

# **What is intolerable is the terrible rise in inequality across both the global North and the global South and its trivialization**

Thursday 14 August 2014, by [LEGRAND Anthony](#), [TOUSSAINT Éric](#) (Date first published: 11 July 2014).

**The long interview given by Eric Toussaint to Anthony Legrand on the 11<sup>th</sup> July 2014 is presented in two parts. The interview addresses how an organization like the CADTM analyzes its activities in the context of North / South relations.**

**See the second part on ESSF (article 32784), [North/South Relationship and the role of NGOs: the future depends on the peoples' struggle for social liberation'](#)**

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**Anthony Legrand - 1. You are trained as a historian and a political scientist. With a PhD in Political Sciences, you are a lecturer at the International Institute for Research and Education in Amsterdam. You are a member of the scientific council of ATTAC France, the scientific network of ATTAC Belgium, and the International Council of the World Social Forum since its inception in 2001. You are a senior lecturer in North / South relations at the University of Liège and a lecturer at the Belgian Technical Cooperation on global financial transactions and the alternatives. You are also the founder and president of CADTM Belgium and it is mainly in this capacity that I am interviewing you. You have written many books, mainly on the issue of debt, and participated in numerous international conferences [1]. You have advised governments including those of Ecuador (2007-2008), Venezuela (2008, you advised the Minister of Planning and Economy) and Paraguay (2008-2009, here it was the President Fernando Lugo -removed from power by a right-wing coup in June 2012). Have you only been officially involved with governments in the South?**

**Eric Toussaint** - I have advised only governments of the South (or some of their ministers), as mentioned above. No government of the North has approached me yet. Perhaps this will change in the future, for example if a left-wing political force formed the government in Greece and decided to take the debt issue head-on. That said, my priority is the work in and around social movements. I have not become an adviser to governments and international agencies. I think changes will come under the pressure of mobilisations from below.

**2. CADTM (Belgium) was established in 1990 after the Third-Worldist period. Would you call the CADTM a Third-Worldist NGO?**

No, CADTM is not a Third-Worldist organisation. It was formed as a platform bringing together a series of pre-existing movements and individuals to fight hand-in-hand for the cancellation of the Third World's debt: trade unions, cultural organizations, organizations for continuing education, some members of parliament, and some people from the North-South solidarity movement. It was a collective, a platform- not a Third-Worldist NGO.

**3. During the era of Third-Worldism, two opposing theories came up: the Modernization theory with its emphasis on internal causes of underdevelopment in developing countries and the Dependency theory which insisted on external causes. What do you think of these two opposing views on underdevelopment?**

- Evidently CADTM follows the Dependency School [2]. But this way of summarizing the opposition is simplistic because from the angle of the Dependency School, there were both an understanding of external factors - the subordination of peripheral countries to core countries as part of an analysis of the global capitalist system - and an analysis of internal causes. Several key thinkers of the Dependency School, such as the Brazilian Rui Mauro Marini [3], demonstrated a clear understanding of internal factors blocking social progress, notably the role of the bourgeoisie. Moreover, as early as 1965, Rui Mauro Marini described Brazil, for example, as a sub-imperialist country or a country with peripheral imperialism [4]. That is to say that this author did not magnify the role of his country and its ruling classes. At the time, Brazil's urge to dominate South America was already a key factor in the analysis of the author, who subscribed to the Dependency School.

**4. What are the causes around which CADTM's activities revolve?**

- CADTM's activities are based on both external and internal factors. Since solving external factors, fundamentally improving the relations with the outside world (e.g. Northern creditors) will not entirely solve the fundamental problems of countries if the South's internal factors (such as the dominance of one capitalist class over agrarian, agro-industrial or commercial sectors) and the social structure in those countries remain unchanged (e.g. high concentration of land in the hands of a landed capitalist oligarchy). Therefore we must work at both external and internal levels in the South. In this sense, the CADTM has an inclusive vision of solving the problems faced by the people in the South.

## DEVELOPMENT MODEL

**5. The development paradigm followed by international cooperation ranges from development through economic growth (according to Rostow) to fighting poverty in the same manner. What is the CADTM's position regarding that paradigm?**

- For the CADTM, GDP growth is not a criterion to assess the fulfilment of human rights and human development in any country. CADTM does not stop at speaking of development in general, we speak of human development. The CADTM critiques the term "development" taken as an end in itself because mainstream perspective links it to economic growth. Our criterion is the achievement of basic human rights: economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights. There is a debate: organizations of the North, connected to the Western world dominated by the United States, will prioritize civil and political rights as they understand them, i.e. strictly individual, while others emphasize economic and social rights. For the CADTM, human rights are indivisible and we want the fulfilment and an improvement in the fulfilment of all human rights.

So there is a very clear distinction between what is fashionable in the eyes of the organizations specializing in international cooperation, international institutions or governments of the North; and

how CADTM sees things. We observe a strong economic growth and at the same time an impoverishment of a large section of the population. This contradiction is pervasive. The countries which follow the Western model or the capitalist model of development are experiencing a significant growth in inequalities vis-à-vis economic growth. This is true for China, which has been following its own capitalist path since the 1980s. This is also true for the African countries which set their priorities as formulated by Northern governments and international organizations such as the World Bank and the IMF.

**6. South-South cooperation allows the peripheral countries to have some autonomy vis-à-vis the centre. However, in the Third World, we notice that some countries themselves become new centers and continue the pattern of exploiting raw materials and labour at low prices in the periphery. In this context, what is the CADTM's position regarding the South-South cooperation?**

- The CADTM is completely in favour of South-South cooperation, but in reality we find that the behaviour of a group of power centres in the South is unacceptable when it comes to guaranteeing their access to raw materials and reproducing the systems already implemented by the Northern powers. Think for example of China's influence on Asian neighbours, and also in Africa and Latin America; South Africa's influence on southern Africa; Brazil on its neighbours in Latin America and some African countries (former Portuguese colonies such as Angola or Mozambique). When South-South cooperation takes up the issues that we support, it actually amounts to the initiatives for integration among pro-progress Latin American countries - initiatives that seem far too weak at the moment (e.g. ALBA - Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas, which is extremely interesting on paper but faces serious limitations). So we're very much in favour of a South-South cooperation involving the integration of peoples and not in favour of an integration limited to economy. Such an integration would imply, for instance, the implementation of systems for transfers from the stronger to the weaker countries in the South.

## SOLIDARITY

**7. According to an OECD report of 2003, the media, predominantly the television, is the primary source of information on development, but the public is not quite informed about international cooperation, development issues, and poverty. People give more importance to humanitarian causes than to others (international trade, governance, democracy), except environment.**

From what we have seen in your assessment reports, the media attention towards CADTM is increasing and its expertise on debt is widely recognized. Your strategy is the intensification and diversification of your media outreach. What is your view on the manner in which public information, the media, treat the challenges of the South?

- The mass media, particularly the television, present speeches and images on the North-South relations and the problems in the lives of the Southern people through a terribly distorted lens. They propagate prejudice and provide a simplistic view of a miserable South, or on contrary, of a smiling South, standing in solidarity. Development Education (DE), as perceived by organizations like the CADTM and others, makes an effort at deconstructing the distorted visions of the South as well as the prejudice promoted by the media. DE should extensively deconstruct preconceived patterns. For that purpose, it is very important to appeal to activists, the advocates of the Southern cause, observers of the South and to let them speak out. It is important to build mechanisms rigorously and pertinently from the perspective of the message and be able to convey it. The CADTM is working on

a series of mechanisms, ranging from books at university level to comics, role plays, board games, videos, websites, etc.

We must expose the basic mechanisms which can explain the continuation or the “development of underdevelopment” (André Gunder Frank). This infernal process keeps rolling every day. We must explain to the public why the situation of the Democratic Republic of Congo never changes (per capita income of \$ 180 annually). It’s not for want of well-timed humanitarian aid but because of structural reasons, both external and internal, that this country continues to be in a subordinate position vis-à-vis the rest of the world.

**8. The 80s saw the decline of Third-Worldism. During that period the Third-Worldist NGOs faced an ideological impasse due to the fall of the socialist bloc, the splitting or the breaking up of the Third World, as well as to critics of humanitarian NGOs (who accused them of mechanically aligning with the South, neglecting local responsibilities and capitalizing on Western guilt). What are your views on the decline of Third-Worldism and the critiques aimed at the Third-Worldists?**

- A series of seemingly promising experiments in the South turned out to have limitations. There has to be an explanation for those limitations. The role of the Northern powers is important but that does not explain everything. The idea that a third path could emerge from the Non-Aligned Movement and benefit the Third World has faded, lost ground. The illusions of a third world movement on developments trailed off. The North’s deliberate intervention by means of a new type of NGOs played the role of catalyst. Humanitarian NGOs have received a strong and active support from the North, parallel to the emergence of the concept of humanitarian intervention which was itself a product of the NGO world. Bernard Kouchner of Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders), who later pursued a government career, as well as other people have pointed to the need for humanitarian intervention. Somehow this served the interests of the great powers in the North and people who seemed to be disinterested and who “represented” ‘civil society’ embraced it. But we have seen that their interests were not so independent of the interests of the great powers as they claimed. Many big humanitarian NGOs have played an active role in discrediting Third-Worldism and Northern governments have supported this to a large extent. The concept of humanitarian intervention was linked to human rights, but it is not something new: during the Berlin Conference of 1885, King Leopold II of Belgium laid territorial claim on the Congo area under the pretext of thwarting the Arab slave traders. This debate rebounded during 1980-90.

Since the CADTM is not a Third-Worldist organization, the Third World crisis is not a problem for it as the CADTM was rapidly formed in a process of joint action of militant activists from both the South and the North. That is why the CADTM quickly became a horizontal international organization in which a majority (3/4<sup>th</sup>) of member organizations is from the South and play a key role in determining the CADTM’s international action plans. These organizations are directly involved with the realities and contradictions of their own countries and try to meet them adequately.

**9. The 90s were marked by professionalization and specialization in the sector of development cooperation, which has been gradually focusing on technical assistance and humanitarian aid. At that time the current generation of NGOs emerged and Stangherlin calls them “technicians without borders.” These NGOs are “less ideological, more apolitical and more pragmatic.” What is your assessment of this process of specialization and professionalization of the NGO world?**

- This technical evolution of international cooperation led by the NGOs in the 1990s has not really produced convincing results. The ability to comprehend problems as a whole has been significantly lost. We look for technical solutions to a technical problem (e.g. best selection of seeds, best use of

land, projects that are better-planned at the technical level), but if we do not get the technical solutions in the context of social relations - property relations, problems of marketing the product - relations in a given country vis-à-vis the dominant forces in international trade - we will not solve the problems at all. Evidence: solutions for the past 15 years are not better than those in the previous periods.

If the CADTM is professional and specialized it is because it does not have a technical vision of problems. CADTM tries to develop analytical tools, particularly the mechanisms to audit the debts of so-called developing countries, to arrive at a complete assessment of the structural policies recommended or imposed by international bodies. But we do not entertain the illusion of solving problems by techniques. Solutions always involve a comprehensive analysis: for example, a debt-audit is not an analysis related to accounting or a strictly legal contract. It is a holistic evaluation (e.g. looking at the social and environmental impact a dam will have on the local population). Technique is a fundamental dimension of a scientific approach but a technician's vision of development leads to a total deadlock and a demoralization for those who believed in it and who have been working in this framework for years. It leads to a loss of contact with reality because the technicians of development prefer to believe that they are doing some useful work.

**10. Do you think that the professionalization and specialization of the NGO sector have had an effect on its activities at the political and ideological level?**

- For a number of cases I think the overview is lost, although there should not be any illusion about the previous generations who had significant limitations as well.

**11. Since the early 2000s new regulatory frameworks, supposed to improve the effectiveness of development aid, have been set up (Paris Declaration of 2005, as part of the Millennium Development Goals). A strong influence of the North (particularly, Anglo-Saxon) can be noticed in this regulation in terms of both the formulation and the conception of the development approach. How do you evaluate these new regulatory frameworks?**

- The MDGs were established by international bodies within the UN framework, with the help of specialized UN agencies with direct government intervention. This approach can be criticized because the goals are too limited. We should set goals for eliminating the causes of poverty, the impossibility for young people to receive a normal education, the difficulties in achieving food sovereignty. Instead of setting a target for reducing poverty, we should have the following goals: achievement of food sovereignty, energy independence or encouraging it at best, liberation from the debt trap. Starting from there, we should develop strategies to achieve these fundamental objectives that would have important consequences on other areas.

**12. Do you think that these regulatory frameworks promote aid effectiveness (managerial and administrative approach) rather than development effectiveness (a more political approach)? Can the dominant model be questioned in the context of this regulation?**

- We must challenge the dominant model. It does not produce any result that can deal with the situation. On the contrary, what is absolutely intolerable and quite obvious is that there is a terrible rise in inequality, both in the South and in the North of our planet, and a trivialization of this increasing inequality. In some cases, official organizations highlight an increase in per capita income and completely put aside the rise in inequality, while for us it is the most worrying problem. We believe that the contemporary tools, the regulatory mechanisms, are often mechanisms for de-regularizing existing mechanisms. These have had a catastrophic result: a rise in inequality. Here we should add the issue of climate crisis-the result of two centuries of industrial capitalism, with

terrible effects on the people in the South. The climate crisis is global and the solutions must be explored, not country by country, but across the globe. We should turn away from a productivist and extractivist mode of production that is based on an intensive use of fossil fuels and which does not hold a future for humanity.

We must break away from a hierarchical world in which a small minority (the 1% richest, denounced by the Occupy movement) dominates the majority.

The capitalist system is catastrophic in the short term and even more frightening regarding what will happen in the coming decades. As for the regulatory frameworks regarding the effectiveness of development cooperation, we return to a vision of development aid in terms of technical efficiency. This has its limitations and excludes from its content an approach which should be holistic and which should take into account the economic and social structures of a country, its gender relationships (male-female relations), the mode of production, the mode of appropriation. This is what should come first in the vision for a development that can be seen as human development providing for basic human rights.

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## **P.S.**

\* <http://cadtm.org/Eric-Toussaint-The-terrible-rise>

\* Translated by Suchandra De Sarkar in collaboration with Christine Pagnouille and Eric Toussaint.

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## **Footnotes**

[1] See <http://cadtm.org/Books>

[2] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dependency\\_theory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dependency_theory)

[3] All Rui Mauro Marini's works in Spanish and Portuguese: <http://www.marini-escritos.unam.mx/> See in English: [http://archive.monthlyreview.org/index.php/mr/article/view/MR-017-07-1965-11\\_2](http://archive.monthlyreview.org/index.php/mr/article/view/MR-017-07-1965-11_2) See also Ernest Mandel, "L'accumulation primitive et l'industrialisation du Tiers-monde", 1968

[4] See Patrick Bond, "BRICS and the tendency to sub-imperialism", April 2014, <http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/features/91303/print>