



## PLATFORM FOR DIALOGUE

### *Spectres of Crisis, Rays of Hope: Revolution, Liberation and Development Today*

In response to the world crisis currently unfolding, the Agrarian South Network (ASN) will create a Platform for Dialogue with the aim of raising consciousness on ongoing liberation struggles and deepening the search for socialist alternatives among working peoples. The COVID-19 pandemic has struck the world economy already in deep crisis and intensified its protracted contradictions. We are at an historic juncture which will determine the course of the twenty-first century and, indeed, the future of humanity. Amidst the manifold spectres haunting the world, there are rays of hope. The ASN will put its resources at the disposal of progressive movements and intellectuals to build solidarities and provide for rigorous reflection on the challenges as they evolve. The theme of the Platform is 'Spectres of Crisis, Rays of Hope: Revolution, Liberation and Development Today', and will comprise of four initiatives:

1. A **Dialogue Series** to be held fortnightly online, beginning in July 2020, for an indefinite period of time, aiming to maintain the network and partner organizations in a process of collective reflection. The main language medium will be English. Translation facilities for other languages will be made available when and where resources permit. The core partners for this initiative are The Sam Moyo African Institute for Agrarian Studies (SMAIAS, Zimbabwe) and ActionAid Association (India). Supporting partners include the Postgraduate Programme in World Political Economy at the Federal University of ABC (Brazil), and others may similarly be invited to join.
2. A **Research Bulletin** to be published monthly online, beginning in August, with short interventions of political or theoretical nature of no more than 2,000 words. The aim is to provide for an organized and incisive exchange of ideas on a frequent basis. As per ASN language policy, contributions will be published in English, but may be submitted in other languages with a view to undertake translation when and where resources permit; published articles may also appear in other languages.
3. A serial **Special Section** in *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy*, with commissioned articles of a political or theoretical nature of 4,000–5,000 words, beginning in December 2020. ASN language policy will apply.
4. A **Short Book Series** of no more than 30,000 words focused on the challenges of the current crisis. The series will be entitled 'Revolution, Liberation and Development Today' and will promote innovative thinking aiming to influence theory and praxis. Manuscripts may be published in English, Portuguese or Spanish, and translations may be undertaken when possible. Publications will be distributed freely in electronic form. Limited print editions will be made available when and where resources permit.

The theme of the Platform for Dialogue is in line with the previously announced objectives of the SMAIAS-ASN 2021 Summer School, entitled 'Alternatives for the South: Liberation, Development and Ecology', and whose concept note has raised a series of fundamental questions which remain central to this new initiative ([www.agrariansouth.org/news](http://www.agrariansouth.org/news)). The Platform for Dialogue will bring focus to the rapidly evolving effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the dramatic fall in world production, disruption of markets, and escalation of debt. The Platform will promote sustained dialogue on emerging liberation struggles and assess the potential for socialist transitions with renewed attention to development planning.

Further information and news may be obtained via our social media, website and email:

@Agrarian\_South, [facebook.com/agrariansouthnetwork](https://www.facebook.com/agrariansouthnetwork), [www.agrariansouth.org](http://www.agrariansouth.org), [agrariansouth@gmail.com](mailto:agrariansouth@gmail.com).

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The COVID-19 pandemic has struck at a crucial juncture. The world economy has been veering toward another, and more definitive, financial crash under exorbitant levels of debt that have persisted after the 2008 crisis, as well as the downturn in world manufacturing growth since 2018, amid trade war. No lasting solution to the crisis has been possible. And by the very nature of the accumulated contradictions of our time – including climate change and prolonged demographic transition – the current systemic crisis will be like no other. There is no prospect of launching a new, long cycle of accumulation. Profit rates in productive sectors have been in decline at the centre of the world economy since the mid-1960s, while the neoliberal project has dragged on with a low overall growth rate, propped up by financial profits and new rounds of primitive accumulation. Nor is there any chance of delivering prosperity to the world's 7.5 billion people, set to reach 11 billion by the end of the century. Half of the world's workforce today already functions as a labour reserve and subsists in degraded and vulnerable conditions. The generations of working people to come will face nothing other than misery and genocide. The degree of monopoly and financialization of capitalism at the present stage makes for an obsolete system, in permanent crisis.

The pandemic has accelerated the course of contradictions. We remain in the midst of the long transition from colonial rule to a neo-colonial situation marked in this late stage by fraying national sovereignties, escalating imperialist aggression, and the return of fascism. The neoliberal project since the 1980s promised peace and prosperity, but it set its sights on containing and reversing the gains of decolonization. The 2008 crisis was a milestone in the recrudescence of avowedly supremacist forces around the world. As neoliberal utopia crumbled, the way was cleared for neo-fascist forces across North and South to mobilize popular hopes and fears, typically through religious fundamentalisms, with the connivance or open support of the monopolies and high finance. A veritable axis of white supremacism has extended from the North Atlantic to settler-states in Latin America and the Zionist state in the Middle East, converging with revived fascisms in Eastern Europe and Islamic and Hindu fundamentalisms across Africa and Asia. The COVID-19 shock has preyed on fears and prejudices, mobilized racial, caste, religious, ethnic, and gender cleavages, created stigmas, and sought scapegoats. Fascistic responses have substituted for bad management and planning and the inability to adapt public health directives to local and national conditions. The likening of public health emergencies to

'war' with 'inevitable' costs has further enabled some governments to pass repressive and reactionary legislation and deploy the state apparatus against the poor in overcrowded urban agglomerations and distressed rural areas. The pandemic has laid bare the convergence of class cleavages with racial and caste oppression and anti-migrant or non-native prejudice.

The pandemic crisis has also exposed the extent of precarious work across the world. Indeed, it has laid bare the entire structure of social formations in the South and the ongoing crisis of social reproduction. Half of the world's workforce, around 1.6 billion working people, located mainly in the South, does not live by, or entirely by, a wage, and subsists in informal economies and vulnerable conditions. More than two-thirds of this semi-proletarianized workforce comprises of women. And when we include the dependents of this workforce, especially the ascendant youth in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, it is clear that we are referring to the bulk of the world's population. The working people of the contemporary peripheries subsist alongside more secure salaried workers and occupy varied positions as peasants, contract farmers, seasonal agricultural workers, fisherfolk, informal urban workers, own-account workers, service delivery workers, home-based workers, homeworkers, domestic workers, domestic and foreign migrants, and indigenous, quilombola and other traditional peoples. The difference between employment and unemployment has become more blurred than ever before. Women workers are particularly impacted by the extensive gender segmentation of work and the responsibility for unpaid reproductive labour. The whole of this social formation constitutes the backbone of the world economy, where incomes have been drastically squeezed to contain world inflation and reinforce the consumptionist vortex elsewhere, and where the costs of social reproduction on a world scale have been dumped to provide for a systemic subsidy to capital by the appropriation of unpaid reproductive labour. It is further notable that the structure and crisis of this social formation creates persisting 'land questions' towards which struggles naturally gravitate. These are set to escalate in the course of systemic crisis. On the back of colonial land theft and today's land grabs by financial, agro-industrial, and real estate monopolies, and in the absence of decent employment and social services, land is an enduring site of struggle, a key resource in production and reproduction extending all across residential, agricultural, indigenous, quilombola, and traditional lands.

The economic depression now unfolding will be more severe than anything foreseen – or even seen before – given the realities of contemporary social formations. According to ILO estimates, simultaneous lockdowns in March saw the partial or full closure of four out of five workplaces worldwide. The reduction of working hours by mid-2020 is estimated to be equivalent to 300 million full-time jobs, impacting most heavily working people in the informal economies, women, and their dependents. The relentless casualisation of work and the rise of the service delivery economy with pernicious practices such as zero-hour contracts was already reaching crisis point. Workers who before the crisis were not recognised as precarious workers have found themselves in dire straits as the demand for their services have collapsed. Own-account and small enterprises, which absorb the bulk of the workforce in key sectors such as retail and logistics are facing massive losses. Peasant producers are facing production and income losses as supply chains are disrupted. Super-exploitation has escalated among agricultural labourers, homeworkers, and domestic workers, the vast majority of whom are women. Migrant workers have been made to trek home over long distances, or mobilized to work under highly oppressive conditions. A new category of ‘essential workers’ has also emerged – in healthcare, sanitation, food processing, manufacturing, and logistics – but most often sent to work without protective equipment. Essential, unpaid reproductive labour has intensified by school closures, the disruption of economic activities and health services, while domestic violence has also escalated.

The spectres haunting the world are of genocidal magnitude. But there are rays of hope that have vindicated basic humanist values of solidarity and social service. Emergency programmes for broad income support for the most vulnerable and protection for immigrants have been implemented, even under the nose of the most unlikely of governments. Consciousness of the failure of the profit system to protect citizens from a public health calamity is rising. New demands are being voiced for local production and markets – from food to ventilators, *etc.* – and for state planning in support of local communities. False dilemmas around ‘public health versus the economy’ which imposed themselves in so many places have also been avoided in others, where humane distancing has been sought together with social protection, central planning, and community participation. In some countries, national and sub-national authorities have responded quickly and effectively, either because they have had recent experience with planning against pandemics, or long-term investments in public health systems, or a declared social commitment even in the absence of notable infrastructure. But in many other cases, the frontlines

have been occupied by social movements, NGOs, and community and religious organizations which have been providing food and succour to the most vulnerable. Communities have self-organized to care for neighbours, while agricultural cooperatives have channelled food donations to rural and urban areas alike. Social solidarity has gained new life and momentum. Mass movements are rising against fascism and in defence of humane alternatives. Insurrectionary politics and international solidarity are intensifying, as so clearly shown in the eruption of struggles against racism triggered by police brutality in the United States in the midst of the pandemic.

We are at a crucial juncture where a radical change of direction is possible for world justice and peace, for current and future generations. The moment of change is now, but the transition is long. If there is anything that the twentieth century has taught us it is that the potential of liberation struggles will not be realized without a socialist transition, inasmuch as a socialist transition will not stay its course without vibrant liberation struggles. Some form of ‘deglobalization’ is now inevitable, yet this will remain subject to monopoly competition and imperialist war unless socialist transition takes root. We understand this to mean the overcoming of capitalist law of value operating worldwide and driven by monopoly profits and rents, imperialist aggression, primitive accumulation, and neo-colonial polarization. The question remains: how to delink from the world economy with a socialist orientation capable of sustaining liberation? For the bulk of the world’s population in the South, delinking raises a further set of questions long suppressed or co-opted by neoliberalism. How to pursue scientific central planning for development? What forms of collective property, cooperativism and popular power are required? How to obtain a new equilibrium between town and country? How to guarantee dignified social reproduction and the rapid transformation of gender relations? How to provide secure access to land for rural and urban working people and autonomy for indigenous, quilombola and other traditional peoples? How to exercise control over natural resources for the common good and rise to the challenges of climate change? How to obtain collective self-reliance in agriculture, industry, technology, and strategic defence? How to engage in international solidarity with progressive forces in the North? Such questions have implications for mobilization and conscientization among movements which often encounter working people fragmented among rural and urban struggles or specific social issues. There is a clear and pressing need for new liberation perspectives against neo-colonialism and a new socialist morality on matters of race, caste, and gender, as well as the ecological challenges of our time.