

**The Wrong Side
of the Tracks:
Railway Privatization
in West Africa**

**Balancing
the Scales:
When Fair Trade Works**

**Crimea River:
Returning the
Tatars' Stake**

Namibia's (and the World's first) Basic Income Grant

Kind of a BIG Deal

HERBERT JAUCH

Namibia, a vast country inhabited by two million people, is one of the smaller economies in Southern Africa. It adopted a market-based economic system after achieving independence from apartheid-era South Africa in 1990. Despite creating favourable investment conditions and its high levels of political stability, Namibia, with its ample mineral and marine resources, could not break the vicious cycle of mass unemployment, inequality, and poverty.

In 2002, the Namibian government appointed the Namibia Tax Consortium to review Namibia's tax system and to explore ways of addressing poverty and inequality. The subsequent report found "that by far the best method of addressing poverty and inequality would be a universal income grant." The commission further suggested that the BIG should be set at a level of at least N\$ 100 (USD\$ 12) per person per month.

A BIG would cover all Namibians from birth until they reach the age of 60, at which time the national old age pension scheme (currently

N\$ 470 per month) would kick in. The consortium pointed out that the net costs of the Basic Income Grant would amount to about 3% of Namibia's GDP and could be recovered through changes in the tax system, whose collection rate is currently below 25%, thus making a BIG affordable.

The Namibian government was divided over the question of a BIG. Some regarded it as an unaffordable welfare measure, while the International Monetary Fund did its utmost to discourage Namibia's policy makers from implementing it. Undeterred, in 2004 a coalition of churches, trade unions, NGOs, and AIDS Service organisations formed the Basic Income Grant Coalition to advocate for the introduction of a BIG in Namibia.

After three years of debating and lobbying, no breakthrough was achieved; government ministers and parliamentarians were still divided over the merits of a BIG. Finally, the Coalition decided to implement a basic income grant in a single village.

The chosen location was the settlement of Otjivero in the Omitara district of Eastern Namibia. About 1,000 people reside there. Most of them are retrenched former farm workers and their families, all of whom have nowhere else to go. Poverty and desperation were

continued on page 3

If You Think in Terms of a Year, Plant a Seed

MICHAEL RYAN WISEMAN

I have never understood why people make such a production about birthdays. On the face of it they are utterly meaningless, mere symbols; excuses to celebrate, intoxicate, evaluate, and—finally— become disenchanted and disillusioned with life for one all-too-short day of a year that, somehow, has always passed quicker than the last.

All birthdays end the same way: with you waking-up the next morning writhing in pain while pleading with a Higher-Power to whom you now steadfastly subscribe (a day before you were, paradoxically, sure of your agnosticism) and begging desperately for fewer wrinkles and another chance at everything that you have decided that you are entitled to but were, of course, cruelly deprived of through absolutely no fault of your own. No? It's just me then.

Besides the weather, little ever changes in the time that it takes for the Earth to spin around. Indeed, besides the weather, little changes in the time that it takes for the Earth to spin around the Sun.

So, as the sun does all of us here at Alternatives International Journal the

dubious favour of rising for the three-hundred-and-sixty-sixth time over our tempestuous universe, why this entirely unnatural and unnerving sense of optimism?

The world, a year later, seems little better. Economic catastrophe has



Ohh, seed money. I only caught the first part.

joined the ecological one that was already in progress; olive branches are few, far between, and in dire demand the world over; the pigs have finally made

their move (Four Legs Good...) and are clearly intent on spreading pestilence—thus far they have been held in check, but if we insist on keeping thousands of them under the same roof with lax sanitation protocol and non-existent oversight, a barnyard rebellion will be the least of our concerns.

And yet hope, ever last into the casket, endures— and will do until the sun grows cold. Says one, concerned, "The shadows are creeping in, let us move over there to where it is still sunny." Says the other, "Stop cursing the sun for sliding across the horizon— climb the trees that are casting the aforementioned shadows. Find me a cloud and I'll share your concern."

If a fire on a beach can lead to the discovery of glass, if fruit juice left out in the sun can uncover a form of intoxicant, if the mould harnessed from an unwashed Petri dish can go on to save countless lives, then why couldn't we combine forces to create something never before known— all the ingredients are there. It requires only the wisdom to recognize potential.

A heartfelt thanks to all of our inspired contributors, to our extremely talented— and patient— graphic designer, to our tireless and brilliant editorial board, and to you, Dear Reader, for if an incorrigibly clever tree falls in the middle of an inordinately dim forest and nobody is around to scoff at it, why doesn't it just get a haircut and a real job?

Photo: Flickr / MATT GIBSON

Alternatives International Journal

is a monthly magazine published by Alternatives. Alternatives is a member of Alternatives International.

The articles represent the opinions of the authors and not necessarily those of Alternatives International.

Contact Us!

Alternatives International

3720 Parc Avenue, #302
Montreal, Quebec, H2X 2J1

E-mail: michael@alternatives.ca

www.alternatives.ca

Editorial Board:

Marie-Adele Cassola
Myron Frankman
Vanessa Gordon
Emmanuel Martinez
Feroz Mehdi
Sarah Mostafa-Kamel
Kari Polanyi-Levitt
Waleed Ziad

Editor:

Michael Ryan Wiseman

Associate Editor:

Ceyda Turan

Alternatives International Journal welcomes any and all comments, questions, suggestions, and—especially—criticisms.

We are always looking for new contributors and ideas. If you would like to submit an article for publication or get involved in any other way, do drop us a line.

Namibia's (and the World's first) Basic Income Grant continued from page 1

widespread and the Coalition believed that if the BIG could make a difference in the lives of the residents of Otjivero, it would certainly be able to make a difference in the rest of the country.

The pilot project started in January 2008. All residents below the age of 60 years received a Basic Income Grant of N\$100 per person per month— no strings attached. A local and international research team has accompanied the introduction of the BIG; their task is to closely monitor its impact over a two-year period.

The community itself responded to the introduction of the BIG by establishing their own eighteen-member committee to mobilize the community and advise residents on how they could improve their lives with the money. This suggests that the introduction of a BIG can effectively assist with community mobilisation and empowerment.

The first to benefit have been the children. In just six months child malnutrition plummeted from 42% to 17%, while the number of parents paying for school fees doubled to 90%. More children are now attending school and the stronger financial situation has enabled the school to improve teaching materials for the pupils. The school principal reported that dropout rates at her school were 30-40% before the introduction of the BIG. By July 2008, these rates were reduced to a mere 5% and by November 2008, they were almost nil.

Another striking fact is that income has risen by more than the amount of the grants. People are now able to engage in more productive activities, which has fostered local economic growth and development; several small industries have sprouted up in Otjivero, such as dressmaking, baking, and brick making.

Indeed, since the introduction of the BIG, the majority of people have been able to increase their work and their income dramatically. Average



continued on page 4

Alfred !Nuseb used the BIG to start a shop; he now makes N\$ 800–1,000/month.



Emilia Garises is now a dressmaker; each one fetches N\$ 150. Her son enjoys the candies from Alfred's Tuck Shop.

monthly household incomes increased substantially over and above the value of the BIG payments: household incomes from wages increased by 19%, income from farming increased by 36%, and income from self-employment increased by 301% during the first year. These findings contradict critics' claims that the BIG would lead to laziness and dependency.

Worries that the grants would lead to more alcoholism proved likewise unfounded. On the contrary, the introduction of the BIG has induced the community to set up a committee that is trying to curb alcoholism. An agreement has also been reached with local shebeen owners not to sell alcohol on the day of the payout of the grants. Meanwhile, economic and poverty-related crime (illegal hunting, theft and trespassing) has fallen by over 50%.

The Basic Income Grant has also helped young women to take charge of their own lives. Several cases document that young women have been freed from having to engage in transactional sex. A further boon is that the BIG has supported and strengthened government efforts to provide antiretroviral treatment to people suffering from HIV/AIDS by improving access to government services and enabling people to afford nutrition. The settlement's health clinic was visited much more frequently; residents were able to pay the N\$ 4 and it has seen its income increase fivefold.

The initial results of this pilot project are encouraging and have, thus far, exceeded the expectations of the BIG Coalition. The local community has embraced the pilot project and is determined to make it a success. The

BIG Coalition now hopes to convince the Namibian government to introduce a countrywide BIG in the near future.

All these positives aside, there is no doubt that the BIG is a limited measure and cannot be a panacea for Namibia's considerable socio-economic challenges. The initiative has to be accompanied by other measures of resource redistribution, job creation and structural change. However, the BIG represents a promising starting point that can make an immediate dent in the debilitating and violent poverty that undermines the lives of so many Namibians.

HERBERT JAUCH is the Head of Research and Education at Namibia's Labour Resource and Research Institute (LaRRI), www.larri.com.na. For further information on the BIG, visit www.bignam.org

Fair Dues

It Takes A Village

SALLY RICHMOND

Rather than getting squeezed by conventional trade, thousands of artisans and farmers around the world will have enough money to provide their families with food, shelter, education, and health care.

The Fair Trade movement is a worldwide phenomenon that holds at its core the belief that people come before profits. Fair Trade is a response to the global inequalities caused by the conventional trading system that has all too often resulted in the rich becoming richer whilst the producers at the bottom of the trade chain remain desperately poor.

In order for an organisation to be recognised as Fair Trade, it must satisfy the 10 standards of the World Fair Trade Organisation (WFTO), the first of which is the payment of a fair price, determined through dialogue with the producer groups.

By working directly with producer groups, Fair Trade avoids middlemen. Conventional trade normally requires the use of 3-10 middlemen. Avoiding this has the threefold advantage of allowing the producer to have a greater cut of the final selling price, cutting the cost of importation, and increasing transparency for the Fair Trade Organisation.



An honest day's work.

It is also crucial to commit to long-term, reliable trade relationships. Conventional traders will often cancel orders or renegotiate the prices after the orders have been placed, leaving the producers vulnerable and making their work risky.

Respecting human rights is fundamental to Fair Trade, particularly those of women and children. Women remain disproportionately amongst the poorest in society and often have no social safety nets, no education, no voice, and few choices. For these reasons, 70% of the producers that Ten Thousand Villages / Dix Mille Villages (a non-profit FTO that is one of the pioneers of the movement- full disclosure: your correspondent proudly manages one of their stores) works with are women. Women are given an equal voice and are always paid the same salaries

as men. Producer groups are also often able to offer services and programmes to their workers and to the wider community, including help with education, medical care, insurance, revolving loans, skills training, and profit sharing.

For trade to be truly fair the local environment of the producers must be respected as well. Fair Trade dealers must work with producers to support the use of clean fuels, clean production methods, and sustainable materials. Indeed, many products are made of re-used or re-cycled or re-claimed materials.

One such producer group is Get Paper. Based in Nepal, Get Paper started out as a small income-generating project for Dalits- the lower caste of so-called Untouchables. Paper making was chosen because the process is

continued on page 11

Photos: UNITERA www.unitera.ca

5TH MONTREAL CITIZEN SUMMIT

A MONTREAL SOCIAL FORUM OPEN TO ALL

JUNE 5TH TO 7TH 2009

Activités en Français aussi ! Conferences • Round Tables • Workshops • Kiosks • Films and more!

At the J.-A. DeSève Pavillion of UQAM

514 282-8378

www.5sc.urbanecology.net

The Little Engine That Couldn't

Railways in Senegal and Mali

MYRIAM CLOUTIER

More than five years after the management of the railway connecting Dakar, the capital of Senegal, to Bamako, the capital of Mali, was yielded to the Transrail consortium, the network lies in ruins. And it is the population that is paying the price for a privatization that went off the rails.

The infrastructure of the Dakar-Bamako railway is dilapidated, the accidents frequent. No investment plan has been implemented despite the promises, since 2003, of the shareholders who have ascended to the leadership of Transrail.

But the worst is perhaps still to come. Verging on bankruptcy, Transrail wants to reduce spending by laying-off 376 of its 1,468 employees. This cost rationalization, announced by the Board of Directors in March, provoked the ire of the Senegalese and Malian

rail workers. Their unions decided to sever all ties with management. In Senegal, the tone has hardened drastically: at the beginning of April, the three railway workers' unions organized a march and brought trains to a standstill between Thiès (Senegal's Third City) and Dakar over the course of twenty-four hours. Recourse to an indefinite general strike is also in the offing. On the Malian side, the the Minister of Transport has made it known that he opposes the layoffs.

Transrail has a history of adopting an anti-union stance. Since 2003 hundreds of employees have been laid off. Moreover, workers have experienced wage reductions and the elimination of certain social benefits. In June and July of 2006, the unions triggered a series of—ultimately unsuccessful—strikes that paralyzed rail traffic for several days.

"For the workers, it's miserable. For the population and the national economy, it's a disaster. I do not understand how the public authorities or the president can continue to defend privatization," explained the Director of the Citizens' Collective for the Restitution and the Integrated Development of Malian Railways (Cocidirail), Thiécoura Traoré. A former Transrail employee and former leader of the Rail Workers' Union (Sytrail) in Mali, he himself was laid off in 2004 without compensation. The reason offered up by Transrail: disloyalty, due to the views he expressed via Cocidirail.

The privatization of the railway has not only worsened the working conditions of the union members, it has also affected the mobility of the population as well as the local economy. Indeed, passenger transportation on the Malian rail network is in a state of near-abandonment because private operators predominantly manage the international transit of goods in order to reap short-term profits—all at the expense of service to users. Furthermore, the closure of twenty-six stops and stations in Mali ensured that many villages are now isolated and



None aboard. A lack of inter-village service has crippled livelihoods.

Photo: flickr / CFARIVAR

that there are, in the absence of travelers and merchants, no more opportunities for inhabitants along the railway line to exchange food products.

Next Stop, Trouble

In 2003, Mali and Senegal privatized international traffic on the Dakar-Bamako railway, which was previously the domain of Malian Railways (RCFM) and the National Railway Society of Senegal (SNCS). The management of operations was then entrusted to Canac (a company of consultants and a train operator with corporate headquarters in Montreal) and Getma (France) who together acquired 51% of the shares of a consortium that has taken the name Transrail SA.

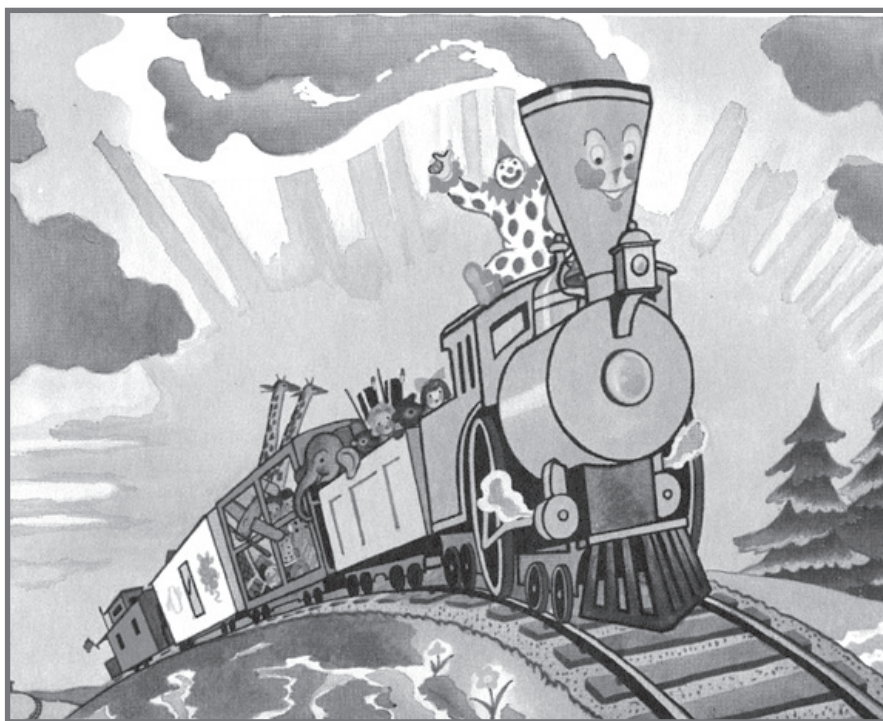
If the SNCS has kept up passenger transport for Dakar and its surroundings out to Thiès, it is Mali that drew the shortest straw in this affair: the RCFM was dissolved, its employees lost their positions, and passenger service (the Kayes-Bamako-Koulikoro route) was abandoned by Transrail.

RCFM, valued at CDN\$275 million, was let go for CDN\$18 million, a sum payable in seven years on the back of the rail line, with a renewable concession for a period of 25 years.

With dissatisfaction in full swing, the Canadians at the heart of the railway privatization chaos withdrew in 2007. Canac was bought by the American company Savage, which then sold its stake in Transrail to the Belgian company Vecturis, who is the new operator. Also in 2007, the Paris-based Advens Group, directed by Abbas Jaber, a close friend of Karim Wade—the son of Senegal's President—became the majority shareholder of Transrail, in addition to having gotten his hands on the country's strategic peanut and cotton sectors.

End Of the Line

An audit conducted in Paris, in December 2007 in collaboration with the World Bank, Senegal, and Mali, estimated Canac-Getma's deficit for the period between 2003 and 2006 to be \$20 million. With Vecturis at the helm of Transrail, the deficit rose by \$6.4 million



Quick, send in the clowns. Don't bother, they're here.

in the last months of 2007 alone. The audit suggested that the states should reinvest, but neither Senegal nor Mali is ready to do so as they are already heavily indebted.

In June 2008, the Ministries of Transport of Senegal and Mali spoke out officially on the state of the railway for the first time. In a joint declaration, they conceded that privatization had failed and spoke of the "death of the railway business." These two states elaborated that, in five years, Transrail had not succeeded in managing the routes more efficiently than the former national companies.

Transrail has never complied with the conditions of its operating contract, which was contingent upon an investment plan for the maintenance and repair works on the Dakar-Bamako line. To this day, such a plan does not exist.

Now, Transrail is imposing a "rescue plan," which not only consists of massive lay-offs, but insists that the states of Senegal and Mali pay \$22 million. With this money, Transrail claims it will be able to make an emergency investment and begin the process of recapitalization.

Meanwhile, for Malian users, things continue to deteriorate. Mohamed Tabouré an activist with Cocidirail, laments, "Our political leaders are hand in glove with the multinational companies and this is why they comply with their demands and are careful not to take action." Cocidirail advocates "integrated development" whereby Mali and Senegal reappropriate the railway and make it an instrument for community development. For this to occur, a total takeover of the transport of passengers and goods by the state would be necessary.

However, such a renationalization is unlikely to take place. The privatization of the National Telecommunications Company of Mali (SOTELMA) is underway, and a law passed in August by their Parliament, under pressure from the World Bank, authorizes the privatization of the Malian Textile Development Company, which manages the nation's cotton spinnerets. Yet this industry ranks first in exportable goods and is profitable for the state.

Have they missed the moral of the story?

Myriam Cloutier is a contributor to Alternatives' French-language edition.

Helping the Change We Wish to See in Afghanistan

Not Another Brick in the Wall

CEYDA TURAN

Sakena Yacoobi founded the Afghan Institute of Learning (AIL), in 1995 to "help address the problem of poor access for women and children to education and health services, their subsequent inability to support their lives, and the impact of this lack of education and health on Afghan society." This was the year the Taliban came to power and banned girls' education. Her goal was to "empower poor women and children by providing them access to education and health services through an organisation designed and run by Afghan women." Over the past 14 years, the AIL has pioneered innovative and culturally appropriate ways to deliver health and educational services, and community building.

The Afghan Institute of Learning is one of the largest women-led nonprofit organisations in Afghanistan. Yacoobi was in Montreal on May 1st and 2nd to attend the McGill Institute for Health and Social Policy's Educational Equity: Global and National Strategies Conference. She spoke of the work of the AIL in providing education, income-generating skills, and hope in the hearts of Afghanis to forge a new Afghanistan with a bright future.

The Taliban's ban on girls' education above the age of eight prevented the vast majority of young women and girls in Afghanistan from finishing even primary school. But, through the Home School Project, the AIL kept education for girls alive by providing grades one through eight underground. Underground home schools were the only educational option available to Afghan girls for more than four years. In 2001 (the last year of the underground home schools), the AIL had 3,000 girls in 80 home schools in Jalalabad, Kabul, Herat, and Logar.

The AIL was the first NGO to start Women's Learning Centers (WLCs)

in Afghan refugee camps in 2002, in Pakistan. WLCs trained teachers, provided health education—including midwifery training—and offered preschool through university classes. Women also learned income generating skills and human rights education. The AIL served 18,000 students through its Women's Learning Centers in 2006.

Upon the request of communities in Afghanistan, Yacoobi started establishing WLCs in Kabul, Herat, Parwan, Balkh and Bamiyan. The AIL now has twenty-two Women's Learning Centers in Afghanistan, where there were none during the Taliban years.

The AIL has trained more than 13,000 teachers in interactive, student-centered teaching, thereby accelerating students' ability to learn quickly. More than 390,000 Afghans have had access



Class is in session: Sakena Yacoobi drops some knowledge—and inspiration—on the IHSP.

to quality education thanks to the AIL's teacher training programs.

The AIL has also been providing a pre-school education program serving over 300 Afghan children per month in Kabul, Herat, and Peshawar. The students study a wide variety of subjects— Dari, English, math, drawing, gymnastics, handicrafts, health, and peace lessons. They also learn and perform Afghan songs, dances, poems, and short skits, to build their self-esteem as well as their knowledge of their heritage and culture.

The AIL's teacher training and school support program has been an invaluable service for tens of thousands of Afghan children whose education was interrupted by the war and civil strife in Afghanistan. School support includes teacher training, onsite monitoring and supervision of teachers, teachers' salaries, administrative support, curriculum development, and provision of school materials and supplies. The AIL supports three community schools with 1,100 Afghan refugee students in Pakistan, two community based schools for 1,300 students in Herat, a pre-school for 300 students, advanced classes for over 200 boys in Mir Bacha Kot, and scholarships for students in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Yacoobi has been working with community members to realize their desire to educate their girls. Community members cooperated with each other and the AIL to secure space for the schools and to insure that the schools, teachers, and students could teach and learn safely.

Since the overthrow of the Taliban, the AIL has played a major role in reconstructing Afghan society. Today, it provides services to 350,000 women and children annually through its 42 program sites, including four health clinics and 38 learning centers in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Of the 400 Afghans that the AIL employs, over 70% are women.

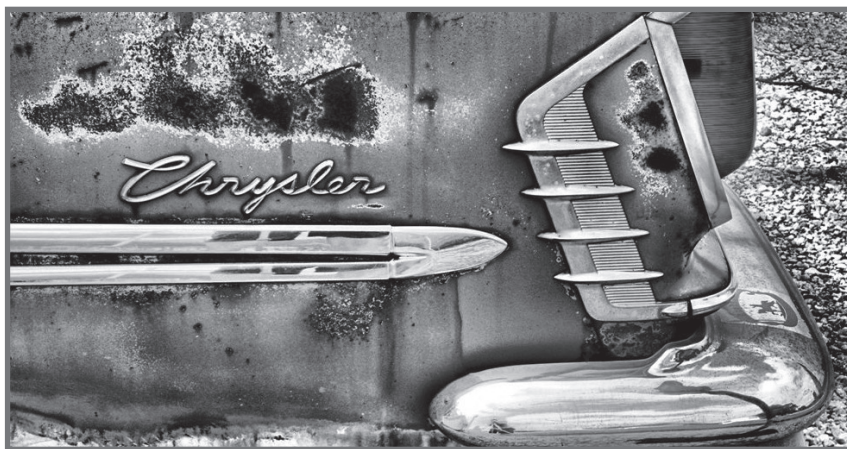
To read more about the work of these courageous women, and/or to support them with a donation, please visit www.afghaninstituteoflearning.org

Photo: IHSP

The '09 Canadian Government Herring

Any Colour You Want—As Long As It's Red

BRUCE CAMPBELL



Rust-proofing optional.

It is now abundantly clear that Canada and the world is facing its worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. However, a sense of premature Hoover-type optimism seems to have settled in to Ottawa's thinking, breeding a dangerous complacency that the government has done all that is required to combat the recession. The federal government appears to be hiding behind the proposition that with strong banks and strong fundamentals, the Canadian economy will automatically recover as US demand picks up.

The Bank of Canada has lowered its interest rate to a near-zero level, and has provided banks with billions of dollars of liquid assets to counter the recession and potential deflationary expectations. It is concerned that deflation, or falling prices, will become generalized throughout the economy. And once the cycle becomes entrenched, as it did during the 1930s, it will be extremely difficult to reverse.

The federal government's fiscal stimulus package is beginning to inject demand into the economy to counteract the contraction of private sector demand,

although many economists argue that a federal deficit of about 2% of GDP is too little given the powerful headwinds the nation faces. Unemployment insurance, though greatly weakened by previous governments (most recently the self-financing rule imposed by the 2008 Budget) will also help to cushion somewhat the fall in demand.

While it may be rational for an individual firm trying to stay afloat to lay off workers, reduce working hours, and/or push for wage reductions, if this becomes an economy-wide phenomenon the resulting downward wage-price-purchasing-power spiral, if unchecked, will deepen and prolong the recession.

This is what happened during the Great Depression. The deflationary cycle became entrenched. Massive price declines in both the US and Canada were matched by a similar drop in average wages; Keynes argued for nominal wage anchors to stem the downward spiral.

One of the things Roosevelt did when he came to power in 1933 was to support the Wagner Act, which strengthened

unions; setting a floor on wages and initiating a process of rising wages, prices, and production.

Government is the player responsible for the overall management of the economy. At a time like this it is the only player that is capable of overriding destructive counter-actionary impulses of private businesses and households.

The federal government is undermining the effectiveness of its own stimulus efforts by freezing the wages of its own employees and by forcing massive auto sector wage concessions (which incidentally will not solve the auto crisis) as a condition of providing financial support to the industry.

It also sends a contradictory signal to business that somehow this belt-tightening is good for the economy as a whole. On the contrary, it will only make matters worse—prolonging the recession and delaying the recovery.

The current economic crisis was caused by the meltdown of the bloated US financial sector, not by exorbitant auto or public service sector wages. Forced wage rollbacks will cascade through the economy reducing purchasing power and demand, offsetting the very thing the government is trying to reverse with its stimulus policies. The collapse of the auto sector (just like the collapse of the financial sector) will most certainly turn the current recession into a deep depression.

Rather than scapegoating the Canadian Auto Workers union for a crisis it did not cause, the federal government should focus its efforts on combating the pressures of wage driven deflation, maintaining income and employment, and using public dollars to buy transformation of the auto industry away from gas-guzzlers to the low emission vehicles of the future. Industrial policies like this have been an important part of the development of the auto industry and are needed once again.

Bruce Campbell is the Executive Director of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, www.policyalternatives.ca

Photo: KATHY MCELLOWNEY

The Repatriation of Crimean Tatars: A Testimony

You Can Never Go Home Again

ALI CHABUK

My family returned to Crimea in 2005. I cannot say that my family's life in Uzbekistan was unbearable and the reason for our decision to return to Crimea. My family did not face any major social or economic difficulties there. My parents had jobs; I had the opportunity to get a higher education. We Crimean Tatars survived as a nation after our deportation partly because we lived among Uzbeks; their hospitality and friendship gave us much support during our first years living in exile. I have great sympathy for the Uzbek people and am very thankful to them and their nation.

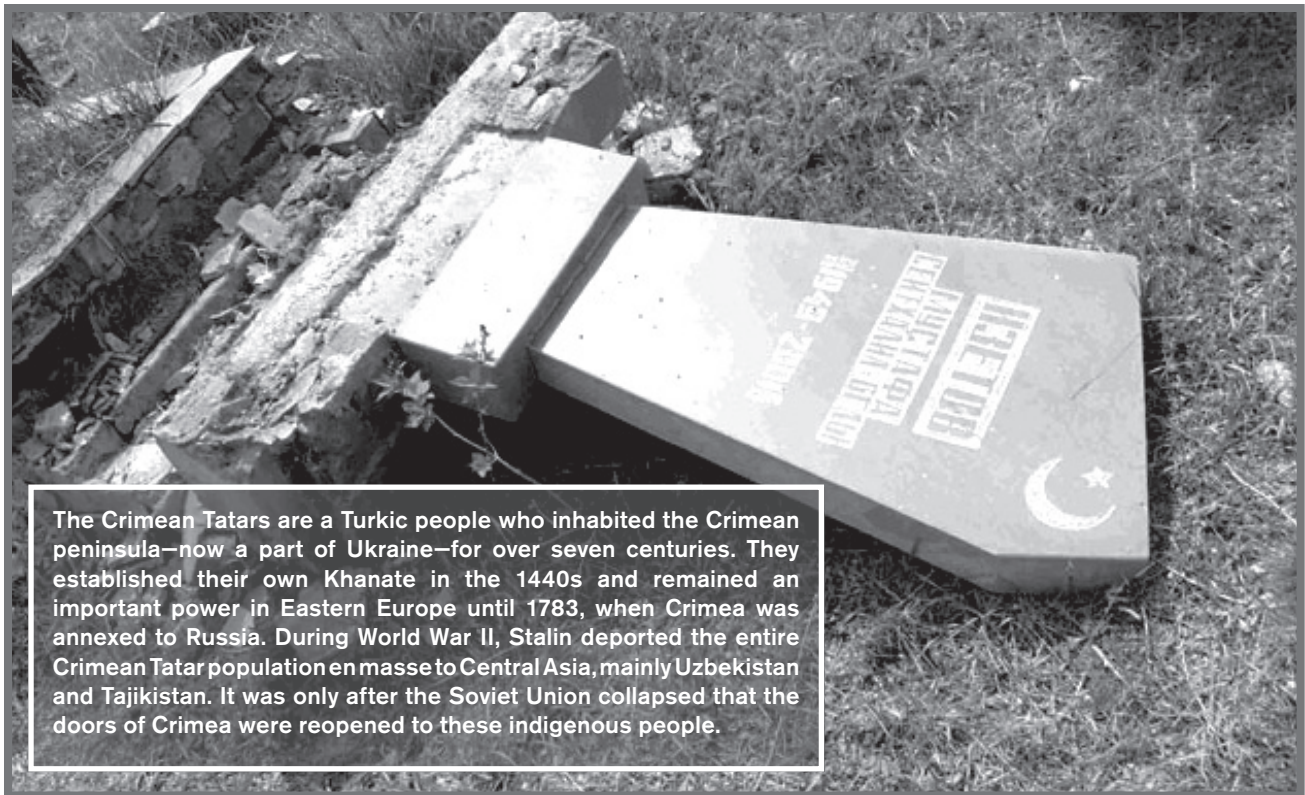
Nevertheless, my grandparents had always dreamed of returning to Crimea. I was brought up in an atmosphere of constant reminiscences of our Motherland—the expression “to live like a native among aliens” speaks for itself.

Upon our return, my family encountered problems of social reintegration. Housing has been one of the first and foremost obstacles for our family— and most of the Crimean Tatar returnees. Our family of four lives in a 20 square meter room within a dormitory with poor facilities. Even though my father took part, as a volunteer, in the management of environmental consequences of the nuclear disaster in Chernobyl in 1986, a service that is supposed to qualify him for free government housing, nothing has been granted to him. Our application for land has also been refused without

any explanation, thus denying us the opportunity to build a house.

As Crimean Tatars do not have the legal right to reclaim the property they lost after their deportation, many returnees have resorted to seizing land by organizing themselves into groups of 200 people or more. The issue of land was once coordinated by the Mejlis, the Representative body of Crimean Tatars, which played an intermediary role between local authorities and Crimean Tatars to advocate for land transfers in a diplomatic way. The Mejlis once had the authority and influence to coordinate such matters but that power has, to some degree, been slipping. The consequences may be devastating. The lack of coordination undermines the unity of the Crimean Tatars and risks bringing a delicate situation to a head.

After housing, the issue of citizenship is the biggest issue every Crimean Tatar family has to resolve upon their return to Ukraine. The absence of citizenship deprives people of basic political,



The Crimean Tatars are a Turkic people who inhabited the Crimean peninsula—now a part of Ukraine—for over seven centuries. They established their own Khanate in the 1440s and remained an important power in Eastern Europe until 1783, when Crimea was annexed to Russia. During World War II, Stalin deported the entire Crimean Tatar population en masse to Central Asia, mainly Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. It was only after the Soviet Union collapsed that the doors of Crimea were reopened to these indigenous people.

Photo: NADIR BEKIR www.iccrimea.org

A felled grave in Chistenkoe

economic, and social rights. In 1998, an agreement unique in international relations was reached between Uzbekistan and Ukraine that would simplify the procedure of acquiring Ukrainian citizenship for Crimean Tatar returnees. However, it takes the government 5 to 6 months to process the citizenship applications. During this waiting period— with no legal status—the returnees cannot earn their living or benefit from social security schemes.

The return of Crimean Tatars, a Muslim people, has also resulted in increased ethnic and religious tensions. There has been an increase in attacks against Crimean Tatars and their properties. Perhaps most disturbing is that, in 2008, almost 300 gravestones were demolished in the Nijnegorsk region, while another 40 were destroyed in Chistenkoe accompanied by graffiti, written in Russian, that read: "Tatars, leave Crimea now!"

There are more than 100,000 Crimean Tatars still living in Uzbekistan. They hesitate to return to Crimea due to the social and economic obstacles faced

by those who do. A reverse trend of self-exile is occurring in which Crimean Tatar families— having been unable to integrate into Ukrainian society— are moving back to Uzbekistan.

Ali Chabuk, is Masters candidate at Milano Graduate School of Management and Urban Policy at the New School University. He is a 2008-2010 Fulbright Grantee from Ukraine.

Fair Dues continued from page 5

fairly simple to learn and because of the abundance of raw materials— recycled waste paper and cotton, water hyacinth, jute, and even corn husks. Since the start of the project, the workforce has grown from 14 employees to 125, with additional seasonal workers to boot. As well as fair wages, the workers are provided with free lunches, health benefits, pension funds, and a share in company profits.

Since 1993, Get Paper has used 25% of its profits to support various community development initiatives. They have planted over 2,000 trees as

part of their reforestation project and have developed a very successful HIV/ Aids Education Program.

The project of which Get Paper is most proud is the "Send Your Daughter To School" campaign. Tragically, Nepalese girls born into very poor families are often sent to work in brothels in India to earn money to help support their families. Firmly believing that education is the key to ending this practice, Get Paper built a series of girls' schools. After it became apparent that the very poorest people were still not sending their daughters to school, Get Paper offered the very poorest family in the village a small allowance on the condition that their girl went to school every day; this inspired the families of those who were a little better off to send their daughters to school as well.

Get Paper has succeeded in making life better for its employees and for Nepalese all around the country, which is what Fair Trade is all about.

Sally Richmond is the manager of Montreal's Ten Thousand Villages-Monkland as well as a Fair Trade activist.

alternatives
INTERNATIONAL
Journal

**Alternatives International
Journal needs your support!**

You can subscribe to Alternative International Journal for \$25/year and receive it at your door.

Send this coupon with your cheque to:

Alternatives International
3720 Parc Avenue, # 302
Montreal, (Quebec)
H2X 2J1

Name:

Address:

City:

Postal Code:

Telephone:

E-mail:

:Peruvian Graffiti

AIJ's MR Wiseman recently read the handwriting on the wall. It belonged to artist-at-large :Peru.

Your most recent mural is of a "Diversitree"; where are your roots? From where do you derive your energy?

That was my most recent "commercial" mural— I paint a wall almost every week. My roots are spread throughout the world; I grew up in Lima, but since then I've lived in Ottawa, Montreal, Vancouver and Barcelona. Peruvian culture dominates my roots but they all meet at the center. We all come from the same place and have more in common than we may think. For murals I get my energy from the people I communicate and interact with; for the rest, I get inspired by everything from my girl to a good meal or a good tune.

A rather unimaginative, but laced with deep psychological insight, follow-up: if you were a tree, what kind would you be?

Haha, I've probably been a few kinds of trees in past lives. I've always liked African Baobabs and Japanese Bonsai, I'm supposed to get one in exchange for a design soon. I'm really into these psychedelic root formations you can find from Indochina's ruins to Mexico's cenotes (underwater caves), or when they grow around carved rocks, or reach hundreds of feet down for water. I would love to visit the redwood forest someday as well. Does that answer your question?

Yes, just I suspected... but seriously now, will murals stop the scourge of our time that is the great graffiti menace?

There's nothing you can do to stop it. A city might make a dent every year by wasting a million dollars cleaning it up, but it's far from a solution. In Montreal, the Mayor's brother has a good grasp of something more effective, which is collaborating with community centers and muralists to enhance certain areas. You create a direct dialogue with some artists that can work together in the

hopes of getting some legal walls for younger kids to learn on, but not everyone sees murals as reclaiming space from graffiti. Some people think it proliferates graffiti and encourages



A proposed 13-story mural in Montreal. For a free trip, go to www.peru143.com and explore all of his creations.

others to join in the decoration— which usually means teenagers who don't know anything about graffiti making a mess. However, graffiti does not belong on legally sanctioned walls alone, so it's the best solution I can think of. You can build walls to protect your city from a tsunami, but everyone is still gonna get wet.

While someone would be hard-pressed to accuse you of graffiti, the word itself is derived from the Italian graffitiare, "to scratch", what is it that gives you the, ahem, itch?

I find Graffiti culture is a tightly-bound community of talented and untalented people who inevitably inspire each other for pure enjoyment. There's an innate need for humans to write their names on walls, from the cave ages to the Egyptians. Some do it for fame and attention, some do it for the thrill, others do it because they are tired of being overwhelmed by ad campaigns that tell them they should consume instead of create.

Through drawing and painting I found my voice, as well as an appreciation for myself and the world as a whole. I believe that the purpose of art in life, if there is any, is to enlarge the dimensions of our soul by exercising our creativity and lay logic and reason to rest.

Not only does art have the ability to give one a means of self-expression, but through catharsis one is able to learn about what is important in life through self-actualization; the world desperately needs to get in touch with their inner art vandal. We have an obligation to ourselves to dig up our true identity which, quoting an article I read on Art Crimes.Org while growing up, gets "buried by years of acting like other people." Not only this, but one must respond to the cultural responsibility and contribute something.

You're an accomplished artist— note that I didn't qualify that with the word 'street'— should I have? Where does the street end? Where does the artist begin?

Art belongs to the people, in the streets, not in pretentious galleries and museums. At least contemporary art should be open to everyone— to be appreciated. There's enough brick and concrete out there as is, we need to decorate it and put some colour into our environments. My "graffiti" will always stay in the streets, otherwise it couldn't be called that. I don't like this obsession with labeling ourselves, I just know my purpose in this life is to do art and I don't argue with it. You don't put yourself at risk on so many levels, or spend so much of your time doing something, unless it has a deeper meaning to you— whether you understand that meaning or not.