

**A Brief History of Resistance to Structural Adjustment  
by George Caffentzis and Silvia Federici**

from the book

*Democratizing the Global Economy*

**Kevin Danaher, editor**

Common Courage Press 2001

**In the dozens of countries where the International Monetary Fund and World Bank have imposed Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), people have not been passive when they experience deterioration in their standards of living, reduced access to public services, devastated environments, and plummeting employment prospects. The pages of newspapers, magazines, and academic journals (those that can survive in depressed economies) have been filled with damning analysis of structural adjustment. More importantly, people have been organizing to combat the pillaging of their lands and livelihoods. This organizing has resulted in mass movements and protests on every continent, but they are not often reported in the mainstream press. A selection of notable struggles in the last 20 years of fighting structural adjustment follows.**

**ALGERIA**

**October 1988: More than 200 people are killed in rioting against high prices and unemployment in wake of SAP.**

**BENIN**

**January-June 1989: Students at the University of Cotonou go on strike, paralyzing the institution for six months, in protest of nonpayment of grants for several months and the government's intention to stop paying them altogether in 1989 as part of SAP reforms. Teachers strike begins in April, with demands for payment of four months' salary arrears, the withdrawal of the 50 percent reduction in their salaries (part of IMF mandates), the unconditional liberation of all teachers, pupils, and students held during the strike and the reintegration of 401 teachers dismissed in March for striking.**

## **BOLIVIA**

**March 1985:** A general strike is called by labor unions, with the support of many agricultural workers, against government's sharp increase in food and gasoline prices as part of its IMF-designed SAP. Troops and riot police are called out. Unions accept government's offer to increase basic minimum wage by more than four-fold along with other wage increases.

**April 2000:** Mass protests against World Bank-inspired plans by the Bolivian government to privatize water supplies; at least seven protesters are killed by police. Government eventually backs down on privatization plan.

**September-October 2000:** Widespread rebellion by small farmers-who feel the government is corrupt and is ignoring the rural population-is met by government repression: more than ten people are killed and dozens are wounded by police and military. Government of President Hugo Banzer eventually makes concessions in an attempt to quell the persistent rebellion.

## **ECUADOR**

**March 1987:** Students in Quito clash with riot policemen during protests against government's SAP.

**October 1987:** Workers in Ecuador firebomb a bank and block streets with tires during one-day general strike against SAP.

**June-August 1999:** A broad coalition of civil society organizations, led by indigenous peasants, rise up to demand the curtailment of austerity measures imposed after the IMF's emergency interventions in the wake of weather catastrophes, further destabilizing the government.

**January 2000:** Indigenous people march on Quito to demand an end to austerity programs and more responsive government. After taking over the parliament building and allying with key members of the military, the indigenous organizations succeed in forcing the resignation of President Jamil Mahuad. Betrayal by the head of the armed forces leads to the vice-president taking over leadership rather than a government of national reconciliation.

## **JAMAICA**

**January 1985:** Demonstrators across the country protest the government's decision to raise fuel prices in accordance with an SAP that began with a 1982 World Bank loan that was renegotiated in November 1984.

## **JORDAN**

**April 1989:** Riots over increased food prices erupt throughout southern Jordan shortly after announcement of SAP agreed to with IMF. At least five protesters are killed by police.

**August 1996:** Riots break out in Karak and other southern cities after IMF demands removal of subsidies, resulting in tripling of price of bread. King suspends Parliament when it refuses to support price hikes. Protesters also target Ministry of Education because of hike in school fees connected with IMF program.

## **MEXICO**

**January 1994:** Zapatista Army of National Liberation begins insurrection against NAFTA and SAP-style policies of the PRI government. The insurrection destabilizes the government and these policies.

## **NIGER**

**February 1990:** Students at University of Niamey boycott classes to protest adoption of reductions in educational funding mandated by SAP. During the course of a peaceful demonstration police fire on demonstrators killing three (according to official police sources) or 14 (according to student leaders). Many others are wounded.

## **NIGERIA**

**May 1986:** Roughly twenty students and bystanders at Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) in Zaria are massacred by security forces after staging peaceful protests over impending introduction of SAP. More students are killed in protests against SAP and the ABU massacre during the following days at Kaduna Polytechnic, the University of Benin, and the University of Lagos.

**April 1988:** Students demonstrate at 33 universities against fuel price increase demanded by IMF-inspired SAP.

**May-June 1989:** Dozens of people are killed and hundreds are arrested in riots and strikes against SAP in Lagos, Benin City, and Port Harcourt. Government is forced to offer a welfare program called an "SAP Relief Package," the establishment of a mass transit scheme and a "People's Bank," and a review of the minimum wage.

**March-May 1990:** Students and faculty on campuses nationwide protest government's decision to accept a \$150 million university restructuring loan from the World Bank, especially conditions requiring closure of many departments and programs. The military government stages armed assaults and hundreds of arrests, with hundreds more expelled from the university system. **May 1992:** Students at Universities of Ibadan and Lagos protest against implementation of SAP, which they accuse of being responsible for the deterioration of campus facilities and education programs as well as the doubling of transport prices. Police respond by shooting demonstrators, wounding at least five. Battles between young antigovernment demonstrators and police in Lagos leave at least three dead and hundreds injured. The IMF and World Bank made the removal of subsidies and probable increase of the price of gasoline the main imperative in its negotiations with the Nigerian government.

## **PARAGUAY**

**June 1999:** A 48-hour general strike is called on June 22 in response to the government's plans to privatize its telephone, water, and railroad companies. The privatizations are conditions of an IMF program that Paraguay must meet in order to access \$400 million in World Bank loans. Police meet the protesters with violence almost immediately, resulting in 20 injuries and at least 10 arrests. About 300 protesters in Fernando de la Mora are dispersed by police with water cannons.

## **RUSSIA**

**December 1993:** Coalition of parties opposed to the neoliberal reform (SAP) measures of the Yeltsin government win a majority in parliamentary elections.

## **SUDAN**

**October-November 1987: Steep currency devaluation and price hikes resulting from arrangements with both the IMF and World Bank lead to demonstrations by about 15,000 in Khartoum to denounce the IMF. Students at the University of Khartoum occupy buildings, leading to eventual closure of the institution. Street violence and arrests follow.**

## **TRINIDAD**

**July 28-August 2, 1990: The Society of Muslims assaults government headquarters and takes President Robinson and other members of the cabinet hostage, demanding an end to IMF-imposed economic austerity measures. Riots and looting follow the assault in Port of Spain; at least 50 people are killed.**

## **UGANDA**

**December 1990: Students at Makerere University protest the government for cutting stationery and travel allowances arising from a World Bank-imposed SAP. Police fire into a crowd of protesting students, killing two.**

## **VENEZUELA**

**February 28-March 2, 1989: About 600 people are killed and more than 1,000 are wounded in rioting over economic measures, including sharp increases in fuel and public transport prices, imposed to satisfy the IMF and World Bank. President Perez, as one of his first acts in office, signed a letter of intent with the IMF putting into place an SAP on February 23.**

**February 1992: Coup attempt by middle-level military officers – widely supported by the population – fails. The economic goal of the coup's protagonists was the end of Venezuela's SAP. Leader of the coup attempt, Hugo Chavez, is elected President in 1999.**

## **ZAIRE (now DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO)**

**March 1985: Students at Mbanza Ngungu and Mbuji Mai Universities criticize cuts in higher education budget adopted by the government in compliance with IMF's SAP.**

## **ZAMBIA**

**January-February 1987: Food price riots in the northern copper mining district in response to an SAP announced in December 1986 eventually lead to program's suspension.**