the status quo. For feminists, that status quo is a patriarchal society. There are several ways in which religion promotes patriarchy:

- Through religious scripture / teachings
- Through religious ceremonies and practices
- Through the structure and power-relations of religious organisations.

### The Soviet Socialist Experience

The Russian Revolution of 1917 was begun by women. They (the Bolshevik women) believed that the liberation of women could not be isolated from the liberation of the working class. The February Revolution in 1917 was led by the actions of female textile workers who left their factories in the then-capital Petrograd to march for "Bread and Peace". This led to food riots and a mass strike. The war-weary army backing the demonstrators, toppled the hated Tsar, resulting in the establishment of an unstable bourgeois-democratic Provisional Government, which was in turn toppled within nine months, by socialists under the leadership of the revolutionary Bolshevik Party.

Women's demands for equality were realised between 1917 and 1927 following the Bolshevik socialist revolution. However, with the rise of Stalin in the Soviet Union a complete reversal of those gains occurred. Trotsky summarised it as follows:

*The position of woman is the most graphic and telling indicator for evaluating a social regime and state policy. The October Revolution inscribed on its banner the emancipation of womankind and created the most progressive legislation in history on marriage and the family....*

*(The Stalin bureaucracy) ...has taken alarm at the 'disintegration' of the family... it began singing panegyrics to the family supper and the family laundry, that is, the household slavery of woman. (Trotsky L. 1937, p170)*

After Stalin's death some changes such as restoring legalised abortion was made, but Soviet women still remained responsible for the full burden of housework and child rearing.

Whilst the Communist Manifesto, written in broad brushstrokes, was largely silent on the plight of working-class women, as noted by Sheila Rowbotham in her fictional letter, (some hundred years later) to 'Mr Marx', the Russian Revolution set out very decisively to emancipate women, drilling down to the living conditions of women.

Leon Trotsky, the co-leader of the revolution and member of the Politburo, reports credibly that the Russian Revolution

*...not only gave her all political and legal rights in equality with man, but what is more important did all that it could, and in any case incomparably more than any other government ever did ....*

*The revolution made a heroic effort to destroy the so-called family hearth – that archaic, stuffy, and stagnant institution in which the woman of the toiling classes performs galley labour from childhood to death.*

The state plans included

*a finished system of social care and accommodation: maternity houses, child-care centres, kindergartens, schools, social dining rooms, social laundry, first-aid stations, hospitals, sanatoria,.....The complete absorption of house-keeping functions of the family by institutions of the socialist society ..... a real liberation from the thousand year-old fetters.*

*.... During the lean years the workers, wherever possible, and in part their families, ate in the factory and other social dining rooms, and this was officially regarded as a transition to a socialist form of life."*

He firmly believed that

*In order to change the conditions of life, we must learn to see them through the eyes of women*

*As long as woman is chained to her housework, the care of the family, the cooking and the sewing, all her chances of participation in social and cultural life are cut to the extreme.*

Stalin's systematic retreat from the fundamentals of Bolshevik Marxism coupled with his brutal, relentless purging, arrests and executions of almost all the Bolshevik stalwarts as well as the falsification and rewriting of the Soviet history rendered the USSR a pale, unrecognisable shadow of the socialist government of Lenin and Trotsky.

Women have shown that the struggle for gender equality is an imperative for forging an alternate socialist society. Caroline Lund explains:

*One great lesson to be learnt from the Soviet experiences, both positive and negative, is the need for women to organise as women before the socialist revolution and during the socialist revolution, so that they will be able to play the maximum role inside the revolution to insure that their needs and aspirations are satisfied and not subordinated.*

### The Struggle for Women's Emancipation Continues

The world faces a rise of movements based on identity politics that has resulted in a shift away from an emphasis on class analyses. The rise in popularity of right-wing ideologies once again brings to

the fore the need to be aware of the relationships and the contradictions between capitalism, patriarchy and religious dominance.

Understanding history is essential to understanding of the way forward. The struggle for gender equity as well as the ongoing fight against gender-based violence, femicide and all forms of the gross violations of women's rights must happen alongside the revolutionary struggle for a socialist order.

For the working class to develop its class consciousness and quest for emancipation, it must recognise that the subjugation of women is counter to developing the necessary unity. It must challenge age old prejudices and assumptions about gender equality.

Present society still tasks women with huge family responsibility (invisible labour) to sustain households despite enormous deprivations and economic deficits. In addition, women face the unrelenting onslaught of gender-based violence, femicide and rape; the commodification of biological reproduction leading to desperate, poor women renting out their wombs. These realities raise further questions for a socialist-feminist perspective.

Proletarian women, presently, work a double shift or very often a triple shift during factory-'overtimes' (often very welcome for the working-poor to earn additional income) given the additional burden of seeing to the daily needs of the family: cooking, cleaning, laundry, children care, etc. Men and male children rarely assist with household drudgery. On the other hand, middle-class and bourgeois women escape the drudgery of household chores by employing domestic help. Today there is a difference in the way women position themselves in the struggle for the rights of women. While upper class women are concerned about their subordinate status within the capitalist system and argue for a re-division of household tasks within the family, Marxists want to transfer household work altogether to the public sphere.

The Russian Revolution has shown what is possible. That a determined, unambiguous socialist leadership can create conditions for the emancipation of women (and men) even in the face of a raging anti-imperialist war, at its very birth.

**Footnotes and references have been excluded**

### **'I am Khanga' written by Fezeka**

I wrap myself around the curvaceous bodies of women all over Africa

I am the perfect nightdress on those hot African nights

The ideal attire for household chores

I secure babies happily on their mother's backs

I am the perfect gift for new bride and new mother alike

Armed with proverbs, I am vehicle for communication between women

I exist for the comfort and convenience of a woman

But no no no make no mistake ...

I am not here to please a man

And I certainly am not a seductress

Please don't use me as an excuse to rape

Don't hide behind me when you choose to abuse

You see

That's what he said my Malume

The man who called himself my daddy's best friend

Shared a cell with him on [Robben] Island for ten whole years

He said I wanted it

That my khanga said it

That with it I lured him to my bed

That with it I want you is what I said

But what about the NO I uttered with my mouth

Not once but twice

And the please no I said with my body

What about the tear that ran down my face as I lay stiff with shock

In what sick world is that sex

In what sick world is that consent

The same world where the rapist becomes the victim

The same world where I become the bitch that must burn

The same world where I am forced into exile because I spoke out?

This is NOT my world

I reject that world

My world is a world where fathers protect and don't rape

My world is a world where a woman can speak out

Without fear for her safety

My world is a world where no one, but no one is above the law

My world is a world where sex is pleasurable not painful

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