

Book Review: Capitalism's Last Stand: Deglobalisation in the Age of Austerity

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In *Capitalism's Last Stand*, **Walden Bello** seeks to emphasize the ever more pressing need to engage in a radical process of 'deglobalization'. Taking in revolutions and protests, the place of China's economy in the world, and Europe's 'tragic spiral', those who are concerned with a just society and a more balanced distribution of global financial resources may find what they are looking for, writes **Pietro Manzella**.



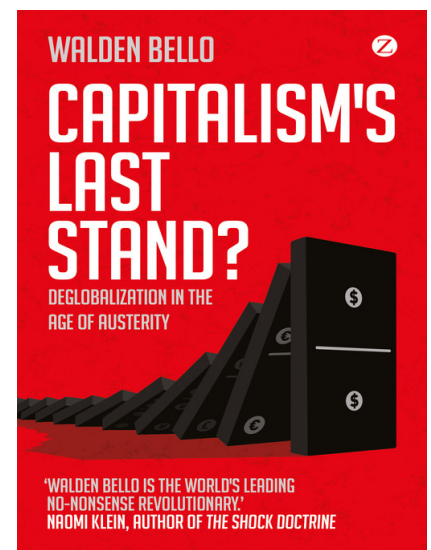
Capitalism's Last Stand: Deglobalization in the Age of Austerity. Walden Bello. Zed Books. July 2013.

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There is no doubt that for social scientists and for those interested in global development and social policy, *Capitalism's Last Stand: Deglobalization in the Age of Austerity* will be a particularly engrossing read. In this book, [Walden Bello](#) brings together a number of articles written over a period of six years from 2007 to 2013, to consider the notion of "deglobalization"; a term which Bello defines as a retreat from global production structures, accompanied by an increased emphasis on local markets, that the author first explored in [Deglobalization: Ideas for a New World Economy](#) ten years ago.

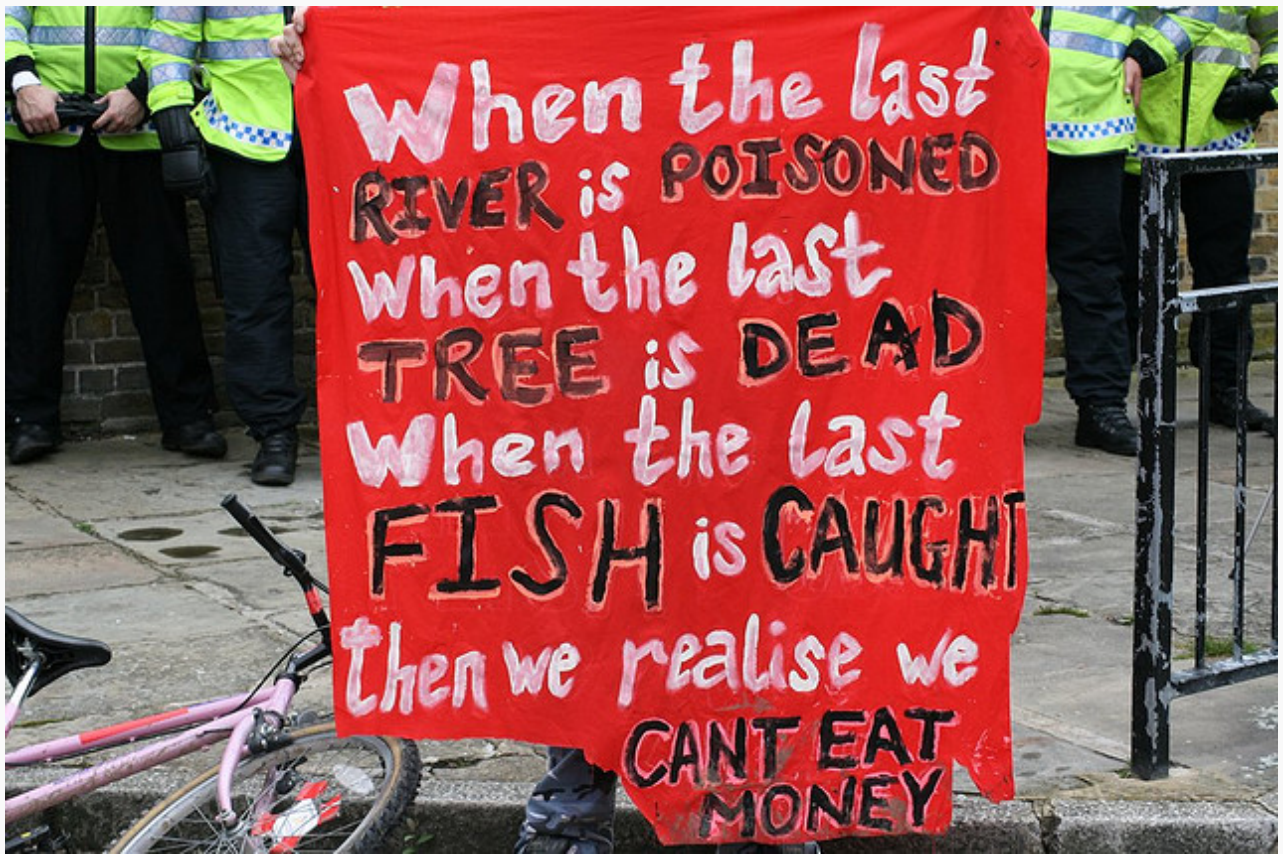
In this analysis of contemporary capitalism's multiple crises, Bello maintains that a shift should take place towards a pluralistic system of global economic governance, making it possible for governments to set up initiatives for development in accordance with their own values and opportunities. The volume deals with globalisation, the rise of China, and the recent recessions in the US and Europe, and aims to provide students and policy makers with innovative ideas on constructing a fairer and more equitable society. Each chapter includes a preliminary comment which places it in context and then provides an analysis of the topics under examination.

The book consists of three parts, "The Destructive Dynamics of Finance Capital", "Globalisation and Crisis", and "Competing Alternatives", which between them provide an in-depth investigation of the origins of financial turmoil, global capitalism, and the numerous perspectives through which globalisation has been examined. Each part is further divided into several chapters; among them, two appear to be particularly thought-provoking, namely Chapter 6, "Capitalism and the Environment", and Chapter 7, "The End of Multilateralism".



“Capitalism and the Environment” is fascinating in that it offers a reflection on the close relationship between climate change and capitalism, a subject of [much discussion in academic circles](#). This relationship is the result of the dependence of the globalised economy on the long-distance transportation of goods. The [temporary collapse of the export-oriented global economy](#) is said to have benefited the climate, because it has brought about a significant reduction in carbon emissions. By way of example, the [drop in gas emissions in 2009](#) was the most significant in the last forty years. A rational response to this drop is deglobalization, argues Bello. Yet a decrease in global freight movement only represents one dimension of the issue. Environmentalists agree that a shift in the global economy is necessary; moving away from overproduction to a greater consideration of real needs, lower consumption, and more sustainable production processes.

In questioning the widespread view among decision-makers that the main problem is the recourse to alternative sources of energy such as “clean” coal and possibly nuclear power, the author instead urges the adoption of an environmentally-friendly capitalism. As underlined by Bello, economists and policy-makers tend to prioritise export strategies to revive the world economy, [disregarding the impact that this can have on the climate](#). In addition, multinational corporations seem to resist government measures to protect the environment. More specifically, “the assumption is that the affluent societies can take on commitments to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions but still grow their high standards of living if they shift to non-fossil-fuel energy sources” (p. 165). Yet the main problem is that many of the alternative forms of energy are anything but viable solutions. In other words, the move away from fossil fuels will not be sustainable, considering current rates of economic growth. For this reason, the author points to the need for a reorganisation of production, consumption and distribution which would deal with the climate emergency and provide a response to the environmental crisis.



Climate Camp 2007. Credit: [fotdmike](#) CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

chapter on “The End of Multilateralism” mainly seeks to examine the crisis of legitimacy on the part of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB), two of the major players in global economic governance. The author starts at the [Singapore 2006 meetings](#): the setting for the annual meeting between the Boards of Governors at these two institutions, finance ministers and other delegates from around the world. The event was intended to discuss matters of business, as well as financial and economic issues at the international level. Desperate to win credibility among civil society groups, the Bank and the Fund had given official accreditation to representatives of four civil society organisations to join the meeting. However, the Singapore government banned those appointed by the IMF and the WB – one of whom was the author – for “security reasons”. Many civil society representatives called on the two institutions to cancel the meeting in protest against this move, but it was a vain attempt.

From the author’s standpoint, this episode is illustrative of the crisis affecting the two organisations. The author critiques multilateralism – seen as a one-sided system of global economic governance – as traditionally favouring the hegemony of developed countries (among others the USA). Arguably, the onset of the economic crisis has highlighted the need for alternative institutions to oversee global finance. In order to help developing countries tackle the crisis, and to regain legitimacy, debt cancellation and/or a moratorium are suggested as an immediate measure, in order to facilitate access to greater resources. In addition, it should be up to local bodies to attend to economic and development issues, as promoting a system in which the northern countries continue to monopolise power and resources would be a case of putting old wine into new bottles. In the author’s view, the financial downturn should help to set in motion a more decentralised and deglobalised economy.

Capitalism’s Last Stand: Deglobalization in the Age of Austerity attempts to present measures for a fairer and more equitable society, taking as a starting point a far-reaching process of deglobalization. Those who are concerned with a just society and a more balanced distribution of global financial resources will find this volume both engaging and enlightening.

Pietro Manzella is Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Marco Biagi Department of Economics, University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Italy, and Senior Research Fellow at the Association for International and Comparative Studies in the field of Labour Law and Industrial Relations (ADAPT). He has an interest in linguistic and translation issues, with special reference to comparative labour law and industrial relations. He is English language editor of the *ADAPT LABOUR STUDIES BOOK-SERIES*, the Italian Labour Law Journal *Diritto delle Relazioni Industriali*, and the *E-Journal of International and Comparative Labour Studies*. For more information visit www.adapt.it [Read more reviews by Pietro](#).

