

## Opinion

## Multipolarity, BRICS+ and the struggle for peace, cooperation and socialism today

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Over the past year, there has been an increased discussion of the emerging multipolar world, how the emergence of the BRICS+ fits within this framework, and what this means for the prospects of building socialism.

Many on the left deny that multipolarity shows any prospect of bringing about a socialist future, or view it as a form of inter-imperialist conflict emerging from global conditions similar to those leading up to World War I. For example, in an article published to the PV website in October 2023 ("The real source of hope for working people lies in socialism, not 'multipolarity'"), Greg Godels maintains that the multipolar "capitalist world of today [is] not so different from the capitalist world on the eve of 1914."

However, I disagree with this assessment. Today's multipolarity may resemble 1914 in some ways, but this conjuncture is also the unique product of historical processes which have developed at a more advanced stage of the capitalist mode of production. It is therefore necessary to theorize the novel geopolitical conditions that characterize contemporary multipolarity and its relation to the struggle for socialism in the 21st century.

While it may be true that most BRICS+ nations are capitalist, it should not be overlooked that all of them – except Russia – are from the global South. In this way, the BRICS+ is a coalition with a concrete class character rooted in the global South, and often in opposition to the interests of the imperialist North. This is a unique aspect of the global order that distinguishes today's multipolarity from that of 1914.

The multipolar world of 1914 was a pluralistic world consisting of inter-imperialist competition between Western powers, but today's multipolar world is a response to the division between "the West versus the rest" – a clearly delineated global class struggle between two antagonistic camps.

One arena of global politics where this division is most clearly expressed is the UN General Assembly and Security Council, which sees a consistent split between voting



trends of Western countries and the rest of the world. There are plenty of examples of this phenomenon, but most recently on May 10, the UN General Assembly forced the Security Council to adopt a motion to give Palestine full statehood recognition. This came one month after the US unilaterally vetoed a UN Security Council resolution to recognize Palestinian statehood.

Meanwhile, countries across the global South, particularly in Africa, are pivoting towards BRICS+. Not only does BRICS+ currently include more countries (three) from Africa than any other continent, but there have also been strong indications that Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia and Senegal are seeking to apply for membership as well. This pivot is coming about during a crucial revolutionary anti-colonial uprising through the Sahel, which has already undermined imperialist interests in the region.

Furthermore, recent discussions on Saudi Arabian membership suggest that the US petro-dollar, which has been a fundamental building block of US unipolar hegemony since 1973, could now be at risk. These concerns are compounded by the dual-power financial structures being created under the purview of BRICS+, such as the New Development Bank which offers developing

countries an alternative funding model to the World Bank, IMF and US economic hitmen.

Despite the importance of these developments, the most significant aspect of the emerging BRICS+ nations is the growing economic power of China. Since 1979, the Chinese economy has grown by a multiplication factor of 100, it has lifted nearly 900 million people out of abject poverty, life expectancy has sharply increased, and its high-tech sector is now a leading global competitor. China's rapid economic growth was made possible under the management of a planned socialist market economy, which is now giving rise to a generation of youth who are finally reaping the fruits of long decades of building China's productive forces.

It should also be highlighted that since 1979, when China undertook its market reforms and rapid economic growth, it did so without dropping a single bomb on another country. If China is an imperialist power, how has it made such nonviolent imperialism possible? The simple answer is that Chinese development was not made possible through imperialism, but by embracing a foreign policy approach governed by the principle of mutual benefit and cooperation. Across the world China builds ports, roads and bridges, while the US builds military bases.

Despite many of the world historic gains made by China, and the prospects of global cooperation and development made possible through the rise of a multipolar world order, many Western socialists still fail to see past the anti-communist propaganda demonizing China. Imperialism sees China as a threat to their power and economic interests, which is why it wants working people to believe that China is a threat to them as well. The Western working class is constantly bombarded with stories characterizing China as authoritarian, anti-democratic, opposed to human rights and seeking world domination. Here in Canada, tireless headlines baselessly accusing China of interfering in Canadian elections, and even pose Chinese-Canadians as a fifth column at the behest of Beijing.

Imperialists have no recourse in the face of a multipolar reality, so they continue to dig their heels in and spread increasingly outlandish lies and attacks against the rising Chinese superpower. Fortunately, the realities of a multipolar world and the rise of China cannot be forever papered over by imperialist propaganda. Western media, offering continual justification for Israel's genocidal bloodbath in Gaza, is leading many people to question the legitimacy of the media narratives being peddled in reference to China as well.

Those of us who see multipolarity and the emerging BRICS+ coalition as a positive step towards socialism are often criticized for embracing "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." But this criticism embraces a worldview that sees the world in terms of "enemies" rather than partners with whom we happen to have disagreements. Nation-states cannot survive this global order by dividing the world up in terms of friends and enemies.

China's growth, strength and longevity are testimony to the benefits derived from a foreign policy committed to peace and cooperation – a model of socialism the West can learn much from in our struggles on the home front. ■

## From the legacy of exclusion in Canada to COVID-era Sinophobia, we must strengthen solidarity with Chinese people

DAINE BOHNER

As the COVID-19 pandemic recedes into recent history an atmosphere of Sinophobia and anti-Asian sentiment remains, buttressed by a long and ignominious history of racism in Canada. This history, as the Mark Twain quote goes, is replete with rhymes such as the Calgary 1892 Smallpox Riot in which Chinese businesses were set on fire after a Chinese worker was blamed for the spread of smallpox.

This scapegoating of Chinese communities for the spread of disease reared its ugly head again during the COVID crisis, with the Chinese Canadian National Council (CCNC) reporting that anti-Asian hate crimes rose 717 percent during a single year of the pandemic.

These racist incidents are manifestations of material conditions which render Asian workers more vulnerable to exploitation than their white counterparts, while simultaneously blaming them for low wages. The roots of this tendency lie in one of the foundational and defining myths of the Canadian state: the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railroad. From the outset of the project the contradiction between the racism and the need for underpaid labour was clear. In the words of Prime Minister John A. Macdonald, "It is simply a question of alternatives; either you must have this labour, or you can't have the railway."



To this end the Canadian government hired Andrew Onderdonk, an American construction contractor whose credentials included recruiting Chinese labour for railway projects in the United States. Despite agreeing that Chinese labour was necessary for the project, Onderdonk also expressed a reluctance to use them. This was manifest in the pay disparity, with Chinese workers receiving \$1 per day compared to \$2 - \$2.50 per day for white workers.

Onderdonk had hoped to hire 5000 white workers, but only 200 showed up. As

CCNC's David Choy stated, "[when] Canadian workers refused to work through the impossible terrain of the Rockies, Chinese workers, not knowing better of the risks hidden from them... were brought in from Guangdong."

In the end 5000 Chinese workers were recruited, primarily from Guangdong where the average daily income was estimated around 7 cents a day. The role of colonialism and the context of the "Century of Humiliation" in which this economic migration took place cannot be overstated and is not forgotten in Chinese communities. Many prospective workers died of disease on the voyage or of exposure to the Canadian winter on arrival. Another 7000 Chinese workers were brought from the US, where they had worked on American railroad projects. Some estimates put the final population of Chinese labourers as high as 17,000.

"Chinese workers sacrificed more than one life per mile of track," said Choy in an interview with China Daily. "This was the buried history of blood and tears."

It is estimated that 4000 died in landslides, cave-ins and explosions. A typical incident was described by a worker named Wong Hau Hon:

"Twenty dynamite charges were ignited to blast a rock cave, but only eighteen went off. The white foreman, thinking all the dynamite went off, ordered the Chinese workers to enter the cave to resume work. Just at

that moment, the last two charges exploded. Chinese bodies flew from the cave as if shot from a canon. Blood and flesh were mixed in a horrible mess. About 10 or 20 workers were killed."

So frequent were the deaths that the Yale Sentinel would write, "Here in British Columbia... the Chinese workmen are fast disappearing under the ground. No medical attention is furnished nor apparently much interest felt for these poor creatures."

Dangerous working conditions and callous bosses were, however, far from the only hazards these workers faced. Chinese labourers, unlike their white peers, had to pay for all their provisions including food and gear. As a result of their impoverished diet, scurvy was rife in their camps. Conflict with white supervisors and workers was widespread due to racist sentiments which were fanned by the newspapers of the time.

Of their arrival in 1882, the Port Moody Gazette said, "The Chinese are beginning to encroach on property in Port Moody... If they obtain a foothold in the central part of the city, that neighbourhood will be rendered uninhabitable for white people and property will decrease in value."

Such NIMBYist racial sentiments evince the age-old connection between race and class which prefigured gentrification struggles a century later.

■ RACIST EXCLUSION LAWS, PG 11