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By Richard Pithouse

Re-posted from Interactivist. This text is ostensibly a report on struggles for housing, sanitation and utilities in Durban South Africa but also contains some interesting criticisms and perhaps correctives to Mike Davis' account of the hyper-development of global slums

On the morning of Wednesday, 14 September 2005 well over 5,000 people from the Kennedy Road settlement and nearby settlements in Clare Estate, Durban, South Africa, marched on their local councillor to demand toilets, land, housing, an end to the threat of forced removals and the councillor's resignation.

This was the fourth instance of mass political insurgence into the bourgeois world to emerge from Kennedy Road this year. The first was a road blockade which resulted in police violence and 14 arrests, the second a march on the police station where the 14 were held and the third a previous legal march on the councillor. Each of these four events has been noticeably larger than the previous mass insurgency and more and more nearby settlements, and groups in nearby settlements, are joining the movement that has begun in Kennedy Road.

Capital is thrusting us into a world in which an increasingly massive portion of humanity lives in Third World slums, in what we call emijondolo. Mike Davis' *New Left Review* article "Planet of Slums" (2004) has recently confronted the left literati with the magnitude of this fact.

The global 2001 numbers are staggering – 921 million slum dwellers, 100 million street children, two million children lost to diarrhoea a year and the fact that Lagos “is simply the biggest node in the shanty-town corridor of 70 million people that stretches from Abidjan to Ibadan”. Many will know Chris Abani's beautiful and searing novel *Graceland* (2004) which develops a profound account of just one life made in the underside of Lagos. The scale of suffering is incomprehensible. Davis' article gets a lot right – he is clear that structural adjustment is a key factor in the recent explosive growth of squatter settlements; that residential theme parks are the antipodes to the slum; that valorisation of the ‘informal sector’ is perverse as “the real macroeconomic trend of informal labour...is the reproduction of absolute poverty”; that the urban poor “are everywhere forced to settle on hazardous and otherwise unbuildable terrains – over-steep hillslopes, river banks and floodplains. Likewise they squat in the deadly shadows of refineries, chemical factories, toxic dumps, or in the margins of railroads and highways”; and that “chronic diarrhoeal diseases” are the most immediate threat to the lives of millions of people. “The UN” he tells us “considers that two out of five African slum-dwellers live in a poverty that is literally ‘life-threatening’”.

The left has been quick to acknowledge that the ravages of capital have created the slum and to try to use this to strengthen its case. But seeing the slum, and its billion inhabitants, as a potential site of struggle, and especially as a site of struggle in-itself and for-itself rather than merely tacked on behind some elite left project is another thing. There is still a racist left that can't see historical agency coming from outside of the white world and so heralds the Seattle movement as the new global vanguard. And there is still an old left that can't see beyond the factory worker. At times these prejudices (often with others in the mix) take the form of basic contempt for the struggles of the most destitute. An American left academic working in Durban casually dismisses the people in Kennedy Road as ‘lumpens’ (The OED gives the meaning for ‘lumpen’ as “Ignorantly contented, boorish, stupid; uninterested in revolutionary advancement”). An independent left councillor in Durban casually and publicly ascribes a decision by people in Kennedy Road, arrived at by wide debate and very careful consideration, to refrain from electoral politics in order to preserve the integrity and autonomy of their political project

as consequent to 'illiteracy'. So it goes. One wonders what Fanon would say to these people....

For Davis "for the moment at least, Marx has yielded the historical stage to Mohammed and the Holy Ghost" and "with the Left still largely missing from the slum, the eschatology of Pentecostalism admirably refuses the inhuman destiny of the inhuman city" and "sanctifies those who, in every structural and existential sense, truly live in exile." Davis' Manichean split between religion and resistance is historically uninformed. Davis is well aware that most slum dwellers come to the city from rural towns and villages because they have been deliberately forced off their land or can no longer survive on it. And he writes about how a similar process in Europe was contained by emigration to the colonies. But he doesn't consider the fact that European rebellions against the rise of capital via processes of primitive accumulation which forced people off land were, as described so powerfully in Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch*, invariably fuelled by millennial religion. Jeff Guy makes the point that the Maphumulo Uprising of 1906, also in part a response to pressures exerted on rural life by capital, was animated by religious feeling to a significant degree. But a key weakness of Davis's paper is that it is written as though the left is entirely missing from the academy – as though we are all politically neutral scientists. Indeed he draws almost exclusively, and without any reflection on this, on colonial (anthropology) and neo-colonial (World Bank and UN studies) modes of 'knowing' the slum that are uniformly objectifying. To say, as he does, that World Bank policies are a primary cause of slums and then to write respectfully about World Bank researcher Branko Milanovic is perverse.

Slavoj Zizek never succumbs to the self-objectification of the mask of the scientists or to that key dogma of academic complicity with evil — 'collegiality' — and would, one feels happily confident, assault Milanovic with the intent to do serious damage if given the chance. Moreover he has no interest in anthropological modes of knowing. In the *London Review of Books* Zizek argues that the explosive growth of the slum "is perhaps the crucial geopolitical event of our times". He writes that what we have is:

"The rapid growth of a population outside the law, in terrible need of minimal forms of self organisation...One should resist the easy temptation to elevate and idealise slum-dwellers into a new revolutionary class. It is nonetheless surprising that how far they confirm to the old Marxist definition of the proletarian revolutionary subject: they are 'free' in the double meaning of the word, even more than the classical proletariat ('free' from all substantial ties; dwelling in a free space, outside the regulation of the state); they are a large collective, forcibly thrown into a situation where they have to invent some mode of being-together, and simultaneously deprived of support for their traditional ways of life...The new forms of social awareness that emerge from slum collectives will be the germ of the future...."

The political process in the two weeks leading up to the recent march in Kennedy Road was extraordinary. There had been nightly meetings in nearby settlements as well as the Sydenham Heights municipal flats and the Jimmy Carter Housing Project in Sherwood. The meetings began with a screening of Aoibheann o'Sullivan's film "Kennedy Road and the Councillor" and then moved into open discussion. O'Sullivan's film gives a short overview of the Kennedy Road struggle from March to June this year. The film is not designed for the consumption of left activists in the North. Interviews are often in Zulu and the film takes the lived experience and intelligence of its subjects seriously (as oppose to the more common practice of distorting the reality of struggles here to make them appear to conform to the expectation of Northern NGOs, academic networks or fashionable theories). It begins with the sanitation crisis and broken promises around toilets before moving into broken promises around land and housing in Clare Estate. But, crucially, it includes the articulation of an abantu abahlala emijondolo (shack dweller) political identity and a direct contestation with the stereotypes that seek to objectify shack dwellers as stupid, dirty, mad, criminal and dangerous. As this struggle has developed it has become clear that symbolic and material oppression have to be confronted together.

Thousands of people saw o'Sullivan's film and were part of intense political discussions during these two weeks. Each community confronts a situation with its own singularities and so each meeting had its own character. In Sherwood there were too many people to fit into the community hall and the film was projected onto the wall of the hall. Here there is a democratic organisation which gives clear support for the ANC but people enthusiastically agreed to support the struggle of the shack dwellers. In Quarry Road a generator was used to show the film on a sheet of cardboard erected on a large traffic circle. In this settlement leadership is contested between SANCO and a somewhat demagogic militancy but everybody wanted to support the march. It turned out that a 17 year old boy from Quarry Road was still in Westville Prison after a violent clash with the police in December in a successful fight back against a armed attempt at forced removal. Moreover while people in Kennedy Road were struggling for toilets people in Quarry Road had had their toilets removed in an attempt to force them out. (Given that the settlement lies along the banks of a tributary that runs into the Umgeni this act could well result in a wider health crisis.) In Foreman Road there had been heavy pamphleteering at the time of the previous Kennedy Road march claiming the initiative as an IFP front and there was a clear split between a majority who wanted an open discussion and an aggressive minority who wanted to stop it. There were some tense moments as M'du Mgqulunga had to hold the space while a stand off with a small group of goons dragged on for ages as people battled to get the generator working. Suddenly it kicked into life and the images of suffering in the shacks and the language of universal dignity made any talk of a plot ludicrous. The space was won. Ashraf Cassiem, who spent some of his childhood in the area but is now a key militant in the Taflesig Anti-Eviction Campaign in Cape Town, gave a quietly powerful speech arguing that the colonial war unleashed on the people of this country has continued through apartheid and into the parliamentary democracy. Black collaboration, he argued, doesn't disguise it. On the march two days later much would be made of amaBhunu amanyama (black boers). The discussion incited that night continues — excited and serious. The large banner painting workshop at Kennedy Road on the Sunday before the march was held in a carnival atmosphere with music (Zola — Bhambhata Namhlanje), food and lots of discussion about the slogans. (Land & Housing!; Sikhalela Izindlu!; Phansi NgoBaig!; 'Moreland' Give Back Our Land!; Fight Forced Removals!; Sifuna Umsebenzi!; University of Kennedy Road; etc, etc)

There was heavy police intimidation leading up to the last legal march on 13 May and the army occupied the settlement the night before the march. With the searchlights, men with machine guns and armoured vehicles it looked like Palestine. This time the security forces exerted no collective pressure and individual harassment was low key and always away from the settlement. A few days before the march the City Council attempted to, in their own words, 'avert this march' with a promise of pay-for-use toilets now and later relocation to rural housing developments. This was rejected with contempt. Then, at the last minute, local ANC structures were informed that participants would be expelled from the party, the IFP front smear was resuscitated and people were told that when delivery came communities that had supported the march would be left out. Sherwood and the Lacey Road settlement dropped out altogether and support dropped in the Foreman and Jadhoo Place settlements. But on the morning of the 14th well more than 5,000 people set off up Kennedy Road to fire their councillor. The shack dwellers were joined by a bus load of people from South Durban mobilised by the inimitable Des D'sa and various other supporters including a group of young white boys with signs saying something about toilets in bad Zulu. Young white boys with shaven heads and the look of poverty have a whiff of fascism to the refined noses of the middle class left and 'out of context' can look like rent-a-mob. I asked them, trying to disguise my suspicion, who they were. Turns out they were from a Pretoria orphanage. They have an annual camping holiday in, of all places, ugly Pinetown and have got to know the campsite caretaker well over the years. He lives in Kennedy Road. So they walked into town and caught the taxi to Clare Estate with him. Such is the beauty of struggle. Such are the ways in which we learn how fucked up we are.

The councillor came to meet ‘his people’ in an armoured car from which he, at times visibly shaking, watched a performance of his funeral. The sombre priest (Danger Dlamini) and wailing mother (Nonhlanhla Mzobe) asked the impassive heavens who would replace the late Councillor Baig. Who would lie as he had lied? Who would show the contempt that he had shown? Who would leave them to shit in plastic bags? Who would switch off his phone when they pleaded with him to intercede with the fire brigade when their homes were burning? When the carnival was over Yacoob Baig was forced out of the armoured car to receive a memorandum from a gentle man who works at a petrol station and lives in a house made of mud and sticks. Back in Kennedy Road the march was celebrated as a triumph.

The next day the national tabloid, *The Citizen*, led with a banner headline screaming “6 THOUSAND PEOPLE HAVE TO USE 6 TOILETS” and the Durban morning newspaper, *The Mercury*, led with the march and reported that the chair of the Kennedy Road Development Committee, S’bu Zikode, had affirmed that “if there was no progress soon the protests would be intensified. He said people would begin taking services by force, beginning with operation Khanyisa which was taking electricity by force”. The media interest rolled on through the weekend and a scandal broke about City Manager Mike Sutcliffe, a master of self promoting spin and media manipulation, earning more than the president while the poor suffered. There was a rip, small but clear, in the carefully and expensively manufactured consent for the city’s casino and themepark led development policy. The first days of the next week began with meetings in the Quarry Road and Jadhu Place settlements in which democratic consent emerged for open resistance. In Quarry Road there was support across the political divisions for a march on their councillor, Bachu. In Jadhu Place a democratic community structure has long been run by a group of Zulu Muslims well placed to access charity from local elites — especially in times of disaster like shack fires. But they were loyal to Baig and were voted out by a group of young people, who intend to fight against Baig and against the ANC, for land and housing in the city. In the massive and massively dense (it has been allowed to become so huge because it is behind a hill and hidden from bourgeois eyes) Foreman Road settlement the faction, numerically large but not politically dominant, that is seeking to build a political project independent of the ANC entrenched itself more firmly. Across the settlements in the North of the city, including those happy to vilify their councillors, Mayor Obed Mlaba and City Manager Sutcliffe but not willing to break with the ANC, the idea of “No House No Vote” was uniting people in a new assertion of their power. On the Thursday the Kennedy Road Development Committee held its Annual General Meeting. The men and women who had held their nerve so firmly throughout the unfolding of this rebellion were swept, joyously, back into office. Meetings and discussions continued over the weekend in Quarry Road, Foreman Road and Jadhu Place. At Jadhu Place there were more than 500 people at a meeting on the Sunday.

The concrete achievements of this struggle include a major and life saving concession – the pit latrines last cleaned out by the council 5 years ago are being cleaned and toilet blocks are promised. There has also been a promise to renovate the dilapidated community hall. But officials in the city and provincial administration have not budged on relocation. Their only ‘concession’ so far is to say that if people can identify land, check out who owns it and what it is zoned for at the deeds office then, if the land is council owned and suitable, they will consider housing developments. The success of the march has meant endless offers of meetings but no retreat from overt contempt by officials. At the first meeting after the march, held at the Martin West building on 15 September, top officials from the Metro Housing Department began by berating the elected Kennedy Road delegation (System Cele, Fazel Khan, Mdu Mgqulunga & S’thembiso Nkwanyane) for ‘putting lies in the newspapers’ and made much show of banging a copy of *The Citizen* on the table. They then entertained themselves by emailing photographs of conditions in the settlement to each other and loudly commenting about how dirty the people were. The pictures on which these claims were based were of a pile of rubbish. Kennedy Road has long asked for and always been denied refused collection. So people collect

rubbish in plastic bags and burn it once a week. The pictures which the officials were using to claim that the people in Kennedy Road are dirty were of this pile of rubbish. These officials are scum whose power must be decisively broken. Any politics that won't fact up to that fact is either wilfully complicit with oppression or delusional. It has been decided that there will be no more meetings in government offices. As S'bu Zikode explains: "Why must we go and sit on those comfortable chairs to listen to the crooks and liars. They must come and sit with us where we live. The battle is on. We will use all tactics." I am writing this on Monday 26 September. Tonight the negotiating team will meet Faizel Seedat, S'bu Gumede and other officials from the Metro in the Kennedy Road hall. It has been decided that hundreds of people will stand in a circle that runs around the hall and sing in low voices as the talks go on. If necessary they will enter the hall and collectively call the officials to account.

And then there is all that has been created in common to be held in common. The crèche which runs every week day; the office with the only telephone line in the settlement where all kinds of things like grant applications and links to and negotiations with schools, hospitals and hospices and so on can be facilitated; the monthly food parcels and weekly cooked meals for the destitute; regular and very well organised care for childheaded households and people with AIDS; security and fire watch patrols at night and so on. Much, although not all of this, was present before the break with obedience following the road blockade, the racialised attacks from Indian police on the command of the councillor and the arrests. But struggle changes everything. There are now vastly more people working on these projects and they are being taken forward with much more seriousness. Before the break with obedience the crèche was run in a derelict room under the hall. That room now looks as bright and safe as any crèche in Glenwood. As Fanon has taught us struggle is, amongst other things, a movement out of the places to which we are meant to keep. Amongst other things new relationships emerge out of this movement and so there has been better access to resources. Most resources are still generated from within the community but a man from a local ashram has provided a gas stove which makes the weekly communal meals possible. John Devenish from CCS has provided a reconditioned computer for the office so that typed letters and press releases can be produced in the community. So it goes. Movement within produces movement out and movement forward.

Part of what has been created in common is a community of struggle. Since May 20 or 30 committed activists have emerged in Kennedy Road. They have got to know people in other settlements and formed unmediated relationships with communities struggling elsewhere in the city from nearby Sydenham Heights and across town to Wentworth. The enthusiasm for making these connections is enormous. Representatives are elected for meetings; money is collected to pay for transport and in each case detailed report backs and discussions have been held. People in Kennedy Road have also formed connections with three or four middle class activists in Durban who have been willing to put resources and skills and networks under the democratic control of the struggle seeking at every point to share their skills and networks via workshops. For example instead of just producing a press release in accordance with what is decided at a meeting a press workshop was held at which people learnt the skill and discussed the politics of the skill. This can't be achieved in every instance – access to the (hired) equipment to make and screen films is not something that can easily be put in common but as a general rule the middle class activists have worked to put their class based skills and networks in common. Four men and women from Kennedy Road have now been elected to travel to Cape Town and have spent time with the Anti-Eviction Campaign and Max Ntanyana and Ashraf Cassiem from the Campaign spent a few days in the settlement in the lead up to the march. Although the Campaign is currently not able to mobilise on the same scale as Kennedy Road it has a far longer history of open resistance, is currently working with shack dwellers in QQ section in Khayalitsha and has taken the strategy of road blockades further than anyone else. All of these new connections, and the experience of struggle within new alliances, have rapidly and radically developed the politics of this struggle. A struggle that started with many people seeing a local councillor in alliance with an often (although certainly not uniformly) hostile local elite as a problem within the system is now confronting the

systemic nature of oppression. Sustained collective reflection on the experience of struggle continually advances the understanding of what has to be fought and how it has to be fought. This is one reason why struggle cannot be adequately understood by the (objectifying) tendency in some autonomist currents to seek to establish the radicalism of a project by diagnosing the degree and character of the 'desire' that animates it. Autonomism may be an important antidote for people in the process of escaping the dogmatism and teleology of Stalinist and Trotskyite socialism. But replacing the activist as bureaucrat with the activist as psychoanalyst doesn't break with vanguardism both in the sense of leadership of a guru with deeper insight and in terms of the subordination of experience to theory. The movement of the struggle in Kennedy Road, like the movement of any actually existing mass struggle, has to be understood in terms of the entirely non-teleological and democratic conceptions of the dialectic developed by philosophers like Fanon, Holloway and Badiou. In a recent article in *Radical Philosophy* (2005) Badiou argues that by dialectic "we understand the deployment of a critique of all critique." But permanent critique is dialectical because it is driven by reflection in the experience of struggle. Badiou argues that the materialistic dialectic is "centred on the exception that truths inflict on what there is." For Badiou truths "become and remain suspended, like the poet's consciousness, 'between the void and the pure event'" and a "truth affirms the right of its consequences, with no regard to what opposes them." In May 2005 your experience may have led you to believe that your suffering was directly linked to Indian racism. In September 2005 you may be paying your part of the R350 to send a taxi to Chatsworth to show solidarity with the struggle of the people there because you have come to understand their experience of suffering. And you may have elected Fazel Khan, a man you have come to know, respect and trust in the praxis of struggle, to be on the Kennedy Road negotiating team in a crucial face-off with the Metro. In other words the critical question to ask before committing oneself to solidarity is neither the autonomist question - 'what is the character of these people's desire?' - or the socialist question - 'what ideological line is dominant here?' - but rather the Fanonian question 'what process is underway here?'. Of course once one is involved in a community of struggle then it becomes personal and you fight to win for different reasons. But that is another story.

And there is the shift in power consequent to the constitution of counter-power. State and corporate power can now only make non-coercive interventions into Kennedy Road with the permission and on terms negotiated by the Development Committee. For example on the Thursday in the week following the march an Italian company arrived at the settlement and began shooting for a film about the last Pope. They needed, they said, lots of shots of children. They were stopped, asked to make a formal proposal, negotiations were held and filming will now go ahead after R19 000 worth of equipment for the crèche has been bought at Makro. In the same way the state can no longer act unilaterally in the area.

But the threat of relocation to the 'rural periphery' still looms.

This story of how these events came to pass can begin almost anywhere. Perhaps we should start with the series of events unleashed when Chelmsford's army rode into Zululand in 1879, the Maphumulo Uprising of 1906 or the community struggles against apartheid in the 1980s. Elements of all these histories of resistance remain present. A sizeable number of people in Kennedy Road fix the beginning of this struggle with the altogether more recent shock of finding that a piece of nearby land, long promised for housing, had been suddenly sold off for the development of a factory. But most people in Kennedy Road have fixed it with the discovery earlier this year that children in the settlement, desperate for food, were eating the worms growing in the pit latrines which had to be abandoned after the council stopped emptying them. At that point 2005 was declared the 'year of action' and that is what it has been. But why Kennedy Road?

What the newspapers are now calling “the national wave of protests” from informal settlements has generally been characterised by a sudden eruption of militancy, usually characterised by road blockades, quick repression, usually including beatings and arrests although there has, of course, also been the murder in Harrismith, and then silence. Indeed this has also been the case in Cato Manor on the other side of Durban. These local mutinies have to confront arrests and people are generally charged with public violence – even if there has been no damage to person or property. None of the few legal services available to struggling communities are allowed by their donors to take on criminal cases and so people often spend months and months in prison awaiting trial. Access to donor independent legal support is vital if these resistances are not to be crushed. The Kennedy Road mutiny received this legal support. They didn’t seek it – they were initially determined to represent themselves but after the shock of Magistrate Asmal’s visceral contempt for the people in her dock – it was agreed to accept support. Of course the (lumpen?) bureaucratised, donor funded and globe trotting elements of the left were not interested but a small group of local militants put up their personal resources and, when she returned to Durban, secured the enthusiastic and effective pro bono support of struggle lawyer Shanta Reddy. But this has happened before, quite often in fact, without an initial break with obedience developing into a sustained mass struggle. If legal support is a necessary condition for the development of these struggles it is not a sufficient condition.

I would like to suggest that the key factor is that Kennedy Road had, long before the road was blockaded, developed a profoundly democratic political culture and organisation. It means weekly formal meetings, detailed record keeping and minutes and all those things. But because these things don’t occur in a separate and self-legitimising sphere they are never pompous, boring or self-serving. Because there are constant report backs to mass meetings and lots of sub-committees and projects taken on in common the ‘leadership’ is in constant dialogue with ‘ordinary’ people and, often, under constant pressure from them. In the struggle that has unfolded since May this year every important decision has been made in collective decision making forums and every individual or group to have travelled elsewhere has been elected and has taken the obligation to report back very seriously. Opportunities for things like travel – whether across the city or the country – are scrupulously rotated. Age and gender balances are excellent in all respects. A nineteen year old woman, System Cele, is on the negotiating team. It was, I think, this highly democratic nature of the organisation in Kennedy Road that produced its radicalism. For years Kennedy Road has dutifully sent representatives to meetings with government. They did everything that was asked of them and became the perfect civil society organisation in search of ‘partnership’ with other ‘stakeholders’. In return they got contempt. The ongoing collective reflection on the experience of the failure of the official model produced an ongoing and collective reflection on a commitment to open resistance. The ‘leadership’ has had no choice but to accept this. There are people with extraordinary skills who have been elected onto the committee. There is no doubt about that. But the work of these people remains a function of the committee which remains a function of the community. Of course this does not mean that the committee is in direct connection with the entire community of Kennedy Road – many people don’t participate in politics at all – but there is a larger community of struggle within Kennedy Road made up of around 20 to 30 committed activists, a few hundred people who come to mass meetings and a few thousand who will be willing to come to a large event like a march.

The meeting can be a slow enervating nightmare. That certainly describes most of my experience of it. But Fanon, a man with an indisputably firm commitment to action, celebrates it as a liturgical act. The religious language is appropriate not just because the meeting performs the same function as religion in the slum – to sacralize the denigrated. It is also appropriate because the meeting, when subordinate to the life in common, is a space for people and communities to become something new – in this case historical agents in the material world.

How this praxis developed in Kennedy Road is another story but it is worth noting that having a hall and an office, no matter how derelict is an important advantage. Other settlements in the area just don't have this. It has been argued that the militancy of the old University of Durban-Westville was enabled by the presence of a large open central square. At the University in Accra (Lagon) the student activists are clear that the reasons why political energies always came from the oldest and least crowded residence rather than the new blocks where people sleep 10 to 12 to a room designed for 2 in flats racked together on long corridors is because the old residence has spaces to meet. In Quarry Road, Jadhvi Place and Foreman Road demanding or developing a place to meet will be a priority.

The waves of destruction visited on human communities and nature by capital are ripping through the world with an ever more frenetic relentlessness. Everything sacred is profaned – destroyed, plundered and sold, and then simulated and resold. Nothing is safe. Music, architecture, medicine, journalism, sport, spiritual yearning, resistance, the academy – nothing. Most 'left' intellectuals occupy a niche market in the business of mopping up scattered resistances and turning them into civil society or seeking to mask their singularity via symbolic subjection to theoretical abstractions. But there are exceptions – people who, in the spirit of Cabral and Fanon and Lenin and Luxemburg, refuse partnership, and donors and networking and, above all, the demand for complicity with barbarism that goes under the name of 'collegiality'. There are people who are willing to fight back – not to appear to fight but to actually fight within the local singularity of actually existing mass struggles. Alain Badiou, an exemplary instance of contemporary militant philosopher, has some ideas about politics in his forthcoming new book *Metapolitics*.

Like Fanon he wants to break with the politics of representation, sees local politics as the site for this and heralds the meeting as central to radical process. He proposes no easy formula "To identify the rare sequence through which a political truth is constructed, without allowing oneself to be discouraged by capitalist-parliamentary propaganda, is in itself a stringent discipline." For Badiou, following Althusser's reading of Marx, what is at stake is not a new philosophy but a new practice of philosophy. He argues as follows:

"To say that politics is 'of the masses' simply means that, unlike bourgeois administration, it sets itself the task of involving the people's consciousness in its process, and of taking directly into consideration the real lives of the dominated. In other words, 'masses', understood politically, far from gathering homogenous crowds under some imaginary emblem, designates the infinity of intellectual and practical singularities demanded by and executed within every sphere of justice....The essence of mass democracy actually yields a mass sovereignty, and mass sovereignty is a sovereignty of immediacy, thus of the gathering itself....The essence of politics is not the plurality of opinions. It is the prescription of a possibility with a rupture with what exists."

It might seem that the slum in a city striving to be 'World Class' (and that doesn't mean Lagos or Bombay...) is a good place to think about rupture. But it is not clear what neo-liberalism as a general theory and practice makes of the slum. Is it seen as an unexplored market, a camp where surplus people are kept at the level of bare life, a prison where dangerous people are contained and forced to labour or is it, as Zizek wonders, a threatening insurgence of subaltern autonomy? At the level of pure theory it would appear that neo-liberalism should be most comfortable with the view that the slum is a place to keep people too poor to be consumers and that while squatting should not be allowed to threaten investments, and should therefore be kept in its place to a degree, the possibilities for huge profits in building elite business and residential themeparks in response to slum growth present a massive opportunity. But it also the case that neo-liberalism wants to reserve primitive accumulation for the rich – the poor should not be taking land in defiance of property rights.

Silvia Frederici shows that enclosure and the rise of capitalism in Europe produced “the criminalization of the working class, that is the formation of a vast proletariat either incarcerated in the newly constructed work-houses and correction-houses, or seeking its survival outside the law and living in open antagonism to the state”. There is no a priori reason why the contemporary urban slum can’t be and be seen to be both of these things simultaneously.

Certainly the fact that official discourse terms it the ‘informal settlement’ indicates an enthusiasm to make ideological claims along the lines of Hernando de Soto’s view that squatters are potential entrepreneurs who just need property rights to be able to explode into action. This seems to have been the view of the Urban Foundation, an NGO set up by big capital in the 1980s to encourage a market led approach to development in the coming post-apartheid society. The Foundation argued that given rights to stay in urban areas squatters could slowly turn their shacks into houses. In fact the Foundation built the now dilapidated hall in Kennedy Road and is remembered fondly because, unlike the post-apartheid government, the Foundation actually engaged with people in the settlement on an honest and respectful basis.

But the market never manages to escape the reality of society. In the real world the rarefied logic of capital has to contest with the embodied fear and power of ordinarily rich people. And it is clear that in Durban the rich, white and black, have profound anxieties about the insurgence and sustained presence of autonomous communities of poor people within the city. These anxieties are well able to become a material economic fact. So it seems that the rural slum, and to a degree the hidden city slum, is ok but the city slum visible in the heart of the bourgeois world is a disease to be rooted out. This does not mean that the urban slum doesn’t provide labour for the city – it does and in abundance: domestic work, casual labour, service industry jobs, informal traders, people that comb the city looking for metal, paper and plastic to recycle and more. But the city is not, in the manner of a factory, dependent on this labour. This is for the simple reason that when ever there are jobs or opportunities for income people will come — even if they have to get up at 4:00 a.m. and spend half their earnings on transport.

To adequately understand what is at stake here in Durban we need some understanding of how the ‘informal’ settlement fits into the historical trajectory of the city. In the 1980s the apartheid state, occupying Namibia, at war with the Cubans and the MPLA in Angola and putting down bitter township rebellions across South Africa lost the capacity to regulate the movement of Africans. The colonial and then apartheid city was conceived as a modern space and as a white space in which Africans had to be carefully contained or from which Africans had to be removed and barred. When the mania – brutal and bureaucratic — to sustain this was no longer sustainable people flooded into the city, seized land in defiance of the state and founded communities autonomous of the state. But now the state again has the resources, including, crucially, the symbolic resources, to do what it wants. And what it wants is to return to the colonial vision of the modern city. Of course the modern city is no longer conceived as the white city. But it is conceived as the bourgeois city. When City Manager Mike Sutcliffe gave a College Lecture at UKZN last year he showed photographs of shacks in the elite Indian suburb of Reservoir Hills and said that transformation had to be pushed hard because Indian suburbs still had informal settlements. He didn’t mean that he would be encouraging land occupations in white suburbs. On the contrary his implication was clearly that justice entailed extending the prerogatives of white privilege to the Indian elite. And so the phrase “slum clearance” has returned as the currency of the policy people. We are told, as people were when Sophiatown and District Six were threatened, that better, more hygienic etc housing will be built elsewhere. What is actually being proposed is that the poor be forcibly removed from the city and dumped in rural ghettos.

Deputy City Manager Derek Naidoo, at a meeting held in Kennedy Road on 12 September to try and “avert” the 14 September march put it bluntly: “This area has been ring-fenced for slum clearance and prioritised for relocation...The city’s plan is to move people to the periphery”. Provincial Housing

Minister Mike Mabuyukula also speaks the language of slum clearance in the propagandistic article the Department pushed into the Independent on Saturday (26/9/2005) in an obvious attempt to contain the damage done by the Kennedy Road march. But the state has also responded to the march with a different language. Two days after the march The Mercury, under a heading reading “NOT ENOUGH STAFF TO CLEAR SLUMS — Land invasion crisis gets worse” reported that Harvey Mzimela, head of the Metro Police’s Land Invasion Unit had complained that it lacked sufficient staff to carry out its work which “involved preventing the erection of illegal structures on council property. This sometimes entailed the breaking down of newly erected shacks, which has resulted in shooting and stoning instances.” The deserving poor will, it seems, move off obediently into the hopelessness rural squalor. They will be dealt with by development. But the others, those who declare their right to remain in the city are criminals, and they will be dealt with as a police matter. The police that deal with squatters dress, are equipped and conduct themselves like soldiers. They are known as amaSosha for good reason. It must be noted that it is the state that has effectively declared this to be a war.

Richard Pithouse, Durban
Monday, 26 September 2005

Postscript: As I was completing this article I received word that three hundred people had entered the hall where the meeting with the representatives from various council departments (Sanitation, Parks and Recreation, Housing etc) was being held. The door was locked and a formal meeting held. Officials reported back and took questions via the chair. More important concessions were made around repairing the hall, providing 300 chairs for the hall, refuse collection in the settlement, local labour for local construction and cleaning work and more. The Housing Department sent a low level official who was only able to report that an engineer’s report was being completed and that the consultant would begin his (R100 000) report soon. An old lady said that she has been living there for twenty years and that in that time every demand for housing had been met with expensive research – research into the land, the air, everything. The meeting proposed and accepted a motion that there would be a meeting with the head of the Housing Department within three days or another march against the Department. The doors were unlocked.

A Memorandum of Demands

Wednesday, September 14, 2005

We the people of Ward 25, democrats and loyal citizens of the Republic of South Africa, note that this country is rich because of the theft of our land and because of our work in the farms, mines, factories, kitchens and laundries of the rich. We can not and will not continue to suffer the way that we do and so we unite behind the following demands:

For too long our communities have survived in substandard and informal housing, and for too long we have been promised land, only to be betrayed. Therefore, we demand adequate land and housing to live in safety, health and dignity.

We are threatened with forced removals to the rural periphery of the Municipality. This would take us away from opportunities to access infrastructure, health care, work and education. Therefore, we demand land for housing within the city.

In Kennedy Road we have only 5 portable toilets for a community of 6 000 people. This causes tremendous suffering, indignity and ill-health. Therefore, we demand the immediate installation of decent sanitation.

Our communities are ravaged by poverty, and we demand that the government create the jobs that we so desperately need. Therefore, we demand the creation of well-paying and dignified jobs.

Those of us in municipal flats find that in addition to providing substandard housing, the council charges rents way in excess of our community's ability to pay. Therefore, we demand the writing-off of all rental arrears.

The government treats us with contempt, believing that because we are not rich, we have not earned their respect. Therefore, we demand participation in genuinely democratic processes of consultation and citizenship.

Our communities are affected by crime, police racism and serious environmental hazards. Therefore, we demand safe and secure environments in which we can work, play and live.

Many in our communities suffer from illness, and the scourge of HIV/AIDS affects us all. Therefore, we demand well-resourced and staffed health facilities.

Our young people are the future of our community, yet they have very few choices. Therefore, we demand attention to the needs of our communities' youth. The exclusion of the poor from school and other opportunities for educational must stop.

Those of us in municipal flats find that the council charges unaffordable rates. Therefore, we demand lower rates in municipal flat buildings.

Amongst those of us who are connected to water and electricity many can not afford the costs of these services and face disconnection. Therefore, we demand that these services be made free for the poor.

We are entitled to decent social services in our communities. Therefore we demand these services, including proper sanitation, refuse collection, community gardens for our poor, and support for orphans especially those in child headed households

Furthermore, just as people from around the city and the country are uniting in support of our struggle we express our support for our comrades elsewhere. We have stood with, and will continue to stand with our comrades in Chatsworth, Crossmoor, Marianridge, Merebank, Shallcross and Wentworth in their fight against the Ethekwini Municipality's attempts to evict them from their municipal flats and to dump them in the rural periphery of the city. We will also continue to stand with the people of South Durban in their struggle against environmental racism; with poor students facing exclusion from technikons and universities and with our comrades all over the country fighting for land, housing, work, education, healthcare, safety and democratic development. At this time we note with particular concern the threats directed Fred Wagner of the Eastwood Community Forum in 'Maritzburg and declare our full support for Fred and for everyone who is persecuted for standing up for the rights of the poor. We also express our full support for the Western Cape Anti-eviction Campaign before their mass rally in Khayelitsha on 17 September. We affirm that their struggle to resist eviction from their homes and to win basic services is just. We stand with them against the repression of their legitimate struggle.

Finally, for his failure to work with his constituents to meet our basic needs, for putting local business interests ahead of those of the poor and for treating the poor and popular democracy with contempt, we therefore demand that Councillor Yacoob Baig, a career-politician with a history of working for apartheid, announce his resignation within two weeks. We further demand that if Baig does not resign we, ourselves, will declare that Ward 25 does not have a councillor and govern ourselves.

<http://www.nu.ac.za/ccs/default.asp?2,40,5,841>