

students, far from defending their ivory tower detachment, are expressing the aspirations of the mass of African youth in the streets.

The main change in this April of Death, however, has not been in the brutality of the African state (for there have already been hundreds of African students killed in anti-SAP demonstrations), but in the attitude of the World Bankers. They used to think that the struggle could not touch them as they were safely ensconced on H Street in Washington. They were happy to have their 'front men' in Africa get their hands dirty dealing with the opposition to their programs. But the antiglobalization movement, which had as one of its sources the persistent anti-SAP student movement in Africa, has finally leaped from the streets of Harare, Addis Ababa, and Algiers into Washington in April, and Prague in September last year. The World Bankers now know that they cannot expect to carry on their planning and comfortable get-together in tranquility. They have been hounded, finally, by a truly international youth movement which has carried the African student dead to their door.

## Kenyan Students Resist the World Bank

by Jim Wakhungu Nduruchi

*This is an expanded version of a letter addressed to the World Bank Bonds Boycott team that was protesting simultaneously in Kenya at the World Bank/IMF headquarters in Washington in April 2002, among other cities in the US. It was also addressed to the Movement Members in universities throughout Kenya, Uganda and South Africa.*

### **Comrades,**

I don't know what transpired on your side. I only know about what happened in Kenya. We have never had such a fabulous protest. We have never made headlines on TV before. We only came on the scene fighting with the police, as intelligent people who did not know how to use their excessive energy.

Kenyan students have always protested against the IMF/World Bank, although they were not being heard due to government brutality and harassment. For instance, in the year 2001, protests were also staged against them, and two protesters were injured by the police.

We have never gained such acceptance as we did this year! Because there was no money to board a bus, we trekked at 7.00 am to downtown, 11 miles from Kenyatta University. We were over 400 students. Many people joined us and did more than what one can believe in. By the time we were downtown, we were over 1,500. Three professors

from the department of history accompanied us. My lawyer, who works with Amnesty International, was with us. In downtown we were joined by comrades from Nairobi University – about 400 students. We straightaway headed for the World Bank offices.

At the World Bank Group headquarters, the chanting went mad. The police were already stationed there to block us, and indeed they did. But they never blocked our mouths from speaking what we know is truth. The officials in the premises could be seen peeping through the window curtains as they swallowed, with pretence, the realities which were coming out of Press For Change members.

The Press For Change Movement is a coalition of University students in Kenya fighting both for justice and accountability in offices of the Government, and to educate people on the ills of the IMF/World Bank's water and electricity privatization, dilution of education, and other bad policies.

The protests were triggered by the World Bank move to privatize water and electricity. Part of the system had already been purchased, but our protests that day salvaged

**“Lagos was literally a ghost town last weekend. The streets were empty, except burning tyres and smoking debris and the rhythmic hooting of a few *okada* (bike) riders. The atmosphere was tense, if not highly charged and palpable. As I moved around observing the mass protests against the IMF-induced fuel price hike, one sight was constant. Youth had turned many of the city's high ways into football pitches. I sat down to watch a match. Suddenly armed police in a station wagon pulled up. Rather than make way, the youth continued to play. The policemen hooted their horns frantically but they were ignored.”**

– Kwesi Owusu, ‘Welcome to Lagos Mr Larry Summers’, June 2000

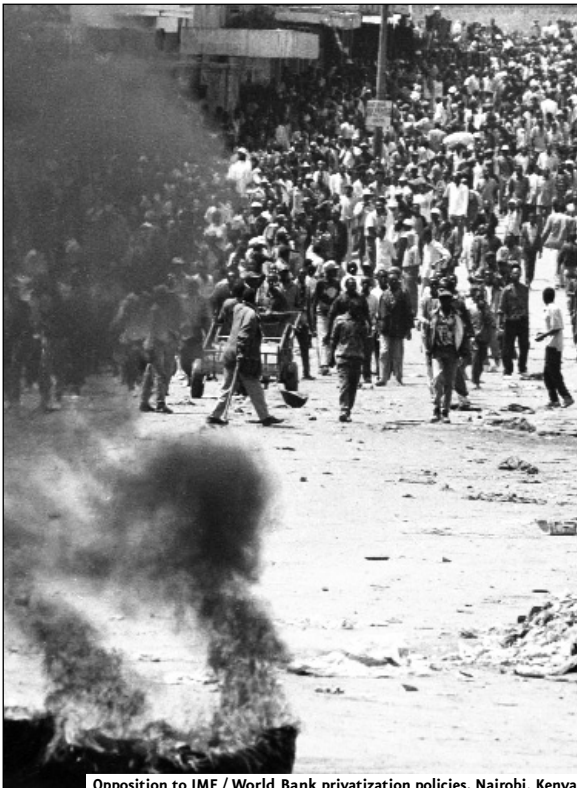
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release of all Zapatista political prisoners, and the removal of seven of the more than 250 military bases from the state of Chiapas. Comandante Esther makes the first address to Congress by an indigenous woman in Mexican history; however, as yet, none of the Zapatista demands have been met.

>> **February 26-27** >> The World Economic Forum meets in a luxury hotel in the resort town of Cancún,

México, behind solid metal fencing and lines of riot police. Around 500 activists brave intense surveillance by local, federal, and immigration police – some stage a symbolic face-off, others parade naked between the rows of activists and cops, and other sit down and block the road, while still others attempt to infiltrate the meeting from the beach side. After a few hours, as people begin dispersing, the cops open the barricade and

violently batter the stragglers. Media and local support for those imprisoned and hospitalized is enormous – food is delivered to the protesters' encampment, a solidarity demo happens the next day in the capital, local journalists organize their own protest against police brutality, and the WEF scuttles out of town without releasing their customary celebratory communiqué. Popular pressure leads to the release of



Ramadhan Ibrahim

Opposition to IMF / World Bank privatization policies. Nairobi, Kenya.

the remainder. In addition, the World Bank interference with higher education was looming. They dictated to the Government how many students should be admitted to public universities. The rich were favoured by being allowed to go for “parallel Degrees”. This was condoned by the Bank and it diluted education so much, denying such opportunities for the poor who had actually qualified.

The World Bank officials listened to everything we had to say about this, but never came out to comment. But the messages on the placards were enough to make them read our message. One poster read, “We stand in solidarity with those that are protesting in Washington DC today.” Another read, “Is it World Bank or Weird Bank?” Another said, “Wolfensohn, you have suffocated us enough, stop now!” Another read, “Where did you hide our education rights?” Another one had a large cartoon showing HIV/AIDS in a limousine called World Bank/IMF. The driver was called Mr SAPs. It was moving on a pot-holed Kenyan highway. The virus, which was too fat, was saying, “Using this vehicle and my competent driver, I shall have conquered 75 per cent of the people by the year 2020. Ahaaa! Lucky me!”

One member of Press for Change, who is an actor, moved the entire crowd into tears after he went before the protesters and faced the headquarters. He personified the IMF/World Bank and sang a self-composed song and a poem revealing how the two are a cruel couple: “We fought for independence in Kenya, we are not going to be colonized by the World Bank and her sister again.” It was a very emotional moment. My speech was the concluding remark,

everything had been said. The good news is this – they heard everything! We are waiting for their comments.

From there we went to the Ministry of Education headquarters. After chanting and cursing against the corruption in that office, the minister sent a lady to explain that we have to leave, lest the police disperse us. The poor woman was hit with a stone from one protester who was not familiar to us. I was so sorry about it.

Then the dancing and chanting group went to the high court grounds where the noise went mad. Here, the high court judge came out to address us. He gave us time to explain our grievances. Over 20 people came up and ridiculed him and the judicial system so much for letting the mess happen in the judicial system. Francisca, a nice lady who works with Press For Change, blamed the judicial system for turning a blind eye to the plight that fell upon my home last December. She appealed to the Chief Justice to personally get involved to make sure justice is done.

In 1996 my brother was shot dead by the police while protesting against the cancellation of government grants to students. This was forced upon the Government by the

World Bank. On 18 December 2001, thugs were sent to invade my home in the upcountry. They killed my dad, brother and had mom raped by six people. She is now HIV+. I was threatened and that's why I had to flee.

At this time my lawyer, who was received with a mad applause, came and told the Chief Justice that he would not rest until justice has been done. I just had tears rolling down and watering the corrupt ground. The Chief Justice promised that some officers in the judicial system were corrupt, and promised that he was going to take action. He asked us to come up with any evidence about corruption against any judge. I answered, "I shall present correct evidence to you. And if you will not do something about it, you shall leave office!" For all that time, three trucks of police officers had been following us at a distance, without opening fire as they have done before.

From here our motorcade took a different tune. We went charitable. We started cleaning dirt from streets. We did it with such efficiency. Dirt has been accumulating for the last two years. The stench was great and we didn't have gloves. But we did it! The media gathered and took pictures of what

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the prisoners, and even the ruling party condemns the police action, with President Fox apologetically appearing on television days later.

>> **March 2-4** >> Thousands of activists gather in Trieste, Italy to protest against a preliminary environmental ministerial meeting of the G8. 3,000 police barricade the streets surrounding the palace where the meeting takes place. Protesters launch

fireworks and colored smoke bombs over the barricades and dance to music from a mobile sound system.

>> **March 12** >> A four-month-long strike by the San Salvadoran Social Security Union ends favorably, having garnered the support of nearly 12,000 doctors and workers who demand an end to the privatization of the country's health system, the reinstatement of fired workers, and an increase in pay.

>> **March 17** >> Twenty thousand protesters take the streets in demonstrations against the Global Forum Conference on e-government, in Naples, Italy. A security cordon rings the conference. The agenda includes discussing introducing an electronic ID card in Italy. Father Vitaliano Della Sala, who took part in the Zapatista march to Mexico City the previous week, says, "It was easier for Subcomandante Marcos

we were doing. We did it without talking. This process took us about two hours. Luckily, I had gotten some money courtesy of the Centre for Economic Justice. So I booked a bus to ferry people back to their respective campuses.

When we came to Kenyatta University where the majority of our members come from, we took donations of old clothes, shoes, foodstuff, blankets, mosquito nets, and utensils and put them in a truck. We headed for the home for the elderly people. We gave them this donation and, I testify, it was such a nice thing. Some of the old guys had no blankets. Some have totally torn clothes. One old woman had nothing to cover her nakedness, but a small rug covering her private parts.

Her chest was all out. Her skinny body was so dirty. Her legs were full of jiggers. She needed a wash. Some were so hungry, and one explained that they had not eaten anything since morning. It was 5.30 in the afternoon. The mentally stable ones explained how they just survive. It was so moving.

One old man was lying outside the men's dormitory and we did not see him when we came. Luckily, I went round the building and saw him. He had no strength to move after being roasted in the hot tropical sun throughout the day. When the attendant who claimed to have gone to buy food came, he told me that the old man had arrived in the home three days earlier. The old inhabitants were not amused at his arrival because it meant more competition over meagre food and resources.

We spent the entire evening washing the dirty bedding, cleaning the home, washing the old nice people, cooking for

**“Just between you and me, shouldn't the World Bank be encouraging more migration of the dirty industries to the less developed countries? The economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest wage country is impeccable, and we should face up to that...**

**Under-populated countries in Africa are vastly under-polluted; their air quality is probably vastly inefficiently low compared to Los Angeles or Mexico City...**

**The concern over an agent that causes a one-in-a-million change in the odds of prostate cancer is obviously going to be much higher in a country where people survive to get prostate cancer than in a country where under-five mortality is 200 per 1000.”**

**– Lawrence Summers, chief economist, World Bank, 1991**

them, and just sitting with them to share and hear what they had to say. They are full of wisdom! We told them who we are and they pledged their support to us. Then we sang the old gospel song, He Has Done So Much, and the old guys blessed us. We left the place so rich and full.

This was a national venture. I am yet to receive a full report about what happened in other universities. They did not join us because of financial problems. I only watched on telly the Moi University group talking to their Vice-Chancellor about necessary reforms at the university to make it a better place to live.

Partners, I don't know what I can tell you. You have made all this happen. Without you, we could not have done that, we could not have recognized 20 February. You sent us thoughts of strength.

And to everybody else around the world who participated in yesterday's protests; you are rare guys! You might be living well, without the SAPS. Your country is blessed. You have jobs and refreshments. And yet your love drives you to fight for us, to protest and risk negation and even beatings from the police just for our sake. Thanks brothers and

sisters. We are so proud of you, and you are a source of strength for us.

**Jim Wakhungu is a founding member of Press for Change, which almost came to a halt following government surveillance and persecutions. He was specifically targeted by the Moi regime, and is now living in exile in South Africa, researching a book, *The African Woman*.**

**Press for Change is still working hard to keep the wonderful agitation for accountability and transparency on the move, but is in urgent need of international support ([jimdaleford@yahoo.com](mailto:jimdaleford@yahoo.com)).**

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**Resources:**

» *A Thousand Flowers: Social Struggles Against Structural Adjustment in African Universities*, edited by Silvia Federici, George Caffentzis, and Ousseina Alidou, African World Press Inc.

» World Bank Boycott campaign: [www.worldbankboycott.org](http://www.worldbankboycott.org)

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to reach Mexico City than for these kids to reach Piazza Plebiscito."

>> **March 21** >> Thousands of protesters descend on Johannesburg, South Africa, to demonstrate against the privatization of the city's water supply. The municipal company was sold to the French multinational, Suez Lyonnaise des Eaux. The South African Municipal Workers Union is appalled that the

ruling party, which came to power in 1994 with promises of providing free basic public services to those who cannot afford them, is inviting profit-driven multinationals to run the city's water.

>> **March 23** >> A 1,000-strong rally in Lagos, capital of Nigeria protests the government's continued persistence to phase in the deregulation of fuel supplies. "We can not pay world prices because we do not earn

world incomes," says one speaker. The unions oppose deregulation and liberalization because these reforms inevitably lead to a rise in prices on basic necessities.

>> **March 26** >> Ecuadorian transport workers go on strike, bringing cities to a standstill in response to a government increase on Value Added Tax, which will result in many of them going out of business.

>> **March 29** >> The Arctic Baking Brigade in Helsinki,