

International VIEWPOINT

International Viewpoint—magazine of the Fourth International

IV443 December 2011

INTERNATIONAL SITUATION

"The result of a long and general crisis is often to clarify the map of the world"

QUEBEC

Québec solidaire struggles to define its space in shifting political landscape

DOSSIER

Egypt

Obituary
Pakistan
Afghanistan/Pakistan
Tunisia
Syria
China
Climate
Philippines
Ecology
International situation

Quebec
Kazakhstan
Morocco
Portugal
Spanish state
Russia
Ecofeminism
Britain
Indonesia

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International Viewpoint, the monthly English-language magazine of the Fourth International, is a window to radical alternatives world-wide, carrying reports, analysis and debates from all corners of the globe. Correspondents in over 50 countries report on popular struggles, and the debates that are shaping the left of tomorrow.

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CONTENTS

Obituary — After the death of Vaclav Havel: history is rewritten	P4
Egypt — The "Cabinet Office" Massacre: A New Crime by the Sons of Mubarak in Power	P5
Pakistan — Pakistan's political parties: Tehreek Insaaf from Middle to Capitalist Class	P7
Afghanistan/Pakistan — Pakistan Afghanistan Progressive parties conference joint declaration	P9
Tunisia — After the elections, the mobilisations continue	P11
Syria — Unite for the success of the mass national general strike: The strike of dignity!	P12
China — Down with corruption; reclaim our land	P13
Climate — Durban, Climate & COP17: Women as last priority	P16
Climate — The fight against climate change is a fight against neoliberal capitalism, landlessness, dispossession, hunger, poverty and the re-colonization of the territories of the people's of Africa and the global South"	P18
Philippines — The storm Washi hits the Philippines: more than a thousand dead - an appeal for solidarity	P20
Ecology — An assessment of the failure of the Durban summit on the climate: no more "green capitalism"	P22
International situation — "The result of a long and general crisis is often to clarify the map of the world"	P24
Quebec — Québec solidaire struggles to define its space in shifting political landscape	P30
Egypt — Egypt's labour movement takes a tumble	P36
Kazakhstan — Repression intensifies against Kazakh oil workers' uprising	P39
Morocco — Elections to contain the spirit of the popular mobilisations	P42
Portugal — Against the unacceptable burden of the debt, the condition of democracy is social struggle	P44
Spanish state — "To change things we need to work every day in the struggles"	P46
Russia — December 10: A new page in the history of Russia	P48
Ecofeminism — What is ecofeminism?	P50
Britain — N30: unions strike a blow against weak government	P53
Russia — "Let the Streets Speak!"	P55
Egypt — The struggle to come after Egypt's election	P57
Indonesia — Solidarity with the Freeport workers	P61

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OBITUARY

After the death of Vaclav Havel: history is rewritten

JEAN-MARIE CHAUVIER ·

There was absolutely no question of all that before 1989; this vocabulary has been invented subsequently, in the recent past. It is a reinterpretation of history, in the spirit of "history written by the (Western) winners" of the Cold War, a reinterpretation such as it has been imposed for the last twenty years, prohibiting all "dissident" ideas.

From 1968 (the crushing by the tanks of the Warsaw Pact of the movement of democratization) to 1989, the Czechoslovakian dissidents (and those of other Eastern European countries) took care not to be defined as "anticommunists". They fought for civil rights and freedoms, that was all. Many of them were communists: supporters of the Prague Spring, expelled (like 500,000 others!) from the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia after 1968. From this Spring, some had drawn radical conclusions, wanting to put an end to the regime which called itself "socialist". But some of them persisted in wanting to see a communism that was democratic, based on workers' councils, on self-management, a perspective that was certainly not pleasing to "the liberals" ... to whom history finally gave victory. Let us admit that liberalism and capitalism are the big winners of this history, sweeping aside not only the regimes of the East, but the ideas of an alternative, of a "third way". The "end of history" as Fukuyama said... or the "happy globalization" of Alain Minc.

Was Havel in his heart anticommunist? It is more than probable and he subsequently presented himself in this way. But many among those whom he represented (in Charter 77) were not. The irony of history is that he was to be

found, at the time of the Velvet Revolution of 1989, hand in hand with Alexander Dubcek, former leader of the Spring of 1968 and former general secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party... But Dubcek was already a man of the past, and Havel a man of the future, not only of the Czech lands freed from a repressive regime, but of the New World Order of which he was an artisan, very close to successive American administrations and, for example, taking part in the war in Iraq.

It should be said in passing that "those who evoke history" forget to specify that the principal artisan of the Velvet Revolution, of the liquidation of the Soviet bloc was... the Soviet communist leader Mikhaïl Gorbachov. That is still a "cumbersome" truth for those who want a "smooth" retrospective of history.

That people can say today that Vaclav Havel, child of the Prague bourgeoisie, was from time immemorial an adversary of communism is all very well. And it did not prevent him from being an artist and a man of great courage. But to present all dissidents in former times as "anticommunist", there is a name for that: it is called falsifying history. Stalinism does not have the monopoly of brainwashing!

December 19, 2011

EGYPT

The "Cabinet Office" Massacre: A New Crime by the Sons of Mubarak in Power

EGYPTIAN REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISTS ·

9 martyrs ... 500 injured ... this is the result of confrontations between the Egyptian Occupying Forces and the revolutionaries in a fresh attempt to bring the revolution to its knees and to bring back the Mubarak regime. And why not? After all, the leaders of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces are the sons of Mubarak, and they are loyal to their economic self-interests. The generals of SCAF control around 20 percent of the economy and are completely opposed to the interests of millions of working people who barely scrape a living. Most of them can't find jobs which offer the chance of a decent life or even offer the hope of changing their lives for the better.

The "valiant" armed forces, members of Military Investigations and gangs of government-backed thugs attacked the peaceful sit-in in the street of the Cabinet Offices. After fabricating an argument Abboudi, one of the young ultras [football fans] who was playing football, they harassed him, subjected him to electric shocks and abuse, and then refused to release him for more than an hour.

This turned out to be merely a pretext for a pre-prepared attack to disperse the sit-in by force and burn the protesters' tents. The old lies are being circulated that the local residents are offended by the protesters, even though the street where the sit-in is located does not block the traffic, and the area itself is a district of government buildings, ministries and embassies and not a residential area.

Thugs and the commandos of "our" army in civilian clothes took over government buildings which are

now effectively under military occupation, including the parliament building itself, in order to throw stones and glass at the protesters and activists who joined them in Qasr al-Aini street to express their anger at the attack on the sit-in. Dozens of demonstrators have fallen to baton charges, water cannons, rubber bullet rounds and live ammunition.

These developments follow a rising tide of workers' protests, and the announcement by large numbers of workers' organisations of their intention to demonstrate and occupy in order to continue the revolutionary tasks of cleansing public institutions of the remnants of the Mubarak regime and the redistribution of wealth in society. This is why it was necessary to break up the sit-in by armed force in order to block the possibility of fusion between the working masses who brought down the Mubarak regime by their strikes in the last days of his rule, and the revolutionaries in the sit-in outside the Cabinet Offices. These events also come as the end of the parliamentary elections is approaching, and with it the beginning of demands for the army to return to its barracks and the formation of an elected government.

All this points to a growing tendency within the army which wants to create chaos and panic so that the generals can seize the reins of power by popular demand, or at least to muzzle the revolutionaries until political positions and powers can be divided between the opportunist political forces which consented to enter the battle of parliament under military rule.

There is no alternative to continuing the revolution in the public squares, in the universities and in the workplaces ... there is no substitute for working to win the popular masses, and at the heart of them

the working class, to the revolutionary camp. If we do not, the Occupying Forces, under the leadership of Tantawi will continue to kill revolutionaries and abort the revolution.

O masses of our people! The massacres of the Cabinet Offices have brought down the government of Ganzoury, who spent his life serving his master, Mubarak, and who wanted to enter the Cabinet over the blood of the revolutionaries. We must fight together for these demands in order to achieve the goals of the revolutions to win bread, freedom and

social justice, and so that the blood of the martyrs has not been spilled in vain:

1. A revolutionary government with full powers.
2. Retribution for the martyrs and the trial of the murderers on the military council
3. Reduction in prices and a rise in wages.
4. Nationalisation of the stolen privatised companies to provide work for the unemployed The military council is leading the counter-revolution ... but the revolution continues.

PAKISTAN

Pakistan's political parties: Tehreek Insaaf from Middle to Capitalist Class

FAROOQ TARIQ ·

Karl Marx wrote long ago that "the middle class has to take sides. It cannot remain an independent social force for long". Tehreek Insaaf is a classical example of this doctrine. Like MQM, the Tehreek Insaaf will yell a lot of slogans of middle class revolution; however, it will be working in the service of the rich through the voice of the middle classes.

The growth of Tehreek Insaaf shows the real crisis of the capitalist class parties in Pakistan. Those fed up with the prospect of two parties' domination of politics are intervening in a dynamic form. They are doing their best to do the maximum damage to Pakistan Peoples Party, Muslim League (Nawaz) and PML Q. The parties that had any illusions that "it's not me that's losing" are now feeling the pain at heart.

The worsening economic crisis is now being manifested as a political crisis of the capitalist class. Pakistan's economy is passing through one of the most serious economic crises in its history. All the efforts to find a way out of this crisis of president Asif Zardari are back-firing. China was once the country where President Asif Zardari was seen all the time. This was a result of misplaced hope that China might help. It did not. Americans are not happy either. Imran might be an option is the thinking of some sections of the capitalist class in Pakistan. They are now making it happen.

In colonial countries, masses some time turn to sports men, film actors and so on. They do so to find the same sort of act as they have done in their particular field. Some of them become very popular and won more support than traditional politicians.

In the Philippines, a film actor Josef Estrada was president of the country from 1998 to 2001. Estrada was the first person to be elected both to the presidency and vice-presidency. Estrada gained popularity as a film actor, playing the lead role in over 100 films in an acting career spanning 33 years. However, allegations of corruption spawned an impeachment trial in the Senate, and in 2001 Estrada was ousted by People Power 2. He assumed office during the Asian Financial Crisis and with agricultural problems due to poor weather conditions, which combined to slow the economic growth to 0.6% in 1998 from a 5.2% rate in 1997. He tried to work within the framework of capitalism and was unable to maintain his popularity and was ousted within three years of coming into power.

A similar scenario can develop here in Pakistan as well. The popularity of sports heroes in politics is no different than those of becoming popular because of their heredity advantages. Both are not based on scientific realities but on emotions and low consciousness.

Questions were put to Imran Khan on 24th December 2011 in Karachi about his plan to recover from the crisis, his answer was that if he is not able to find a way out, he would quit and leave politics. That is simply a way of avoiding the real situation. Not a single mention of capitalist crisis, its impact on Pakistan's economy and ways to change the course of the economy.

The present growth of Tehreek Insaaf is a real growth. If the majority of the middle class had not said yes to TI, there would not have been a rush of joining in. The middle class felt the extreme pain of the crisis while the working class was unable to

manifest itself on the political stage because of extreme disillusionment with politics and politicians. The politicians who are queuing up to join TI are looking forward to the possibility of returning to the assemblies with a different identity. They are just echoing the objective realities. It is not what many on the Liberals are saying that "establishment" is promoting TI. "Establishment" always backs the parties of rich one way or another. It is not a conspiracy of any group that TI is making progress; it is a manifestation of the objective realities. The PPP and PMLN, and Q have disappointed the masses in general and now they are looking for a way out. The internal crisis of these parties of the rich is creating favorable conditions for TI to grow.

Thereek Insaaf in its essence is a right wing capitalist party in the making. It will damage mainly the right wing political and religious parties; however, the party in power is not from the left wing either. So PPP will absorb a major portion of the damage that TI will inflict on them.

TI can grow even further. Popularity of any political group or individual does not mean that they have a solution. Masses always adopt an easier path of finding a solution. The present crisis is a crisis of system, the capitalist system, not a crisis of corruption of a group or individual. It will not make much difference if Imran Khan replaces Yousaf Raza Gilani or Zardari and try to find a way out of the

crisis within the system by introducing some social reforms.

Why Labour Party Pakistan and other Left groups have not grown like TI? Yes, they have not grown in the masses in general but they have grown among their own class, the working class, to some extent. TI is growing in its own class. Their class has the resources and means to influence the consciousness of the masses for the time being. Consciousness is a by-product of the objective realities, so, the right wing is growing in one way or another.

The Left has to learn some lessons from this growth of TI as well. It was the public identity of TI that was visible all the time during the last five years in particular. The public appearances of the Left forces are few and also the commercial media does not give them the same importance as they do for their own class. The Left has to develop its own alternative media as it can never rely on the commercial media.

The Left has to keep going on building the movement of the workers and peasants. There is no short cut to the solutions of the miseries of the working class. The system had to be challenged and an alternatives to be presented. There is much basis for the reforms in capitalist system. It got to be challenged and changed.

Pakistan Afghanistan Progressive parties conference joint declaration

PAKISTANI AND AFGHANI LEFT PARTIES ·

The progressive and democratic forces of Pakistan and Afghanistan met here in Lahore for two days in the first ever joint conference. This is a historic step for the progressive forces of both sides to sit together and share the sufferings of our people at the hands of US-led NATO forces as well as the religious extremists in the form of the Taliban. We also vehemently condemn the military establishment and the governments of both countries who use different excuses to justify the occupation by foreign forces as well as tacit patronization of religious extremism.

We resolve to launch a sustained campaign against the forces of imperialism and religious extremism. We plan to organize coordinated days of action and other initiatives at the political as well as the cultural and educational levels. We plan to broaden this movement and include other left and progressive forces who share the common goals of establishing a just peace and of progress in the region. We resolve to also include the progressive movements in India and Iran in order to build up a broad regional alliance to secure a just peace.

We agree that by occupying a sovereign country under false pretences, in blatant violation of all accepted norms of international law, then cynically deploying the smokescreen of "human rights" and "democracy", NATO's active promotion of criminal, misogynist warlords has exposed the myth of bringing democracy and freedom to the people of Afghanistan. The policies of the occupation forces have resulted in the country being hijacked by medieval warlords, who are as adamant in their rejection of democratic processes and denial of civil lib-

erties and equal rights for women as the Taliban regime they have replaced. This has resulted in Afghanistan regaining its ranking as the biggest producer of opium in the world, adding another potent element to the lawlessness that is destroying the fabric of Afghan society.

The violent, theocratic movement of the Taliban is deeply anti-people and promotes the ideal of rule by an elite clergy. The Taliban claim to defend the sovereignty and freedom of Afghanistan, yet they are unable to guarantee basic freedoms and protection to their own population, and their policies make Afghanistan an easy target for foreign interference (e.g., from Pakistan or Iran) and even outright occupation.

It is commonly portrayed in the Western media that the situation of women in Afghanistan has drastically improved since the NATO intervention with the protection of women being used as an excuse to justify the occupation of Afghanistan as well as military operations in Pakistan. We reject these claims as false and point out that after 10 years of occupation, Afghanistan has been awarded the rank of the most dangerous country for women with Pakistan in the top five.

Looking at the effects of the American War on Terror on Pakistan, we note the consolidation of the links between the CIA and sections of the Pakistan Army, resulting in drone strikes inside Pakistan, the abduction and selling of Pakistani citizens to the United States, the continued transit of military supplies to ISAF from Karachi to Khyber, the use of Pakistani military bases by American forces. We also observe that the closing of ranks between the Afghan Taliban, the Pakistani Taliban and the Pakistan Army – as part of the Pakistani

Establishment's policy of dealing with both the Taliban and NATO – has led the Army to adopt a more belligerent attitude in public, and seeking to capitalize on the peak in anti-American feeling in the country, to attempt to derail the India-Pakistan peace process (or at least tarnish the patriotic credentials of the elected representatives) and even, it is feared, attempt to dislodge the government altogether.

We condemn military action in Balochistan and demand the Pakistani government that repressive measures of the establishment in the form of disappearances must be stopped with immediate effect.

Given this history, we reject any military solution to the problems of Pakistan and Afghanistan and pledge to devote all our energy to constructing concrete alternatives to the false choice between NATO and Taliban, a genuinely pro-people, pro-freedom alternative.

The immediate withdrawal of all foreign troops along with measures aimed at achieving socio-economic justice are what we believe can alleviate the suffering of the people of both Afghanistan and Pakistan and lead to a just peace in the region. However, let us be clear that none of these people-friendly measures will ever be given to the people, but will have to be extracted from the impending alliance of local and foreign powers that is planning

to dominate Afghanistan even after the withdrawal of NATO troops (the recent Bonn conference is the latest example of attempts to make such alliances). And this can only be done by a genuine movement of the masses of Afghanistan and Pakistan working together with a clear identification of their common enemies: US imperial power, the neo-colonial Pakistan Army and the Taliban and various allied groups. We recognize this struggle as part of the larger fight against the economic colonization of the region in the name of globalization and neoliberal agenda.

We support the enhancing of trade ties between the South Asian countries to promote trade and creating more business and job opportunities.

Afghan Labour Revolutionnary Organization

Solidarity Party of Afghanistan

Afghan Revolutionnary Organization

Malalai Joya Defense Committee

Labour Party Pakistan

Awami Party Pakistan

Workers Party Pakistan

Pakistan Trade Union Defense Campaign

Awami Tehreek

United Kashmir Peoples National Party

TUNISIA

After the elections, the mobilisations continue

ABDESSALEM HIDOURI ·

After the elections for the Constituent Assembly and its first sitting, on November 22, rallies took place in Tunis before the Bardo, the place where the Assembly meets. The demonstrators were protesting against the policy of the Triple Alliance, bringing together the Islamists of Ennahda, the CPR led by Marzouki and the social democratic Ettakatol party led by Ben Jaafar.

Their slogans were axised on the defence of human rights and liberties, threatened by the fundamentalists. Serious events have taken place in the universities and public areas, where the Salafists have forced women to wear the "hijab" and the "niqab", and prevented men and women mixing. These acts reveal the project of the current reactionary right. These slogans and demands are advanced by all the progressive forces, which are in the minority in the Assembly, and in particular the modernist pole organised around Ettajid (the former Communist Party, now aligned on centre left positions).

Other slogans reflect social demands such as work, liberty, social justice and dignity, as well as the demands for prosecution of the snipers who killed the martyrs, a purge of the media and the legal system, and equitable development between regions. In

short, these slogans affirm the necessity of continuing the revolutionary process.

The results of the elections of October 23 do not in fact reflect the reality of the popular will, above all of the poor, the unemployed, the marginalised and the oppressed, who were at the origin of the revolution and fought for work, liberty and dignity.

From the Bardo to the regions of the interior, the sit-ins continue, as well as demonstrations for the right to work and liberty, against the capitalist and fundamentalist forces, the continuation Ben Ali system as well as any foreign interference, in particular from Qatar.

Since the overthrow of the dictator, nothing has changed concerning the exploitation, oppression, pauperisation and marginalisation of a great part of the population. To fight against this involves a break with those who practice opportunism towards the forces of the right, and have turned their back on the demands of the masses, contributing thus to the current political confusion.

It is time for the continuation of the revolutionary struggle so as to fulfil the task of the revolution, and notably the dismantling of the political system set up by Ben Ali.

* Abdessalem Hidouri is active in the Tunisian LGO (Left Workers' League) organisation. He was one of the coordinators of Casbah 1 and 2.

SYRIA

Unite for the success of the mass national general strike: The strike of dignity!

SYRIAN REVOLUTIONARY LEFT TENDENCY ·

We call on all the comrades, group and persons of the left engaged in the permanent popular revolution, as well as all those who support liberty, equality and social justice, to participate effectively and seriously in the success of the mass general strike— the strike of dignity — and to consider it as an important and essential step on the path of the reappropriation by the masses of the initiative to decide the destiny and future of their country. It is necessary to appeal broadly and participate, to organise seriously and effectively everywhere we are. Participation presupposes setting up action committees common to all the forces and individuals involved to realise the best organisation and management of everyday life.

The future of our people and of its country can only be decided on by the masses of our country. The fall of the regime and the building of a Syria of liberty and justice are up to the insurgent popular masses now and to those who will not fail to rally to the revolution shortly. It is our stake, it is the path to the victory, liberty and sovereignty of our people. The mass general strike will lead there.

The regime of the ruling clique has failed to break the determination of the insurgent masses just as it

has failed to lead them into the hell of confessional or civil war, or to make weapons the sole expression of confrontation. Nor has it succeeded in diverting the masses who count on their determination to bring it down or in making them believe that armed foreign intervention would be their sole salvation... It has failed in all its attempts to crush or to divert the magnificent popular revolution... and it finds itself today as in the first days of the revolution face to face with an insurgent people which will not delay in bringing it down and wiping out this dark stain in the history of our country.

Let's participate together in the mass general strike, the strike of dignity, until the fall of the regime and victory!

We call for a united front of all the forces of the revolution to bring down this bloodthirsty regime!

We call for the unification of the revolutionary left!

Long live the struggle of the Syrian popular masses for the fall of the regime and for liberty, democracy, social justice and equality!

Long live the Arab permanent popular revolutions!

Damascus, December 7, 2011

* The Syrian Revolutionary Left Tendency is a group uniting revolutionary Marxists in Syria and in exile.

CHINA

Down with corruption; reclaim our land

CHINA LABOUR NET ·

Their demands were clear: to reclaim the land sold without the consent of the people, to release public accounts concerning the some 400 hectares of land seized and sold since 1978, to launch investigations into fraudulent elections and to enforce the Organic Law of Village Committees to hold fair and open elections. The demonstration ended peacefully after the acting mayor received the villagers' petition.

Illegal land sales prompt villagers' mobilisation

Since the early 1990s, the villagers of Wukan had launched petitions at the local governments of Lufeng, Shanwei, and Guangdong province, only in vain. A proper reply from officials was never made. Without democratic elections, the secretary of the Communist Party's local chapter, Xue Chang, has stayed in power for 41 years. Abusing its position as the so-called representative of Wukan, the village committee has sold and leased hundreds of hectares of land without consulting the villagers, and yet in the past few decades, villagers have received less than 500 yuan in compensation.

The ongoing demonstrations were prompted by allegations that Hong Kong-based businessperson Chen Wenqing, who is originally from Wukan, had colluded with the village committee to strike a private land-sale deal with luxury home developer Country Garden, thereby gaining the 700 million yuan that was supposed to be paid to the villagers. As the representative of Guangdong province and Shanwei city in the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the honorary president of the Confederacy of Hong Kong Shanwei Clansmen Ltd, as well as owner of various hotels and development companies in the mainland, Chen holds numerous official positions

both in the mainland and Hong Kong. In recent months, as Country Garden began its construction work, villagers could no longer put up with the situation.

On September 22, 2011, the villagers of Wukan rose up and launched a mass protest at the municipal government, after which officials promised to investigate the problem. The village committee leadership that was under suspicion immediately fled the area, leaving the village without an administration.

To prevent a state of anarchy and to strengthen the mobilisation of the people, villagers filled the leadership vacuum by democratically electing 13 representatives and setting up a Provisional Board of Representatives to conduct village affairs. In mid-October, villagers also established a Women's Representatives Federation to support the ongoing struggle. At the same time, the Lufeng municipal government sent out a team to investigate the situation.

However, on November 1, the government announced that it would relieve party secretary Xue Chang and vice party secretary Chen Shunyi of their duties, and agree to Chen's resignation from the village committee leadership. The municipal government did not implement democratic elections after that, but appointed the vice-mayor of Donghai township as the new party secretary of Wukan. The problems of land and official corruption raised by the villagers were not properly investigated and addressed. After two months of unresponsiveness and inaction on the government's part, the villagers had no choice but to launch a peaceful protest on November 21.

Villagers call general strike; elected representative dies

After the march on November 21, on December 3, the municipal government unilaterally announced to the press that the issues had already been solved, and that the Wukan "incident" had come to an end. Outraged, more than 13,000 villagers launched a general strike from December 4 and held assemblies and marches. On December 5, villagers protested against the arrival of the undemocratically imposed party secretary.

On December 9, police arrested village representatives Zhuang Liehong, Xue Jinbo, Zhang Jiancheng, Hong Ruichao and Ceng Zhaoliang on criminal charges. Two days later, on the night of December 11, the Lufeng municipal government suddenly announced that the democratically elected representative of Wukan village and vice-president of the Provisional Board of Representatives, Xue Jinbo, had died of a heart attack. Officials stated that external causes of death had been ruled out. This directly contradicts with the recording of Xue and his daughter that has been circulated on the internet. According to Xue's daughter, Xue's entire body was bruised, his hands swollen, his chin and nose caked with blood: clear signs of having been tortured to death.

Police seal off village in siege

In response to Xue's death, on December 12 and 13, the villagers of Wukan organised an assembly to remember him and to voice their anger. They swore to continue the struggle to remove corrupt officials. Currently, roads into Wukan have been sealed off by thousands of security personnel, effectively cutting off Wukan from outside contact and even stopping the village's water and food supplies. As a result, food is becoming increasingly scarce in the village. Earlier, in attempt to enter the village and arrest more democratically elected representatives, police threw gas canisters at protesters and demolished the homemade roadblocks that the villagers had set up to prevent police from besieging the village.

Faced with continued demonstrations, the municipal government has only acknowledged that it

would hold a "double designations", that is, to have the village committee's party members attend question sessions at a designated place for a designated duration. Officials also announced the suspension of the two projects coordinated by former party secretary Xue Chang and Hong Kong-based businessperson Chen Wenqing.

Same problem: capitalism

While the villagers of Wukan are fighting a difficult battle, at the same time, teachers in Lufeng city also launched their own demonstrations on December 11 to demand a pay rise. Like the 1922 agrarian movement in Hailufeng, the struggles of the Wukan villagers as well as their political and economic demands have a pioneering significance in the history of Chinese workers' and peasants' fight for democracy. The Hailufeng peasants' movement in the 1920s, the workers' strikes in Hong Kong as well as Shanghai all echo each other in highlighting the economic and political crises that plagued global capitalism and capitalist states.

Today, more than 80 years later, the workers' and peasants' movements in Hailufeng similarly echo the recent labour strikes in Shenzhen, Dongguan, Shanghai and so on. They all shed light on the current political and economic crisis in which wealth and power in society are concentrated in the hands of a few.

"Down with corruption, reclaim our land" is the voice of 1 billion Chinese people. It is also the voice of the millions of Hong Kong people who live under the oppression of property hegemony. The revolutionary tradition that began in Hailufeng has been revived once again. While thousands of police surrounding the village, the government declares the people's democratically formed organisation illegal, refuses to tell the truth regarding Xue Jinbo's death, arrests and jails village representatives and only investigates corruption on the village level.

It is clear that the villagers of Wukan have reached the most difficult and yet critical point of their long and hard-fought struggle.

At this fateful hour, we call on those who push for progress and freedom around the world. We call on the people of China and Hong Kong to give their full support to Wukan's fight for democracy. On December 17, we in Hong Kong will protest!

We demand that the central government:

1. Immediately stop the sealing off of Wukan, and release the arrested village representatives;
2. Return Xue Jinbo's body and release the details and truth behind Xue's death; punish the security personnel in charge of extracting confessions by torturing Xue and make a formal apology and grant compensation to Xue's family;

3. Recognise Wukan's democratically elected Provisional Board of Representatives, allow representatives to participate in investigations and handle the matter in an open, fair and just manner;

4. Reclaim the sold land and return it to the villagers of Wukan;

5. Address the demands of the villagers to curb corruption and implement democratic elections;

6. Investigate land seizures in the country and stop the privatisation of land.

Sign the petition to support these demands (English text below Cantonese on site) <http://www.gopetition.com/petitions...>

<http://www.worldlabour.org/eng/node/506>

CLIMATE

Durban, Climate & COP17: Women as last priority

LINN HJORT ·

That climate change affects men and women differently and that men are bigger emitters than women are old news. It is, therefore, disappointing to note that civil society in its mobilisations against COP17 did not spend more time on issues like gender, gender roles and gender equality. At the same time several organisations report that the official COP17 worked hard on mainstreaming gender issues in discussions and position papers.

"Gender has been one of the buzzwords here at COP17," reports the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) from Durban. Over 30 side-events on gender issues have been held and December 5 was declared the Gender Day by the UNFCCC. There is still a long way left, but more and more organisations are making efforts to make gender a central part of agreements and the framework for discussions, according to WEDO.

Many meetings were held on high levels before COP17 to make sure that gender issues makes it into all documents and policy papers to be presented, according to GenderLinks – necessary since references to gender and women were absent from important documents such as SADC's (the Southern African Development Community) suggestion for a Framework on Climate Change. GenderLinks has also been part of training journalists from southern and eastern Africa in news reporting with a gender perspective.

Women held prominent positions at the official COP17 – president was Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, former minister of International Relations and Cooperation of South Africa, and Christiana Figueres, who has been part of Costa Rica's delega-

tion to COP for many years, is the Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC.

From an elite perspective this has been presented as a real possibility for women in the most vulnerable positions to – drastically but not unrealistically written – survive. But at the same time there was never any doubt that COP17 would close with a deal much less powerful than the Kyoto Protocol – which itself places much too weak demands on the cutting on emissions for the world to avoid the worst effects of climate change.

And it is the poorest women in the world that will be hardest hit by the obvious lack of political will to spend resources on changes in industries and agriculture, public transport and consumption patterns to save the climate. The thousands of lobbyists from multinationals swarming the UN, and the oil companies that are part of negotiation delegations to COP without any intention to cut back on their emissions have, so far, more power than a few phrases about women's rights and a woman chairperson to the COP.

Next to COP17 there was C17, a space for activists where trade unions, environmental organisations, NGOs and social movements gathered during the two weeks of COP17 in order to build alliances, acquire more knowledge and find alternatives to the market-based solutions that were being debated at the governmental level.

But besides the energetic Rural Women's Assembly – consisting of over 700 women from the rural areas of southern Africa – there were few opportunities to highlight the effects climate change has on women or women's solutions to the crisis. Remarkable, considering the fact that the event was held in Africa, where the threat to the continent's

food production is so closely linked to women's roles as producers of food.

A woman journalist explained how she had discussed with her editor the invisibility of women's issues amongst the activists. Nyathi Esther, who works with gender issues in the mine workers' union NUM, had after a few days not heard anything about women in the seminars where she had participated. The international trade union federation ITUC held 23 seminars – not one of them had women's issues as a priority. A meeting on eco-socialism was criticised because three out of four speakers (all three men) completely missed to reflect over the strong influence patriarchal structures have in terms of exploitation of humans and environment, and for simply reducing this to "a single sentence mentioning women".

Agnes Nygren from the Africa Groups of Sweden comments: "No, unfortunately there has not been a lot about women's issues. In private discussions with activists it is obvious they are very conscious of how climate affects women and women's role in finding solutions to climate change. But this has not been picked up by organisers of seminars and meetings."

When the biggest trade union federation of South Africa, COSATU with about 1,8 million members, introduced their climate policy the gender perspective was all but present.

"There is a parallel gender process taking place in COSATU about how climate change affect women, and we appreciate how it has affected women at the level of employment.

But it is correct, the policy has no gender perspective and that makes it weaker in that aspect", comments the president of COSATU, Sidumo Dlamini.

Terisa E Turner, associate professor at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Guelph in Canada, presented eco-feminist and class-based perspectives to the climate crisis. She says that a gendered class analysis has been largely absent amongst the climate activists and in the seminars she has participated he gender perspective has been "almost zero".

Asked if the lack of a gendered class perspective can lead to failure on our part, she said: "Yes! Women with a gendered class perspective are not very prominent here – and we have to work to bring it here."

But, she further says: "The thousand women from the rural areas that are here, they are the most powerful group at this meeting – they are the producers of food and they raise the children. And we will see more of them in the future".

And fact of the matter is that these women to a large extent hold the key to the solutions. Their visions of production patterns and reproduction possibilities, without discrimination, based on human needs as opposed to profit accumulation, are a realistic and inevitable alternative to the agreements emanating from the COP processes. Perhaps it is about time that the diverse international climate movement starts taking them seriously and realise that their experiences are central to the possibility of creating a sustainable and equal society.

<http://www.viewpointonline.net/cop1...>

CLIMATE

The fight against climate change is a fight against neoliberal capitalism, landlessness, dispossession, hunger, poverty and the re-colonization of the territories of the people's of Africa and the global South"

VIA CAMPESINA ·

We are here in Durban, South Africa where the 17th United Nations Conference of Parties is taking place and are discussing false solutions to the climate crisis. And we can see that the future of Mother Earth and of humanity is in peril as those responsible for nature's destruction are attempting to escape their responsibility and erase history.

We, La Via Campesina, the global movement of peasants, small-scale and agricultural family farmers, is severely dismayed at the attempts of the developed countries to further escape their historic responsibility to make real emission cuts and push for more false and market based solutions to the climate crisis.

Here in Durban, they are discussing a "new mandate" as an outcome of the COP 17, one which contains market mechanisms and a voluntary pledge system in order to move away from the mandated program of working towards legally binding commitments to cut emissions. Also, developed countries are working hard to escape their historical responsibility and not pay their climate debt by pushing for a green climate fund that involves private capital and the World Bank. Finally, there is a push to include agriculture in the negotiations, treating agriculture as a carbon sink rather than a source of food and livelihood. For La Via Campesina, with this trend of negotiations, it is better to have no

deal than a bad deal that condemns humanity and our planet to a future of climate catastrophe.

We are now at the worst moment for agriculture and small farmers and for nature. The impacts of climate change are steadily worsening, leading to harvest failures, destruction of habitats and homes, hunger and famine and loss of lives. The future of humanity and the planet is in critical danger and if these false solutions push through, it will be a catastrophe for nature, future generations and the whole planet.

We therefore demand to all governments in the negotiations:

For all countries from the global South to stand up for their people and to defend the people and the planet with dignity and conviction. The government of South Africa has already sold out its people in this regard.

For all the developed countries to live up to their historical responsibility of causing this climate crisis and to pay their climate debt and commit themselves to at least 50% domestic emission reductions based on 1990 levels, without conditions and excluding carbon markets or other offset mechanisms.

Stop industrial farming that promotes pollution and climate change through high levels of use of petroleum based chemicals

Governments must support agro-ecology

For all countries to listen and work for their people and not be under the control of transnational corporations.

For all countries to stop trying to save capitalism and making the people, including small farmers, pay for their economic and financial crisis.

We as La Via Campesina, demand the implementation of the people's global agreement on climate agreed on in Cochabamba. And here in Durban and in a thousand Durbans, we strongly reiterate our solutions to the climate crisis.

Further global warming must be limited to a rise of 1 degree Celsius only.

Developed countries must make domestic emission reductions of at least 50% based on 1990 levels, without conditions and excluding carbon markets or other offset mechanisms.

Developed countries must commit to payment of their climate debt and give funding from at least 6% of their GDP. All funds for this climate finance must be public and be free from the control of the World Bank and private corporations.

All market mechanisms must be stopped, including REDD, REDD++ and the proposed carbon markets for agriculture.

We reiterate that there will be no solution to climate change and the predatory neo-liberal system that causes it, without the liberation of women, and rural women in particular, from age old patriarchy and sexist discrimination. We therefore demand as part of comprehensive action against patriarchy and sexism:

The promotion of women's land access and rights through targeted redistribution

Laws and policies must be made responsive to the particular needs of women

We as La Via Campesina, demand an end to the commodification of our Mother Earth reject the mechanisms of the carbon market. Furthermore, we reject the proposed inclusion of a work program on agriculture in the negotiations and reject all proposals of market mechanisms surrounding agriculture.

We as La Via Campesina and the people of the world have the real solutions to the climate crisis and we call on all governments to heed them before it is too late. At this assembly of the oppressed we declare to the people of the world that the solutions are in their hands. Through building social movements and mobilizing popular struggles for social change the world's people will overcome the close alliance between governments and multinational corporations that is strangling the world. In Africa at the moment this alliance is perpetrating one of the biggest land grabs in history, which would mean more chemical-industrial farming, more poverty and exploitation, and more climate change. The only serious counter to this is the land occupations initiated by the landless themselves. From the perspective of food sovereignty, agrarian reform and climate justice, these land occupations deserve the fullest support.

Sustainable peasant's agriculture and agroecology cool down the planet.

Food Sovereignty is the solution!

Peasant agriculture is not for sale!

Globalize the struggle, Globalize the hope!

Assembly of the Oppressed, 5th December 2011, Durban, South Africa.

PHILIPPINES

The storm Washi hits the Philippines: more than a thousand dead - an appeal for solidarity

DANIELLE SABAI ·

During the night of 16-17 December, the Philippine archipelago was hit by the tropical storm Washi (local codename: Sendong). According to official figures released on 21 December, there are already 1002 deaths. Hundreds more remain missing. The damage is considerable: roads are destroyed, infrastructure damaged, houses swept away...

Several hundreds of thousands of people are without shelter and have been displaced. The evacuation centres are overcrowded. When people return home, it is first of all to look for loved ones that have been killed and to bury them... There is a shortage of drinkable water and the floods have spread pollution. There is a real risk epidemics might break out.

Two port cities situated on the northern coast of the large island of Mindanao were hit especially hard: Cagayan de Oro and Iligan. While the storm created large waves, enormous amounts of water rained down on the mountain-slopes.

According to meteorologists, this was the worse storm to hit this region since November 1958, more than half a century ago. It has also been one of the most lethal storms to hit the country. In 2008, official statistics say that the storm Fengshen killed 938 people in the centre of the archipelago. In 1991, floods caused by the typhoon Thelma caused the death of 5000 people in Omoc City on the island of Leyte.

Europe solidaire sans frontières (ESSF) has been cooperating for several years with an activist network in Mindanao that brings together different NGO's, associations and popular movements.

Among those is Ranaw Disaster Response and Rehabilitation Action Center, Inc. (RDRRAC). This network is especially strongly implanted and active in Iligan and immediately mobilized to organize emergency aid. At first communication was impossible, and it remains difficult, because of the damage to electricity networks and internet connections. We have to rely on information passed on by our contacts. On 20 December we received the following information:

'As far as I can remember, this was the first time towns like Iligan and Cagayan de Oro were hit like this by a tropical storm. This made the situation worse because when the warning was given that a particularly strong storm was coming, people didn't appreciate the gravity of the danger and didn't take serious precautions. Even more, the disaster came when the tide was high and during the night, shortly after midnight, when most of the people were sleeping. One of our members only managed to save her life because her dog woke up when the water entered the house where she was staying alone!'

'Torrents of rain fell down on the surrounding mountains. Parts of the slopes are covered with pineapple plantations, with little vegetation on the ground. On other parts there is little vegetation left because of deforestation. There was nothing to stop and absorb the large volumes of water which poured into the town, causing terrible damages.'

'The disaster hit more than half of the neighborhoods and villages of the city of Iligan. The villages on the river banks have been completely swept away. At least a third of the population has been directly affected: over a hundred thousand people. In many cases, entire families drowned and were

swept into the sea. There is nobody left to report them as missing.'

'Regarding members of my organization, two houses were completely destroyed by the floods and a dozen families lost all or part of their belongings, but at least no members have been killed. The same goes for about a hundred of activists of movements in which we take part, movements of urban poor, workers, drivers of jeepneys [a kind of public transportation] and peasants.'

'Our activist networks in the neighboring provinces immediately mobilized to bring aid. I was outside of Iligan and had difficulty entering the town because of the damage to roads and bridges. When I got there, the air stank with the smell of rotting corpses of animals and humans. Many of the killed were children or elderly people. Locating and identifying the bodies is going to be very difficult. There is not enough room in the morgues for all the remains.'

'We usually intervene in natural or human made catastrophes (military conflicts...). But this time, we ourselves were directly hit, our offices were hit, families of our members were affected. This was an unprecedented situation for us and it took us some time to get organized, we learned from the experience. But precisely because our organizations come from the affected areas and because they bring together – in this island torn by so-called humanitarian conflicts – Christians, Muslims and members of the indigenous peoples living in Iligan, we

can act efficiently and we have set to work. But we also need all possible assistance.'

It is important to respond to the appeal of RDRRAC, including by using Pay Pal. If necessary, it is also possible to address checks in euros to ESSF which will transfer the money.

Directly to RDDRAC

Donations (including using Pay Pal) can be made through this site: <http://rdrrac.wordpress.com/donate>

Through ESSF

If you make a donation to ESSF, don't forget to specify it is for the Philippines.

Cheques in euros only can be sent to ESSF at:

ESSF
2, rue Richard-Lenoir
93100 Montreuil
France

Bank :

Crédit lyonnais
Agence de la Croix-de-Chavaux (00525)
10 boulevard Chanzy
93100 Montreuil
France
ESSF, account n° 445757C

International account data:

IBAN : FR85 3000 2005 2500 0044 5757 C12
BIC / SWIFT : CRLYFRPP
Name of the account holder: ESSF

An assessment of the failure of the Durban summit on the climate: no more "green capitalism"

ESTHER VIVAS ·

There were two central themes at the Durban summit; first, the future of the Kyoto Protocol which expires in 2012 and the ability to put in place mechanisms to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and, secondly, the launch of the Green Climate Fund approved at the previous summit in Cancun (Mexico) with the theoretical aim of supporting the poorest countries to face the consequences of climate change through projects of mitigation and adaptation.

After Durban, we can say that a second phase of the Kyoto Protocol remains empty of content. They postponed any real action until 2020 and ruled out any binding regulations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It was the representatives of the most polluting countries, headed by the United States, who argued for an agreement based on voluntary reductions and opposed any binding mechanism. The Kyoto Protocol was already inadequate, and its strict application would lead to a small slowdown of global warming. But now we are on a path that can only make the situation much worse.

With regard to the Green Climate Fund, as a first step, rich countries pledged to contribute up to \$ 30 billion in 2012 and 100 billion per year until 2020. In the first place these amounts are insufficient. Further, no source of public funds has been identified. Therefore, the doors are wide open to private investment run by the World Bank. As has already been noted by social movements, this is a strategy to "transform the Green Climate Fund into a greedy employers' fund". Once again they are making profits from the climate crisis and environmental pollution (investment banks have already

developed a range of financial instruments to intervene in what is called the carbon market, emissions, etc.)

Another example of the commodification of the atmosphere was the endorsement by the United Nations of capture and storage of CO₂ as a mechanism for so-called clean development, whereas this procedure is not intended to reduce emissions and will help to seriously deepen the environmental crisis, especially in developing countries that are candidates to become cemeteries of CO₂ in the future.

The results of the Summit therefore cause an increase in green capitalism. South African activist and intellectual Patrick Bond denounced it like this: "The trend towards commodification of nature has become the dominant philosophical point of view in environmental governance." In Durban, we repeated the scenario of the previous summits, such as Cancun in 2010 and Copenhagen in 2009, where the interests of large transnational corporations, international financial institutions and the elites of the financial world, both North and South, are given priority over the collective needs of the people and the future of the planet.

In Durban, not only our future was at stake, but also our present. The effects of the ravages of climate change are already being felt; including the release of millions of tons of methane in the Arctic, a gas 20 times more potent than CO₂ in terms of atmospheric warming. Then there are the melting glaciers and ice caps which is resulting in a rise in sea level. These effects are already increasing the scale of forced migration. In 1995 there were approximately 25 million climate migrants; that number has doubled now, with 50 million. In 2050, this

number could be between 200 million and 1 billion people displaced.

All indicators show that we are moving towards an uncontrolled global warming of more than 2 °, which could rise to about 4 ° at the end of the century. Scientists believe this will most likely trigger unmanageable consequences such as a very significant increase of sea level. We cannot wait until 2020 to start taking action.

But with the lack of political will to tackle climate change, resistance does not, however, dry up. In a movement parallel to Occupy Wall Street and the wave of indignados which has reverberated round Europe and the world, many activists and social movements met in a daily forum a few meters from the official conference centre with their initiative called "Occupy COP17." Participants ranged from farmers struggling for their rights to representa-

tives of small island states like Seychelles, Grenada and the Republic of Nauru (Oceania, Micronesia) who are threatened by an imminent rise in sea level, to activists against debt who are demanding the repayment of ecological debt from the north to the south.

The movement for Climate Justice shows the need to focus our lives and the planet against the commodification of nature and the commons. Capitalism and its elites are unable to provide a comprehensive response to the socio-climate crisis which has led us to a productivist and predatory system. If we are not to exacerbate the climate crisis with all its consequences we must fundamentally change this system. The well-known environmental activist Nnimmo Bassey said very clearly: "The summit amplified climate apartheid, where the 1% richest in the world decided it was acceptable to sacrifice the remaining 99%."

INTERNATIONAL SITUATION

"The result of a long and general crisis is often to clarify the map of the world"

FRANÇOIS SABADO ·

1. The crisis is already more than four years old and it is going to last. It is general, global. It is economic, financial, social and ecological, but its specificity is its junction with a sea change in the world.

2. The first point is to take the measure of this change. It is not a conjunctural change or displacement, with a return to normal, after the crisis. To measure the extent of the change, we can take as a reference the moments when the centre of gravity of the worldwide economy changed, as in 1760-1780 between the Netherlands and England or after the interwar period between England and the USA. Except that here, it is not only a continental change but a world change, in an economic, social, political and cultural sense... It is a change whereby the West - Europe and the USA - which has dominated the world since the discovery of America, is losing hegemony to the advantage of new emergent powers or of old powers which are rediscovering their strength after four or five centuries.

3. In these new world relations, Europe is declining and the USA is losing its economic, but not yet its politico-military, hegemony. Much depends on developments in the crisis in the USA. But the share of the G7 countries in world GDP, which was 56 per cent at the beginning of the 1980s, is today only approximately 40 per cent (figure for 2010). Forecasts indicate that the curves between the ex G7 and the BRIC will even intersect within a few decades and in terms of average income per capita that can happen in 2030-2040. The indications of growth over the last 10 or 15 years are around 8 to 12 per cent for China and India compared with one to two per cent for Europe and two to three per cent for the

USA, and in terms of world reserves profound changes are also indicated.

4. These relations are likely to be confirmed by the deepening of the crisis in the USA and in Europe. In the USA, debt can no longer compensate for the fall in wages. Underconsumption and overproduction are feeding off each other. The tendencies towards overproduction in a series of sectors are being confirmed, and not only in real estate, but in the whole of the manufacturing sector. Unemployment is staying at the same level or increasing. Obama's capital spending programmes have not got the machine going again. Contrary to some declarations, here or there, there has been no Keynesian turn. There has not been a Keynesian turn because there has not been a relationship of forces with a workers' movement strong enough to impose social compromises on the capitalists. But especially because we should not forget that what got the USA and Europe moving again after the crisis of 1929 – 35 was the war and not Keynesian recipes... So, despite all the speeches about raising the moral standards of capitalism, it is financialisation that continues to dominate, as the capitalists respond to the fall in the industrial rate of profit. As a result, the process of deindustrialization continues. The US economy is holding up, today, thanks to the strength of the dollar, to the role of the FED which continues to inject liquidities and to the fact that the American dollar remains the reference for the purchase of treasury bills and bonds for sovereign funds, Chinese Japanese and those of the Gulf states. Lastly, the USA maintains politico-military hegemony but is in retreat compared to the beginning of the 2000 decade - failure in Iraq, in Afghanistan, less ability to intervene faced with the

Arab revolutions. Its objective is now to prepare to reinforce its presence as a peaceful power!!!

5. But it is in Europe that the crisis can take on forms of a crisis of collapse. At bottom the problem is their positions of weaknesses in world competition. Germany remains one of the main exporting countries – 47 per cent of GDP, Japan 17 per cent, China 15 per cent of GDP, but it is also affected by the contraction of the world market. Also, in response to world competition, the European ruling classes want to liquidate what remains of the "European social model". There is still too much of the social left. It must be dismantled, that is the explanation of the speculative offensive on the European markets. "The markets", but they are material realities, bankers, managers of pension funds, managers of multinationals require an increase in the rate of surplus value, by reducing wages, liquidating social security, and increasing working time. What explains the brutality of the austerity policies is the need to adapt to the world market in labour power drawn by the social relations of the emergent powers, which implies a fall in purchasing power of 10 to 15 per cent over the next few years. But moreover, and this is what gives an acute, explosive character to the crisis, and which can lead to collapse, there is the type of political construction which Europe has experienced, with the economic divergences or trajectories of divergence between various poles of the EU: Germany and the German circle – the Netherlands, Austria, Northern Europe, and the periphery of Southern Europe, the PIGS along with Ireland, with France in the middle. Franco-German relations express the economic, political and institutional reality of Europe, but without a state, a leadership, a development plan or resistance to the crisis. The present situation once more demonstrates the historical incapacity of the European bourgeoisies to unify Europe. Dislocation is possible, but they are already thinking of the old idea of Balladur, of a Europe made up of concentric circles: Germany and the richest countries; the South and certain countries of Eastern or South-eastern Europe. The problem is France and Italy,

because if Italy goes, Europe goes. They want to tie them into Germany, which requires extremely brutal austerity plans, but this situation announces a deepening of the crisis, with growth around one per cent. That will last, but with risks of social explosions or pre-revolutionary situations as in Greece. All the more so as on the political level, the anti-democratic of the EU is combined with the development of authoritarian tendencies organically linked to the intervention of the financial markets. The heads of government imposed by the EU in Italy and Greece are thus an indication, but the strengthening of the forces of the Right and the far Right express this march towards authoritarian solutions. We can no longer exclude alliances between parties of the parliamentary Right, or sectors of them, and the far Right. More than ever, the market is not democracy, on the contrary.

Here, I am already touching on a problem of orientation concerning policy with respect to the UE. In this context, it is necessary to combine a policy of breaking with the EU, of disobedience with regard to the treaties, and not of reform of the EU. The problem is to know what we counterpose to this crisis of Europe: de-globalization, national or European protectionism, the exit from the Euro or a break and a constituent process with a new internationalist social policy, democratic, in the service of the workers: we have to take up again a perspective of the Socialist United States of Europe...

But this general positioning does not settle the problem, for example in Greece: the explosion of Greece and the brutality of the attacks by the EU are resulting in some people analyzing this country of the periphery as a new colony and from there, the absence of European solidarity with the Greeks combined with the nationalist historical traditions of the Greek Left lead today to the fact that the Greek Left, Syriza and Antarsya are demanding an exit from the Euro as part of an anticapitalist programme.

6. In this integrated world economy, can China save the world economy? Is there a decoupling between the development of China and the world economy?

The forecasts of development of China's GDP will intersect between 2020 and 2030 that of the USA. That is considerable. China is already the second world power, before Japan, the first manufacturing power along with the USA: 19.8 for China and 19.4 for the USA. For GDP per capita, it is necessary to differentiate between the various zones of China. The coastal regions, which are already on a level of GDP per capita comparable with Brazil, have between \$5,000 and \$10,000 GDP per capita, Beijing and Shanghai, \$10,000. All that adds up to 600 million people.... the centre of the country has less than \$5,000 GDP per capita. But China is an imperialist power in formation, on the military level, on the level of the export of capital, as regards unequal exchange with the countries of Africa and Latin America, in particular the purchase of millions of hectares of arable land. But this strength of China is not sufficient to relaunch the world economy, or the US economy, through mass production and consumption around such and such a manufacturing sector. The Chinese economy remains very unbalanced, between a rate of consumption in relation to GDP that is very low, 35 per cent of GDP, whereas in the USA it is 70 per cent, in India 60 per cent, the world average being 60 per cent; and a rate of investment of 45 per cent, whereas the USA has 15 per cent and the world average is 22 per cent.

China therefore remains very dependent on the world market and on exports. Its priority is to build up its domestic market, which necessitates higher wages and a minimum of social security... So we see beginning in China a process of struggles over wages and in defence of better living conditions.

On the question of decoupling, we also have to be careful, considering the interdependence of national economies in the context of globalization, but there too, up to now the crisis in the West can slow down rates of growth or make them drop by between one and three per cent, but that does not call into question the underlying tendency of development.

Two remarks in conclusion:

*The Chinese economy cannot replace Europe and the USA yet. It remains too unbalanced.

* But the underlying tendency of growth is still around 10 per cent per annum, which is increasing the difference in the level of development with the other continents.

7. In this crisis, the map of the world is being redrawn; competition is raging. We cannot explain the European crisis without taking into account these big changes in the world. They want to align the European job market on the world market. New world relations are emerging. We have spoken about relations between China and the USA, but Latin America is marked today by the power of Brazil, and secondarily Argentina. Utilising again the concept of sub-imperialism expresses this rising strength of Brazil. The country is today the pivot of the Latin-American economy, with its great multinationals, Petrobras, Gerdau, with its big hydro-electric projects, its financial power... In the overlapping but conflictual relationship between the USA and Brazil, Brazil has notched up a series of points. In the relationship between the three major roads or types of regime: the reactionary Right in Colombia and Mexico, the nationalist anti-imperialist road in Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia and the other America of Lula and Kirchner, it is the latter which largely dominates. You could not say that seven or eight years ago.

8. In this context what is the situation of the workers' movement, of the Left? At this stage, after more than four years of crisis, there has not been a response on the level of the capitalist attacks.

So the crisis provokes reactions, resistance, struggles, strikes, even pre-revolutionary situations as in Greece. There are new movements like the indignant ones, but there is a serious imbalance between the explosiveness of the situation and the political, organic expression of these movements: there is no reinforcement of the trade unions, the reformist parties, the radical Left, the revolutionary Left, or left currents within organizations or even the emergence of new organizations. There are new forms of

organization, but they are for the moment too unstable. Furthermore, since capitalist crises began, there has never been, at the same time, such a major crisis of the capitalist system and such a weak workers' movement faced with this type of crisis, except for the periods when the workers' movement was physically liquidated by Fascism or military dictatorships.

Several factors are weighing on the situation of the workers' movement:

a) The liberal counter-reforms, since the end of the 1970s, on a world scale have led to a process of reorganization of the labour force, to its individualization, its precarisation, the loss of collective rights, the weakening of trade-union organization. Deindustrialization liquidated dozens of bastions where the working class was concentrated. Not to mention the so-called "informal" economy. Blue- and white-collar workers form more than 60 per cent of the active population but it is not the same social structure as before. In China and in other countries of Asia, industrialization is leading to an unprecedented expansion of the proletariat, but we are only at the beginning of the organization of independent workers' movements, and there too, at this stage, there is no synchronization of trade unions or associations or parties in Europe, the USA and Asia. There are setbacks in the West and only fragile beginnings in the East.

b) The balance sheet of the last century, in particular that of Stalinism in the short twentieth century, where for millions of people there was the identification of Stalinism with Communism, a twentieth century which finished with neoliberal capitalist globalisation. That weighs on the problems of the formation of a revolutionary socialist consciousness.

c) Then there is the evolution of the social democratic parties and organizations, which are undergoing a social-liberal mutation. They maintain historical links with social democracy. They are forces of alternance, so they must be distinguished from parties of the Right, according there too to national

specificities, but they are completely integrated into managing the crisis. There are no differences between Holland, Papandreou, Zapatero, Socrates, and the leaders of the European Right. The processes of primaries and the resemblances with the American Democratic Party go in the same direction. These are parties that are less and less working-class and more and more bourgeois. As for the post-Stalinist parties, they are reduced to either following the social democratic parties or resisting by trying to have a policy, called "anti-liberal" but consisting of managing the capitalist economy and institutions. But as the Socialist parties move so far to the right, they leave a space for these formations, which can play a role as long as they are not obliged to go directly into government: witness the results of the United Left in Spain, and tomorrow the results of the KKE and Syriza in Greece or the Portuguese Communist Party or the Left Front in France.

d) This combination of weakening of the workers' movement in the face of more than three decades of neoliberal attacks with the policies of the leaderships of the Left gives the bourgeoisie internationally room for manoeuvre to "manage the crisis" by increasing the positions of the financial markets and deepening the attacks against the popular classes, and even, in the BRICs, improving the material situation of millions of people. We cannot understand, for example, the development of Brazilian power without taking into account the qualitative mutation of the PT under Lula into a social-liberal party. And reciprocally, the fact that PT holds the reins power in Brazil cannot be explained without taking into account the emergence of Brazilian power... There is always, for capital, a way out of the crisis if there are no working-class solutions. The problem is that the social, ecological and human costs are more and more terrible.

e) It is also within this framework that I would like to come back to the revolutionary processes in the Arab world. First of all, they are revolutions in the sense that "the masses erupt onto the social and political scene", democratic and social revolutions.

But there too, there is an imbalance between the revolutionary process and its "democratic and social" political expression. The thrust of the masses is there, and it will continue, but there is the combination of the destruction caused by decades of dictatorship, the defeats of Arab nationalism and of nationalist or socialistic left forces, the effects of neoliberal reforms, the accumulation of forces by the Islamist movements. All that is leading, at this stage, to the electoral victories of the Islamists, with the benevolence or the support of the imperialist powers, and the active intervention of Gulf states such as Qatar. The Islamist movements are also going through processes of differentiation between supporters of the Turkish AKP model and the Salafists; there is a whole range of reactionary currents. But the democratic thrust is there. It will continue to operate in the Arab world. It is giving rise to new independent trade-union organizations, as in Egypt, or to a strengthening of forces on the left. But that weighs much less in the balance of the relationship of forces than do the Islamist movements.

f) But are not these "imbalances" or "desynchronizations" between social resistance and the weakness of radical left forces an integral part of the new period that we are living through? If we pose the problems in terms of major changes in the world in a new historical period, after several centuries of domination by Europe and the USA, if there are structural changes in capital on a world scale, if there is a new place for nation-states in the globalisation, a structural crisis of parliamentary democracy, a tendency towards the integration of the trade unions - Trotsky already evoked this tendency in 1940 – if there is a march towards authoritarian regimes... can all that not have consequences on the reality of the workers' movement, on the place of parties? Are we not at the end of a historical cycle for the European workers' movement such as it was configured at the end of the nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century? Are globalisation and the crisis of the nation-state not undermining the basis of parties and trade unions such

as they were formed over decades? We are still, and more than ever, living in the time of capital, the time of capital which leads to the class struggle, with its resistance, its organizations, but most probably what will emerge will be new organizations which will have, of course, links with the old but will be fundamentally new and will especially be made up of new generations.

g) And, there is also a historical responsibility for revolutionaries, and more particularly for Trotskyists. We have maintained a line of resistance, a united front against the crisis and austerity, references to the revolutionary programme. But we are pulled this way and that between going back to the traditional revolutionary Left, the far Left of the 1960s or the maintenance of movements originating in the 1930s and the pressure of left reformist organizations and currents. We had already discussed the historical need to emerge from a situation where we regarded ourselves as "the left opposition to Stalinism". Stalinism collapsed, but we should be careful, there are still post-Stalinist parties, even though they are considerably weakened. But we are not succeeding in getting away from conceptions that are marked by this situation of left opposition. We have difficulty in taking account of the full dimension of a wholesale reorganization of the working-class and social movement. We have difficulty in redefining a project that is independent and at the same time enables us to act politically. We have difficulty in formulating an independent project for the long term. That also brings us back to rethinking a programme for the twenty-first century: the Fourth International has started to reflect on the need to think about a new ecosocialist programme. We are at the beginning of that process, but we can see the repercussions of such an approach on the abandonment of nuclear power, for example. What are the implications of reformulating a transitional programme? To take up again the discussion on the question of democracy, on the relationship between direct democracy and representative democracy, on democracy in the factories and in the neighbourhoods and on the strategic

axes of a conquest of power by the workers; in short the broad outlines of a project of emancipation, with at its centre the self-activity of the workers? The programmatic cohesion that we had in the previous century, or perhaps that we thought we had in the previous century, and which was the strength of the Trotskyists, each current in its own way, cannot answer the challenges of the twenty-first centu-

ry. We are confronted with a certain loss of substance, programmatic, political, strategic, all kinds of basic elements that are fundamental for developing a political education that the acceleration of the historical process is making complicated today for revolutionaries... There are more questions than answers.

QUEBEC

Québec solidaire struggles to define its space in shifting political landscape

RICHARD FIDLER ·

Only days earlier, the QS candidate had tripled the party's vote in a by-election in Bonaventure, a rural riding in the Gaspé region; her 9% of the popular vote (up from 3% in the 2008 general election) has inspired high hopes in the party of equivalent or better results in a Quebec general election, which could occur next year. A wave of enthusiasm swept the delegates when the candidate, Patricia Chartier, was introduced. Although she ran third (behind the Liberals, 49%, and Parti Québécois, 37%), her tally seemed to many a successful result for a small pro-independence party that is generally portrayed in the mass media as anti-capitalist.

Election expectations were definitely in the air as delegates turned their attention to education, healthcare, social welfare, housing and cultural and language policy. These are the bread-and-butter issues on which the party hopes its proposals will resonate with an electorate fed up with neoliberal austerity, cutbacks, downsizing and offloading. And they are issues with which many of the delegates are well acquainted through their own lives as teachers, students, healthcare professionals and workers, and activists in the various social movements.

The common theme of most of the adopted proposals was defense of existing public services and their accessibility free of charge in opposition to the wave of privatizations that is ravaging such services as healthcare and education. But delegates also adopted a resolution proposed by QS members in Jean-Lesage riding (Quebec City) calling for "de-

mocratic management of public services" through mechanisms of participative democracy allowing users, workers and local citizens to determine local and regional priorities and the resources to be allocated to them.

The delegates reaffirmed Québec solidaire's commitment to free-of-charge public education from kindergarten to university. They called for strengthening "a public, democratic, secular school system independent of market forces." However, by a large majority they turned down a proposal for a single public school system, voting instead in favour of a mixed system comprising both public schools financed by the state and private schools offering equivalent curriculum but without state funding. Some 20 percent of Quebec elementary and secondary students attend private schools, which are funded at present by the government. Thus, while wealthy elites may still send their children to private schools, the effect of the adopted proposal would be to stream many students into the public system.

The adopted resolutions also called for an end to shaping the curriculum of junior colleges (CEGEPs) to the job market and the interests of big business, and for freeing university research and development from corporate influences. Schools would be encouraged to propose their own curriculum, democratically decided in consultation with parents, students and staff, in addition to the official program of the Ministry.

The proposals on healthcare reflected an approach that would focus on preventive medicine and greater attention to alternative and traditional medicines. Proposed measures include strengthening front-line services in the popular local commu-

nity service centres (CLSCs), enhancing home-care and restoring the public educational role of the CLSCs. A major issue is the lack of doctors in rural areas and remote regions. But delegates rejected a proposal that would impose financial penalties on doctors who leave Quebec before working five years in a region (10 in a university health centre). And on a very close vote they rejected a proposal to integrate all family doctors in CLSCs, which would effectively put them all on salary instead of fee-for-service.

A major issue in Quebec is the urgent need to strengthen French as the common language of employment and public discourse. Delegates voted for revisions to the Charter of the French Language (Law 101) that would, among other things, prohibit employers from requiring knowledge of English unless it is demonstrated that English is indispensable to the job, and to strengthen French as the language of work by extending the Charter's reach to companies with fewer than 50 employees (the current threshold). They rejected proposals to make French the sole language of instruction in the CEGEPs and universities, reflecting QS's position that students who wish to study in English do so primarily because of job requirements and that the solution lies instead in reinforcing French in the workplace.

A separate resolution was adopted on "Immigration and the French language." It outlined how recent (and often non-Francophone) immigrants could be encouraged to integrate with the French-speaking majority through such measures as increased accessibility to regulated trades and professions, affirmative hiring of immigrants in the public service, and an end to job discrimination by ethnic profiling.

On media and communications, adopted proposals included creating a Quebec public radio network, eliminating commercial advertising on public radio and TV, and creating an independent agency to supervise and regulate Quebec broadcasting (replacing the federal CRTC). A major debate occurred over the proposal to "place distribution of telecom-

munications under public control, including if needed complete (100%) nationalization." As one delegate noted, Quebec has the highest rates in the world for cell-phone use. In the end, however, the entire set of proposals on this topic was referred to the party's policy commission for further study.

Proposals for substituting public debate and culture in place of commercial advertising and marketing in the media, and even "complete elimination of commercial advertising," were set aside. Delegates instead called for regulations to avoid sexism, racism, violence, etc. from the media.

Québec solidaire is now on record in support of a guaranteed minimum income. In the context of a full-employment policy, the adopted resolution reads, "for anyone who is unemployed or with insufficient income, the state will provide a guaranteed and unconditional minimum income paid on an individual basis from the age of 18. This income could be complementary to income from work or other income support where these are below the established threshold." This proposal should be read in light of previous QS commitments for a substantial increase in the minimum wage and for a shorter work week without reduction in wages. However, the "established threshold" was left undefined.

Delegates selected guaranteed annual income over other options that were proposed, such as a "citizenship income" that would operate like old-age security but be paid to everyone, children included; a living wage (*salaire à vie*) related to skills, studies, know-how, etc.; and a "universal guaranteed social income" that would replace all tax redistribution measures and income support transfers other than family allowances.

The convention also voted in favour of establishing a universal retirement plan comprising a vastly improved Quebec Pension Plan that would replace the many private and public plans, including RRSPs. Benefits would be defined and indexed, available at age 60, and adapted to need and years worked, with supplements for low-income beneficiaries.

Employee contributions would be geared to capacity to pay.

Other proposals adopted included a massive program of investment in quality social housing (public, cooperative and community), and limits on rents to no more than 25% of income.

Finance capital gets a pass

While the delegates managed, on a very tight agenda, to wade through the 65-page resolutions book, readily disposing of a mass of detailed resolutions and amendments that had previously been debated in draft form in local membership assemblies and aggregates, they seemed less comfortable with some unfinished business that had been referred to this convention from the previous one in March for lack of time. These were resolutions on "Nationalization of the banks" and a similar one on other financial institutions, and a set of resolutions addressed to tax policy.

In the wake of the developing global protests against capitalist austerity and government bailouts of the banks, it might be thought that expropriation of the banks and financial interests would be high on the agenda of a party that sometimes promises to "go beyond capitalism." And indeed, in the lead-up to the March convention, the QS policy commission had proposed, in a draft resolution, that "to eliminate completely the influence of private financial power," an independent Quebec would implement "a complete nationalization of the banking system." The QS national coordinating committee (CCN) had responded, however, with a counter-proposal to nationalize banking "if and as needed," this phrase (*au besoin*) being underlined in the resolutions booklet.

But many of the delegates at this December convention were relatively new to the party, and seemed less familiar than those in the previous convention with economic and financial questions. Also, the left-over resolutions attracted little attention in the pre-convention discussions. And this convention met in a context that was much more

electoralist-oriented; QS is now an established party, much more subject to media scrutiny and criticism. (This was the first QS convention covered live by Radio-Canada television.) Opportunist pressures weigh more heavily on the members.

No less than seven options were presented and debated. Most advocated "socializing" or "nationalizing" banking and private finance (one called for complete expropriation). In the end, the convention, voting each proposal up or down in a process of elimination, simply opted "to establish a state bank, either through creation of a new institution or by partial nationalization of the banking system," which would "compete with the private banks." As a few delegates had noted, however, as long as most of the banking and financial industry remains privately owned, a single bank could compete with others only on much the same terms; Quebec has a vivid example of this in the *caisses populaires*, the credit unions that started as a chain of small parish-based banks but now comprise the giant Desjardins complex which largely replicates the lending and investment practices of the major chartered banks.

The proposals for "nationalization of financial institutions other than banks" were referred without debate to the policy commission for further study. And the proposals on taxation policy were referred once again to the policy commission for consideration when preparing the QS election platform. These draft proposals included placing personal incomes 30 times the minimum wage in the highest tax bracket, imposing estate taxes, shifting the tax burden from individuals to corporations, and reviewing consumption taxes as "regressive." (In its 2008 election platform, QS called for abolishing the Quebec sales tax or at least adjusting it to meet ecological concerns.)

All said, it was hardly "a program of social transformation," as alleged by one enthusiastic QS member. But the adopted proposals are probably a fair representation of many of the demands raised by the social movements in current struggles, and enough to distinguish Québec solidaire, as an inde-

pendentist party, from the capitalist Parti Québécois.

An end to discussion on program?

At a post-convention news conference, QS president Françoise David said the party "has now adopted almost the totality of the program that shapes our vision for the next 15 years." She and other QS leaders now plan to convert a subsequent program convention, scheduled for April 2012, into a more modest event designed to fine-tune an election platform.

However, there are in fact many topics that have not yet been addressed in this programmatic exercise — among them, agriculture and international affairs. Québec solidaire originated amidst the mobilizations of the altermondialistes, the opponents of capitalist globalization, antiwar activists, and proponents of global justice and solidarity with progressive movements and governments around the world. David herself was best known for helping to initiate the World March of Women. The Union des forces progressistes (UFP), a QS predecessor, took strong positions in opposition to imperialist war and "free trade" agreements. These are positions that should resonate with the new generation of activist youth, "the indignés" who just recently occupied public spaces in Montréal and Quebec City in solidarity with the Occupy Wall Street movement.

It is worth noting, however, that QS does occasionally address international questions. An important initiative was taken this past summer when the QS leadership designated Manon Massé as the party's representative on the Boat to Gaza project, in solidarity with Palestine and the Boycott, Sanctions and Divestment campaign unanimously endorsed at a previous convention. More such initiatives would be welcome.

Likewise, Québec solidaire has yet to develop its thinking on agrarian issues, or to connect in any significant way with farmers' organizations that are fighting on behalf of "peasant agriculture" and or-

ganic farming practices. Some, such as the Union paysanne (UP), the Quebec affiliate of Via Campesina, are trying to abolish mandatory membership in the government-backed farmers organization, the Union des producteurs agricoles (UPA), which is dominated by major agribusiness interests. An agrarian program must be an integral part of any regional development strategy, and intersects closely with important environmental protest movements, including the mass movement now developing against shale gas exploration and development.

Another major area of Québec solidaire's activity that remains largely undeveloped so far is the labour movement. Although the party adopted strong proposals on labour and trade unions at its March 2011 convention, it still lacks a consistent and coherent intervention in this milieu. A book recently published by QS leader Françoise David [2] outlining her vision for the party and Quebec scarcely mentions the organized labour movement or employment issues, although full employment and strong unions are key to achieving any serious redistribution of wealth in a capitalist society.

This lacuna has important implications for contemporary politics. The Charest government, taking advantage of recent exposures of corruption and union coercion in Quebec's construction industry — and hoping to distract public attention from its own share of recent corruption scandals — has scapegoated construction workers by introducing legislation to abolish a longstanding practice of "placement syndical," the union hiring hall by which jobs are allocated under the control of the respective unions the workers have chosen to represent them. Under Bill 33, workers will now be assigned to jobs by a government bureaucracy — unelected and not answerable to the workers. The main beneficiaries of Bill 33 will be the construction bosses, the very ones at the source of the industry's corrupt practices. Yet Amir Khadir, the sole QS member of the National Assembly, did not fight the bill and was absent for the vote, when the 99 MNAs present voted unanimously in favour. A remarkable opportuni-

ty was lost for Québec solidaire to stand out as the sole defender of an important section of the Quebec working class. [3]

During a break in the convention proceedings, about 30 members, mostly trade unionists but also a few students, met in a meeting of the party's "Intersyndicale," an informal caucus of union members, to discuss ways to network and engage in possible future actions, especially in collaboration with student activists who are mounting a militant campaign for free education in opposition to the Charest government's scheduled tuition fee increases. The Intersyndicale has recently published an attractive leaflet outlining the program on labour and the unions that was adopted at the March 2011 convention.

Major challenges ahead

Québec solidaire faces some imposing challenges in the coming period. The tectonic plates under Quebec's political landscape are shifting. The capitalist parties that have dominated the province's politics for the last 40 years or more are in crisis. Jean Charest's governing Liberals (the PLQ) are mired in mounting scandals, and popular discontent with the party is fueled in particular by its flagrant collaboration with the resources multinationals; yet Charest's new flagship program Plan Nord offers only further concessions to them. The Parti québécois, out of office since 2003, is bleeding profusely from the crisis that erupted in sovereigntist ranks on the heels of the New Democratic Party's "orange surge" in the May federal election. To date, a half-dozen of its MNAs have defected, most of them in opposition to PQ leader Pauline Marois' insistence on placing the fight for Quebec sovereignty on the backburner for the foreseeable future.

Meanwhile, a group of former Péquistes and Liberals led by ex-PQ minister François Legault and businessman Charles Sirois have formed a new party, Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ), which advocates putting the national question on ice for the next ten years — a position which apparently appeals to many Québécois who have abandoned

hope for any change in Quebec's constitutional status for the foreseeable future. The CAQ has already absorbed the right-wing Action démocratique du Québec (ADQ) and appears to be capturing substantial support from former Liberal and PQ supporters although it has yet to contest any election.

Québec solidaire is faced with an unprecedented opportunity to mobilize support among disaffected Péquistes as the independentist party with a relatively progressive social agenda. However, under the first-past-the-post electoral system, its electoral prospects are quite uncertain, and in a multiparty context it is impossible to predict how even an electoral score of 10% or more might — or might not — translate into seats in the National Assembly. In the circumstances, the party leadership — and a portion of the membership [4] — continues to entertain hopes of negotiating a deal with the PQ (or possibly the Verts, the "Green" party) under which each party would agree to stand down from running a candidate in one or more ridings where the two parties are in relatively close contention, thus facilitating the election of QS candidates. Many QS members are inclined to view the PQ as a party of the "left" — not so much because of its politics, which are thoroughly neoliberal, but because QS and the PQ appeal to much the same constituency of working class voters.

In recent months both Françoise David and Amir Khadir, the party's co-leaders, have publicly spoken in favour of such a deal, to the dismay of many QS members, who voted at the party's last convention in March to reject any such "tactical alliances." With this in mind, QS militant Marc Bonhomme moved an emergency motion at the opening of the QS convention to add to the agenda a debate on the question of alliances, from the perspective of proposing that QS work instead to build a "left front," both electoral and extra-parliamentary, with the unions and popular movements "against the Right of the banks, the bosses and the parties in their pay, the PLQ-PQ-ADQ-CAQ." Bonhomme's motion was defeated. Although the vote meant there was no debate on the strategic direction for

QS proposed by the motion, it does mean that the March convention's decision remains in force — as Amir Khadir later conceded to reporters who had been unaware of the vote taken in March in a closed session of that convention.

In any event, the PQ has virtually ruled out any talk of alliances. In a document on institutional reform to be debated by its National Council in January, the PQ leadership opposes any electoral reform that would offer proportional representation to parties (as proposed by Québec solidaire), and proposes instead a two-round system of voting in which, failing a majority for a candidate in the first round, the two candidates with the highest scores would face off in a second round. Given its present standing in the polls, Québec solidaire's candidates would have little chance of election except in a very few Montréal ridings under this formula.

Still unclear is the possible long-term impact on Québec solidaire of the recent gains of the NDP, now a factor in Quebec politics and not just on the federal scene. Notwithstanding QS's independence, there is considerable overlap in popular sup-

port and even membership of the two parties. Significantly, the QS candidate in the Bonaventure by-election, Patricia Cloutier, staffs the constituency office of the local NDP member of parliament. However, the NDP's progress in Quebec may be ephemeral; judging from recent opinion polls, its stumbling on some issues related to the national question during the recent session of the federal Parliament — such as its acquiescence to the appointment of a unilingual Anglophone Supreme Court judge and federal Auditor General, or its contradictory reactions to Quebec's exclusion from the recent multibillion dollar shipbuilding contract — is a factor in a serious decline in support in the province. The NDP's historic inability to relate to Quebec's national consciousness is demonstrated repeatedly, even on questions that may seem trivial to an uncomprehending audience in English Canada but are regarded by most Québécois as vital to their identity and existence as a minority nation within Canada.

December 16, 2011.

Thanks to Nathan Rao, like me an observer at the convention, for his input.

EGYPT

Egypt's labour movement takes a tumble

YASSIN GABER ·

After a wave of strikes and workers' action fuelled and empowered Egypt's 18-day uprising, the burgeoning labour movement, subsequently empowered, began asserting itself: unilaterally declaring an independent trade union federation to rival its state-run counterpart and undertaking steps to dismantle the power dynamics and structure of the state's union. Recently, however, Egypt's workers and unionists have found themselves fighting to maintain their gains.

In March, Egypt's manpower minister, Ahmed Hassan El-Borai announced the right of Egyptian workers to establish their own labour unions and federations, an action hailed by the International Labour Organisation. But a new trade union law is yet to be passed by Egypt's military rulers, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF).

Following the August enforcement of a 2006 judgement, the state-run Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF) board was dissolved. However, these steps have been stymied by the government's continued reliance on members of the old-guard whenever it comes to implementation. This adds up, in the words of Hisham Fouad, a founding member of the Democratic Workers Party, to a government outlook that is "counter-revolutionary and opposed to workers' progress." Added to this, their refusal to consult directly with independent unionists is, for him, proof of a deeper intransigence and indicative of the ruling military council's desire to quell the movement.

The decision by former prime minister Essam Sharaf to dissolve the ETUF board and freeze the general union's assets was a high point for independent unionists. But a sobering reality set in in its

immediate aftermath. A steering committee consisting of independent, state-affiliated and Muslim Brotherhood unionists was tasked with examining the general union's financial affairs. This de-facto board began reviewing reports by the Central Auditing Organisation: reports that contain hundreds of infractions and financial remarks linked to the ETUF as well as other organisations under its umbrella.

Unionists found to have illicit financial dealings were supposed to be turned over to the prosecutor-general's office, but interests got in the way. The committee was paralysed by its multi-factional composition.

A coalition of four general unions – the Union of Petrol Workers, the Union of Flour Mill Workers, the Maritime Transport Workers Union and the Transport Workers Union – went on strike in mid-November, calling for the dissolution of the Cabinet-appointed steering committee. Members of the de-facto board also tried, unsuccessfully, to remove its head, Ahmed Abdel Zahir, a carry-over from the dissolved board and an associate of its former head, Hussein Megawer. The notorious businessman was charged earlier this year for playing a role in the 2 February "Battle of the Camel."

When El-Borai was unable to put an end to the strike, he dissolved the steering committee and replaced it with another one consisting of figures from the old board – associates of Megawer. "We've regressed. The situation now is just like when Hussein Megawer was around," states Wael Habib, member of the steering committee.

Fouad believes that this move is a response by the ruling SCAF to the wave of strikes that swept Egypt in September. "The SCAF felt more in control and

needed to clampdown on the empowered labour movement," Fouad states.

Following the imposition of a new ETUF committee, El-Borai announced on 28 November that the newly-formed Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU) had agreed to join the state-run ETUF, creating much alarm and sending signals that the government no longer valued union pluralism or freedoms. Though confusion and speculation is still rife, it would seem that such a consensus between independent unionists and their state-affiliated counterparts never truly existed.

"We will not get involved with them in any respect. We reject the notion of a state-run trade union," Fatma Ramadan, a board member of the EFITU and labour activist, stresses.

Ramadan had to withdraw her candidacy in the People's Assembly (Parliament's lower house) elections, after administrative courts in the governorates of Giza and Menoufiya (both in the upcoming second round of elections) refused to accept candidates who received their workers' status from the independent general union. According to Ramadan, the EITUF authorised the candidacy of between 300 and 400 workers for Egypt's three stage People's Assembly elections. Of those, around ten unionists, including Ramadan, were denied the right to stand for elections as workers.

In a 20 July decree, the ruling SCAF maintained a 47-year-old quota for representatives of workers and peasants in both the upper and lower houses of Egypt's Parliament. Unionists are divided on whether this quota should be consigned to the fate of the old-regime or refashioned. "The 50 per cent quota for workers and fellahin is meant to protect these sectors: give them a voice, but when the quota is used to fill parliament with businessmen and technicians who do you think they will defend: themselves or the workers?" asks Ramadan.

Saud Omar, a member of the Suez Canal Authority's workers union and workers candidate in Suez, believes that the 50 per cent quota should remain but that a new law must be put in place to

ensure that elected representatives come from the workers and truly stand for them, preventing misuse of the system. "Parliament does not truly speak for the people. The millions of people heading to the streets proves this and negates the supposed role of parliament, but we still must work through these political avenues."

While the country's first post-Mubarak elections promise to bring to power what some observers predict will be the most legitimate parliament since the 1930s, the make-up of the forthcoming parliament will to a varying degree determine the course of the workers' movement.

First round results reveal strong electoral gains by the Muslim Brotherhood's political arm, the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), and the Salafist Nour Party. Even with two rounds left in the People's Assembly elections, many observers believe an Islamist takeover is now inevitable. Should Islamists come to power, the labour movement can expect to come up against certain obstacles. The FJP has previously condoned the ruling SCAF's opposition to strikes, going a step further by attempting to force an end to teacher's strikes in some governorates last September. The Nour Party has also taken an anti-strike line, calling such labour actions, at this point in time, "undesirable." The only liberal list to make any substantial gains in the first round was the Egyptian Bloc. The Free Egyptians, the Bloc's leading partner, also has an unfavourable labour stance which it made clear when it quickly declared its support of the ruling military council's anti-strike law in July.

Nevertheless, some labour activists are resolute: "We are undeterred by parliamentary elections; the battle for parliament is only part of the struggle. The street is where our main fight lies. We demand the right to freely unionise, an end to the law criminalising strikes, a minimum and maximum wage, the restart of stalled factories and the rehiring of their workers, an increase in pensions and adequate health care," Ramadan states.

According to labour lawyer and Revolutionary Socialists member Haitham Mohamedein, "The true issue lies in the law." Specifically Law No 35 (1976), which outlined the structural and electoral regulations of the state-run ETUF among other central organisations. The ruling military junta's decision to shelve the draft legislation, approved by the Manpower Ministry and then by Sharaf's Cabinet, is the crux of the matter, Mohamedein believes. The legislation would allow, for the first time since the 1950s, trade union pluralism and freedoms for workers and businessmen to form their own unions and syndicates respectively, but strong unions and syndicates would challenge a system

that breeds corruption, oligarchy and social inequality.

The Brotherhood has always fought for control of syndicates and unions, states the labour lawyer, and they will approach the ETUF in a similar fashion. "The FJP wants the general union to be under their thumb and they will control the federation through elections: elections framed by Law No 53. It is not in their interest to radically change this law. The workers movement is a source of anxiety for businessmen and the Brotherhood. They could possibly seek to amend the law but would not allow the same freedoms as the shelved legislation."

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KAZAKHSTAN

Repression intensifies against Kazakh oil workers' uprising

PETER SALMON ·

The protests started on 9 May at Karazhanbasmunai, a joint venture owned by Kazmunaigaz, the main state-controlled national oil company, and CITIC, a Chinese holding company. The immediate spark was Karazhanbasmunai's refusal to recognise the results of a trade union election that had gone against a collaborationist official. On 9 May, 1400 workers refused to eat lunches and dinners, and on 17 May 4500 walked out. They demanded pay parity with workers at OzenMunaiGaz, KazMunaiGaz's largest production subsidiary – who themselves had won a substantial increase in basic wages, and torpedoed company plans for a greater element of production-linked pay, with a 19-day wildcat stoppage in March 2010.[i] [1]

On 11 May, activists called for a general strike across Mangistau region. Kazakh workers employed by Ersai Caspian Contractor, a joint venture owned by ENI, the Italian-based multinational oil company, and ERC Holdings of Kazakhstan, joined the protests. They demanded pay parity with foreign employees doing the same jobs, who they said were paid twice as much. Ersai refused to negotiate with the strikers, ten of whom went on hunger strike, and retaliated with sackings, according to a news agency. [2]

In late May the action spread to the larger workforce at OzenMunaiGaz, where workers – including transport drivers and those conducting well servicing and well workover operations – demanded pay rises to make up for rapid inflation since their increase last year and the slashing of bonus pay-

ments. On 24 May a local court declared strike action at the company illegal, but on 26 May there was a mass walkout nonetheless.

The strikers in the three companies advanced various demands. The principle concern at Ozenmunaigaz was for a recalculation of the coefficients (i.e. regional weighting, industry premia, etc) on which pay depends, Kazakhstan's main business newspaper reported. Other demands reported by the Association of Human Rights for Central Asia included: the right for independent trade unions (the Karakiyak union and others) to function; revision of collective agreements "on the principle of equality of parties"; a 100% wage increase to bring workers' living standards up to minimum; and for wages and conditions to meet International Labour Organisation standards [3]

The strike now turned into a grand battle between the workforce on one side, and the companies and authorities on the other. KazMunaiGaz Exploration and Production (KMG EP), which owns all of OzenMunaiGaz and half of Karazhanbasmunai – and is itself state-controlled but with 39% owned by investors via a London stock exchange listing – announced that it now expected to lose 540,000 tonnes of oil production, 4% of its previously projected total of 13.5 million tonnes in 2011, due to the dispute. Ozenmunaigaz's output had already fallen by 2% in 2010, mainly due to the strike in that year. [4]

On 1 June, Natalia Sokolova, a lawyer who had advised the workers, was arrested and both OzenMunaiGaz and Karazhanbasmunai began sacking strikers. Tensions were heightened further when Sabit Kenzhebaev, a transport department manager at Karazhanbasmunai who had been in-

structed to sack strikers against his will, died of a heart attack. On 5 June, 500 Karazhanbasmunai workers gathered in Aktau, the capital of the Mangistau region, intending to march to the akimat (regional authority) building to protest – but were dispersed violently by police. Three strikers, including the prominent trade union activist Kuanysh Sisenbaev, were admitted to hospital with knife wounds after harming themselves as a protest. Local authority employees were instructed to go to work as strikebreakers, and threatened with sackings if they refused, according to labour movement information networks. [5]

During June, some strikers returned to work, but those who remained out grew more determined. Workers established a "tent city" in Zhanaozen, and on 8 July it was broken up by baton-wielding police – to which about 60 responded by pouring petrol on themselves and threatening to set themselves alight. Another thousand demonstrators were encircled by police outside the OzenMunaiGaz headquarters. There were repeated confrontations between police and a crowd of several thousand in the days that followed. [6]

The movement has a political aspect. Not only was it first sparked by a row over union representation, and featured demands for the right to organise independent unions, but it has also led to mass resignations from Nur-Otan, Kazakhstan's ruling political party. Workers at state-controlled enterprises are encouraged to join it, in a manner reminiscent of Communist Party recruitment in the Soviet period – and on 11 August a large group marched to the Nur-Otan regional headquarters in Zhanaozen to hand in their resignations. A spokesman told reporters that 3000 of them had quit, since they had been forced to join anyway, and their demands had not been met. The Nur-Otan regional leader, Koshbai Qyzanbaev, acknowledged only 1089 resignations. [7]

As the summer wore on, the Kazakh courts and police stepped up repression against activists. Natalia Sokolova, the lawyer assisting the strikers, was on 8 August sentenced to six years in jail for "inciting so-

cial discord"; Akzhanat Aminov, a trade union leader at OzenMunaiGaz, and Natalia Azhigalieva, an activist, have been arrested and charged with the same crime, while Kuanysh Sisinbaev has been sentenced to 200 hours' community service. On 16 August, Zhanbolat Mamay, a 23-year-old activist in an opposition political group, Rukh Pen Til, was arrested as he returned from Moscow – where he addressed a press conference and civil society meetings about the oil industry dispute – and sentenced to 10 days' administrative detention. According to company statements, 373 OzenMunaiGaz employees and 160 from Karazhanbasmunai have been dismissed for "illegal" strike action. One activist, Zhaksylyk Turbaev, has been murdered by unidentified thugs. [8]

The oilfield conflict makes a mockery of Kazakhstan's long-standing efforts to present itself in the west as a democratic state, and human rights organisations in western Europe have not lost the opportunity to point this out. On 6 July, with encouragement from Amnesty International, the rock singer Sting cancelled a planned appearance in Astana at a \$700-per-ticket concert, stating that he had "no intention" of crossing "a virtual picket line". The legal persecution of labour movement activists has been denounced in the European parliament by Paul Murphy, a Socialist Party/United Left Alliance member of the parliament from Ireland visited Mangistau, and others. [9]

The Kazakh oil workers' struggle bears out the proposition of the labour historian Beverly Silver that "where capital goes, conflict goes". [10] Since the break-up of the Soviet Union, western capital has made greater inroads into the oil sector in Kazakhstan than in Russia, where it has been somewhat constrained by statist and nationalist policies. In the last decade it has been joined by a gigantic inflow of Chinese capital. The Kazakh elite, who have been immensely enriched by the oil boom of the last decade, is the third part of the unholy trinity that workers face.

In Mangistau region, oil production has expanded at a healthy pace. But the riches have been divided

unequally: while billionaires flourish, and living standards have risen in the new and old capitals, Astana and Almaty, Mangistau has in terms of the UN's development indicators only been lifted to the national average, from below it. And, staggeringly, although Mangistau produces more oil than any other Kazakh region, in 2008 it had the highest

proportion of people living below the poverty line (32.4%) and the worst poverty by the UN's measures. [11] The immediacy of this injustice, the stark chasm between rich and poor, and a tradition of worker activism that has resurged in recent years, is a potent mixture that has now exploded.

First published here.

MOROCCO

Elections to contain the spirit of the popular mobilisations

ZIYAD ·

The revolutionary wave experienced by Morocco since the beginning of the year has played a role as catalyst of this movement of social struggle. The popular masses are going in their tens of thousands onto the streets besides the young unemployed graduates who mobilise on a daily basis. Small farmers are emerging from their historic silence in some regions. The striking fact in this new context of struggle is the appearance of the February 20th movement (M20) with its political demands and its demonstrations which have continued without waning for more than nine months, despite the repression and the manoeuvres of the regime.

So as to divert the democratic demands of the movement, the regime has made a formal renewal of its Constitution in which referendum was boycotted by more than half of the population, and organised the elections for the renewal of its parliamentary façade. The M20, the radical left, a part of the reformist left and the Islamist Justice and Welfare movement called for a boycott of the elections. This position was already evident in previous elections, notably that of 2007 with an official rate of participation of barely 37%.

Contrary to the false result of a participation rate of 45% announced by the regime for the elections of November 25, the real rate, using the official figures, is 21%. The number of Moroccans of voting age is 21 million, while 13.5 million are registered to vote. The number of voters was 6.1 million and that of spoiled ballots 1.6 million.

It is clear to all that the regime favours the Party of Justice and Development (PJD), a moderate Islamist party, which it created in 1996 to counteract the influence of the radical Islamist movement. The PJD finally won 107 seats out of a total of 395. This shows that the regime is playing its last cards in terms of choice of political parties. King Hassan II has already played the card of the USFP, which dominated the scene of struggles, notably in the trade unions, through the Confédération démocratique du travail (CDT) and which had a long history of opposition, to save its regime from "cardiac arrest" and guarantee a tranquil transition. The choice of the PJD reflects a political necessity of changing somewhat a little the contours of the old parties of support which are broadly discredited, to appear in perfect harmony with the electoral breakthrough of the Islamist movements in the electoral processes underway in the Arab region, to claim to be in line with the democratic spirit at play, and to say to the imperialist centres that Morocco is successfully negotiating change, led by the king and his new constitution.

But the regime cannot control the explosive situation by using the PJD, which has no roots on the scene of struggle and concerns itself with a hollow moral charlatanism, without ever opposing neoliberal policies and the international financial institutions which sap the sovereignty of the country, destroy progress and increase poverty. All the political mechanisms by which the regime tried to camouflage its despotic nature are in the process of profoundly losing legitimacy in the eyes of the popular masses who have expressed their rejection by a high rate of abstention and by the big marches of November 20 (five days before the elections) in

nearly 70 towns and villages at the call of the M20, and those of November 27 (two days after).

This big mobilisation is qualitative and truly historic in Morocco. It constitutes a first stage on the road to a radical change of the institutions of the king. The task of revolutionaries is to continue the fight for the strengthening of the movement of

struggle for democracy and social justice by broadening the base of the M20 through an active participation of the trade union movement, young students and pupils, unemployed graduates and the pauperised social categories in struggle in the popular neighbourhoods and the marginalised regions.

November 30, 2011

PORTUGAL

Against the unacceptable burden of the debt, the condition of democracy is social struggle

BLOCO DE ESQUERDA ·

During a press conference that followed the work of the National Bureau, Francisco Louçã argued that, given the current Portuguese political and social panorama, "it will be necessary to mobilize a unified general social struggle strong enough to resist the destruction of the Portuguese economy."

Referring to the debt crisis and urgent European issues, the Bloco leader warned that the European Summit on December 9 needed to approve measures that included "a complete withdrawal of the issuance of sovereign debt securities of the European states from the clutches of the global speculative financial system and the use of bank financing, as in the U.S., and as in Britain, to protect economies and to reposition the economy in the sense of its priorities: an economy against speculation and promoting employment." In the event that this measure is not approved, the euro is at risk of collapse, warned Louçã, saying that, if this does not happen, we will see a continued disintegration of the euro and an exponential growth of austerity policies.

Bloco hails the general strike and condemns the abstention of the PS on the 2012 Budget

In the resolution adopted by the National Bureau with 2 abstentions and 0 votes against, the Left Bloc salutes "the organizers of the strike and its unitary convergence, and highlights its efforts to ensure that demonstrations are the place of the festa and the indignation of the people, in which everyone can participate safely "considering that " it is unacceptable that police action would restrict the right of people to express themselves."

In this document, the Bloco also condemned "the abstention of the PS in the Budget, once again protecting recessionary policies and worsening the national crisis" and announced the promotion, via the internet, of a Petition "to be signed by members of the Workers' Commissions, trade unionists, MPs, members of social movements and personalities in our society that will culminate in late January with a public initiative."

The Bloco is opposed to the measures proposed by Merkel and Sarkozy

With regard to European issues, the Bloco de Esquerda in this resolution reaffirms "its frontal opposition to the measures proposed by Merkel and Sarkozy: oversight of the budgets of national states, worsening of sanctions against economies in difficulties or suspension of the structural funds" which "constitute unacceptable forms of authoritarian restriction of the capacities of choice of each country."

The Bloco also announced "its willingness to fight, with all forces, for a popular referendum where the people can express their views on the policies of austerity and the appropriation of the Union by the governments of Germany and France" and has four emergency proposals against financial blackmail:

- a) An immediate intervention by the ECB as a lender of last resort to the states, buying the debt securities issued as required;
- b) A program of replacement of national securities by Eurobonds;
- c) A process of direct exchange between short and medium term public debt in the different European states, outside the financial markets;

d) The immediate withdrawal of sovereign debts from the rating system of the rating agencies.

The Bloco supports the Citizen Debt Audit

The Bloco also expressed its support for the recently initiated process of conducting a Citizen Debt Audit, and argued that "the people have the right not to pay debt that comes from speculative inter-

ests, illegal or harmful contracts, and also of unbearable burdens".

In the resolution adopted on Saturday, the Bloco opposed the recapitalization of banks with public money and demanded payment of the debts to the Portuguese people.

Finally, the Bloc sent greetings to the Bloco de Esquerda/ / Madeira for their efforts in presenting political alternatives.

SPANISH STATE

"To change things we need to work every day in the struggles"

ESTHER VIVAS ·

1. How do you evaluate the results for Izquierda Anticapitalista?

I think the campaign we waged has been good, with an activist profile, raising the need to build a left alternative at the margin of the traditional parties. While it is clear that the results in number of votes have been very modest and well below what would be necessary in a context like the present. And yet many people prefer to "vote" for options such as IU or abstain, given the difficulty of an anti-capitalist choice such as ours, in obtaining parliamentary representation. Building an anti-capitalist alternative is a process that takes time and perseverance.

2. How do you feel about the so-called anti-capitalist left (in its various organizations) being once again outside of Parliament?

Well, we were already in that situation! We know that elections are not neutral ground and are determined by money, media coverage and the institutional levers. Getting institutional representation is always difficult for the options which emerge from outside the party system. Opening an electoral breakthrough and getting anti-capitalist voices in the institutions to use them as a loudspeaker is not done in a day, it is a medium-term task.

3. There was some controversy (comments, articles and so on) in the alternative press (Rebellion, Kaos, inSurGente, La Haine and so on) on Izquierda Anticapitalista's position on what happened in Libya ... Do you support a "neither nor" position as many comments said ?

It is not about "neither nor" but having political positions responsive to the complex realities and having a dialectical view of reality, without falling into

"campist" positions to simplify things. The situation in Libya is characterized first by having a dictatorial and despotic government, an ally as well for the last decade of Europe and the United States, which therefore cannot be defended. Second, a rebellion against the regime led by sectors without credibility and not representing a left alternative. Third, an intervention by NATO and imperialism in order to bring about the fall of the regime and secure control of oil in the post-Gaddafi period. In such a scenario I think it is right from the beginning to support the popular rebellion, but without supporting the leadership of the rebel forces of the Transitional National Council, and opposing the imperialist military intervention. More generally I think it is necessary to encourage all rebellions against despotic regimes in the Arab world and oppose the attempts, both of these regimes (or their remnants) and imperialism (by military or diplomatic means), to stifle the protests

4. Do you see significant differences between the PP and the PSOE?

In the economic sphere the PP and PSOE basically defend the same policies that involve transferring the cost of the crisis to the workers and governing according to corporate interests. The Social Democrats, converted to social liberalism, have no agenda of their own for exit from the crisis different from that of the right. And while on topics such as family, sexuality, and so on, they take different approaches, the positions of the PSOE are subject to business interests. The alternation between PP-PSOE, and social conservatives and liberals that occurs in European countries has become an alternation similar to that of Democrats and Republicans in the U.S. In the end, regardless of who governs,

financial capital is in charge. Another thing is that the social base of both parties is not the same and neither is the social perception of them.

5. Do you not have the feeling that the militant activity and demands of organizations such as IA is more important than the electoral channel?

It is true that the election options such as IU, ICV and others have a strength that does not correspond to real social implantation or, even less, with their participation and involvement in the struggles. And, conversely, the groups most active in the social struggles have little electoral impact. It is precisely about trying to break this situation and not allow electoral representation to be the monopoly of forces with few links to the struggles or very supra-structural links.

6. IA had negotiations with IU on a joint electoral effort, why did they fail?

IU convened various forces to talk about 20N. We drew up an "open letter" addressed also to the entire left. It argued that any unitary bid to the left of the PSOE should be based on a project with an anti-capitalist program, be linked to social struggles, ready to use its presence in parliament in favour of mobilisations, make a critical assessment of its past of governing with the PSOE (as in the case of the tripartite Catalan government) and, above all, be represented and embodied by activists, workers, the unemployed and not professional politicians. A proposal that would represent a new project, outside the conventional party system and would be an alternative. And we saw IU had another approach, different from ours. We believe that with forces such as IU we have to work on what we agree, in social activities where they overlap, and so on. But it is clear that we have different left projects.

7. What would you say to people who have voted IU, and even for the PSOE or Equo, thinking that they are revolutionary or left organizations?

I would tell them to change things you need to work every day in the struggles and you do not change this world from the institutions, as clearly shown by history. And in an election it is better to support political organizations that have their centre of gravity in the street and not in institutions. To support organizations that do not make agreements with social-liberalism as others that you mention have done or are willing to do as evidenced by their sister organizations. But it is understandable that many people vote for these formations, but I hope that practical experience will break them from this. We should not blame anyone for supporting these forces, but persuade them of the need to make another choice.

8. How is it possible that when regional governments have taken so many unpopular decisions, the 20N did not get more votes?

We must not forget that the majority of citizens did not vote or the PP in the Spanish State or CiU in Catalonia, and even fewer have voted for the cuts. The PP won the support of 30.27% of the electorate of the state, but this is only 0.97% higher than that achieved in 2008. In Catalonia, CiU won the elections with the support of only 18.8% of the electorate. You have to remember these figures against the mantra that says that the election results legitimize their policies of cuts. But we see that the right has a significant and solid social base.

9. Is it possible that one day there will be a broad Left Front that brings together all people who question capitalism from top to bottom? Do you work for this?

We have the collective challenge of building an anti-capitalist alternative, as strong and broad as possible, which can have social impact. There are no shortcuts to this and there is a long way to go, but I think it is a shared will among many organizations, groups and individuals.

Monday December 12, 2011

RUSSIA

December 10: A new page in the history of Russia

ILYA BUDRAITSKIS ·

Only a week ago, the regime would not have imagined that it would have to face serious problems. The electoral campaign for the State Duma (parliament) was held according to rules that are now well-known to everyone, the rules of "guided democracy", an authoritarian political model whose foundations were laid by President Yeltsin in 1993, at the time of the adoption of the present Constitution. It could have been thought that over the last decade Vladimir Putin and his acolytes had succeeded in turning politics into a tiresome spectacle which nearly all of the population felt to be something completely foreign to them. Scarcely seven unrecognized parties fought to win a place in Parliament, but it was a foregone conclusion that the biggest share of the cake would go to United Russia (Putin's party). This party has a monopoly of both state structures and those of the country's big capitalist companies. In order to ensure the victory of this bureaucratic monster, whose popularity is in freefall, thousands (indeed, millions!) of civil servants were mobilized. Every possible mechanism of manipulating the vote and the work of the electoral commission was resorted to.

The growing dissatisfaction with the regime was expressed in a massive vote for parties that were seen as having a critical position with regard to United Russia. Millions of voters applied the principle of voting "for any party, but not for United Russia". They thus gave their votes to the Communist Party and the centre-left party Fair Russia. On the morn-

ing of December 5, when the results of the elections were announced, the country was indignant: United Russia had won 50 per cent of the vote, whereas its real popularity was sharply decreasing, and within the population this party is known as "the party of swindlers and thieves". The reports published by observers from the opposition revealed that nearly a quarter of the ballot papers had been tampered with to the advantage of the party in power!

Russians have the feeling of having been personally insulted and ridiculed, which comes on top of the increasingly obvious consequences of the economic crisis, with glaring poverty and the privatization of the social sector. On December 5, more than 7,000 people went to the meeting organized in Moscow by political groupings calling for democratization. The demand for "fair elections!" quickly gave way to the slogan "Putin - resign!", and at the end of the meeting violent confrontations took place between the police and the participants. Within a few days, the conflict spread and grew stronger and young people organized through social networks tried to take unauthorized actions in the city centre; they were followed closely and savagely dispersed by the police.

On Friday, nearly 1,000 people were arrested during such actions in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Finally, on Saturday December 10, the level of discontent reached its highest point. What happened that day can already be considered as a point of rupture in the history of modern Russia. For the first time since the beginning of the 1990s, millions of people were engaged in live political action, which took place in the streets. In this political activity we can already observe a battle of ideas and alternatives being played out between three forces: democrats, militants of the radical Left and nation-

alists. This battle of ideas has as its backdrop a task that everyone has made theirs: the bringing down of the Putin system and the re-establishment of elementary political liberties.

The perspectives for this newly-born movement are doubtful. But, at all events, nothing is as it was before. We are entering a new period of history where the anticapitalist Left will have a greater role to play than in the past.

| ECOFEMINISM

What is ecofeminism?

JUAN TORTOSA ·

Q. What is ecofeminism and what is its history?

Ecofeminism is a vast movement of women born from the consciousness of this double problematic and of the conviction that the struggles for both ecology and feminism contain the keys to human dignity and to sustainability in equality.

In the movements for the defence of land there were and are many women. We know the role of women in the Chipko movement in defence of the forests, in the movement against the dams on the Narmada river in India, in the struggle against the toxic residues of the Love Canal, at the origin of the movement for environmental justice in the United States, as well as their presence in the local movements of defence of communal lands, in the fight for urban public space or for healthy food. The ecologism of many poor women is an ecologism of those who depend directly on a protected environment to be able to live.

In the middle of the last century the first ecofeminism discussed the hierarchies established by Western thought and revalorized the terms of the dichotomy that had until then been depreciated: woman and nature. Masculine culture unleashed genocidal wars, devastation and poisoning of territories and the installation of despotic governments. The first ecofeminists denounced the effects of techno-science on the health of women and confronted militarism and environmental degradation. They understood these as manifestations of sexist culture. Petra Kelly is one of their representatives.

After this first ecofeminism, critical of masculinity, there followed other propositions, mainly coming from the South. These propositions considered women as bearers of respect for life. They accused Western "misdevelopment" of causing the poverty

of women and indigenous populations, who are the first victims of the destruction of nature. This is perhaps the best-known ecofeminism. In this vast movement we find Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies and Ivone Guevara.

Going beyond the essentialism of these positions, other constructivist ecofeminists (Bina Agarwal, Val Plumwood) see in the interaction with the environment the origin of this particular ecologist consciousness of women. It is the sexual division of labour, the distribution of power and property which have subjugated both women and the nature to which we all belong. The reductionist dichotomies of our Western culture must be broken in order to build a more respectful and freer way of living together.

The feminist movement has seen in ecofeminism a possible danger, given the bad historical use that patriarchy has made of the links between women and nature. Since the danger exists, it is necessary to delimit it. It is not a question of glorifying domestic life as being feminine, of again locking up women in a reproductive space, of refusing them access to culture, nor of making them responsible, if they do not have enough to do, for the enormous task of saving the planet and life. It is a question of unmasking submission, of defining responsibilities and of making men and women jointly responsible for the work of survival.

Q. Does there exist an anticapitalist ecofeminism and does it seek convergence with other anti-system social sectors? Must any emancipatory project integrate this concept? What are the principal elements of this ecofeminism?

The conception of work as it existed in preindustrial societies corresponded to the idea of an activity

which proceeded in a continuous way and which was an integral part of human nature. However, roughly two centuries ago, there emerged a new conception which was forged from the myth of production and growth, which reduced the former broad vision to the field of waged industrial production.

This reduction of the broad concept of work to the sole sphere of remunerated employment occults the fact that in order for society and the socio-economic system to continue, the realization of a long list of tasks associated with human reproduction is essential: looking after children, taking care of the elderly, the satisfaction of basic needs, the promotion of health, emotional support, encouragement to social participation... Ultimately it means an enormous quantity of working time whose purpose is to ensure the satisfaction of human needs and the wellbeing of people, and which because of the sexual division of labour imposed by patriarchal ideology falls mainly on women within the home.

Classical economists, even if they do not concede that there is any economic value in this effort, at least recognized the importance of family domestic labour, and defined wages as the historical cost of reproduction of the working class. They tended to recognize the value of domestic labour, without however incorporating it into the analytical frameworks of economic science.

This contradiction disappears almost completely with neo-classical economics, which institutionalizes definitively the separation between public and private space, between commodity production and domestic production, marginalizing and occulting the latter. It is this segregation of roles which allowed men to engage in full-time wage labour without the constraints that are constituted by tasks related to the care of individuals and the family and the maintenance of conditions of hygiene in the home. Thus a definition of the economy is imposed which is not concerned with the sexual division of labour and does not recognize the crucial role of domestic work in the reproduction of the capitalist system.

However, although care work is frequently regarded as separate from the productive environment, it ensures the production of a "raw material" that is essential for the conventional economic process: the labour force.

The capitalist system is incapable, within the framework of its own relations of production, of reproducing the labour force that it needs. Daily, but especially generational reproduction, requires an enormous quantity of time and energy which the system would be incapable of remunerating. The processes of education, socialization and care for the elderly are complex and imply affection and emotions which allow everyone to develop in a certain framework of security.

Anticapitalist ecofeminist thinking defends the idea that the socio-economic system has the form of an iceberg. The market is the floating and visible part of it. Under the surface, with a much greater mass, there is the work of maintenance of life. These two parts of the iceberg are well differentiated. The principal one is dissimulated, hidden from view, but both constitute an indivisible unity. The bloc of wage labour and the conventional economy rests on and is supported by the submerged ice of domestic work and regeneration of natural systems. The invisibility of the sphere centred on the satisfaction of basic needs and wellbeing, which absorbs tensions, is essential for keeping the system afloat.

We can say that there exists a major contradiction between the process of natural and social reproduction and the process of accumulation of capital. If social reproduction and maintenance of life were the dominant aspect of the economy, activity would be directed towards the direct production of goods of use value use and not exchange value, and wellbeing would be an end in itself.

To prioritise the two logics at the same time is impossible. It is thus necessary to choose one of them. Since the market does not have as its main aim the satisfaction of human needs, there is no sense in making it the privileged centre of social organization.

Making profits and economic growth should no longer condition the distribution of time, the organization of space and the different human activities. To build societies based on wellbeing, it is necessary to articulate them around social reproduction and the satisfaction of needs, without belittling the importance of the biophysical base that allows our species to exist.

Heterodox economic conceptions have a lot to contribute at a time when economic science is being reconfigured. Ecological economics shows us that a good part of economic activity is harmful to life, that it consumes significant amounts of resources without generating wellbeing, and that it even creates misery. Feminist economics inverts the category of work and puts back at the centre of things the historically scorned and underestimated activity of women, activity which is however the basis of daily life. With other sectors of critical economics, these different conceptions and approaches are essential to building a new model.

To recognize us as vulnerable beings requiring the attention of other people during our life cycle allows to redefine and supplement the concept of labour-capital conflict and to affirm that this conflict goes beyond just the tension between capital and wage labour and reflects a tension between capital and all labour, that which is paid and that which is carried out for nothing.

Let us also remember that, in an ecological perspective, the fundamental contradiction which exists between the present economic metabolism and the durability of the biosphere brings out an important synergy between ecologist and feminist conceptions. The ecological perspective demonstrates the physical impossibility of a society centred on growth. Feminism makes this conflict palpable in our daily lives and denounces the logic of accumulation and growth as being a patriarchal and androcentric logic. The insoluble and radical (at the root) tension which exists between the capitalist economic system and the sustainability of human life demonstrates, in reality, an essential opposition between capital and life.

Putting the satisfaction of basic needs and wellbeing in conditions of equality as the objective of society and of the economic process represents an important change of perspectives. It situates the satisfaction of the needs which make it possible for individuals to grow, to develop and to live with dignity, just like work and the production that is socially necessary for that, as a structuring axis of society and consequently of analyses. In this new perspective, women are not secondary beings, nor are they dependent, but active beings, actresses of their own history, who create cultures and values of work that are different from those of the capitalist and patriarchal model.

BRITAIN

N30: unions strike a blow against weak government

FRED LEPLAT ·

Demonstrations were held in many places, including in small towns which had never seen a protest since the beginning of the Iraq war in 2003. Over 50,000 took to the streets in London and 15,000 in Belfast, but there were also 100 in Lerwick in Shetland! For the overwhelming majority of those who took action on 30th November, it was the first time that they were on strike. Two out of three schools were closed, museums and tribunals were closed, and non-emergency operations in many hospitals were cancelled.

The strike was a tremendous success not just because of its size, but because everybody knew that it was not just about pensions, but also about the defence of public services and ultimately, who pays for the crisis. It put the issue of fair pensions for all on the agenda.

The Tory-led government has been arguing that it is not fair that public sector workers get a better pension than those working in the private sector. However, they say nothing about the multi-million yearly earnings that bankers get such as the £7million pocketed by the heads of Barclays and Royal Bank of Scotland. There are over 2.5 million pensioners living below the poverty level of £178 a week. Pensioner poverty in Britain is among the worst in Europe – there are only three countries in Europe that have worse pension provision than those in Britain, that is Cyprus, Latvia and Estonia! France spends twice as much on pensions than does the UK.

The strike was a long time in coming. The Tory led coalition government announced as soon as it was elected that it would unleash war on public ser-

vices, and the pay and conditions of workers in general. Although the TUC agreed in September 2010 to organise co-ordinated national industrial action against these attacks, it took six months to organise a national demonstration on 26th March of 500,000. Despite this tremendous success, the leadership of the three big unions and the TUC were reluctant to organise action. It was only because of a hugely successful strike on 30th June by the teaching unions UCU, NASWUT and NUT and the PCS civil servants union, that all the other unions and the TUC decided to call on their members to strike.

The leadership of most unions were pushed into organising for the strike because of pressure from their members wanting action and because they had no longer any choice but to do something. The government had been dragging out negotiations since the beginning of the year without any concessions, and had even imposed some unilateral changes to the pension schemes including pushing back the retirement age to 67 for younger workers.

The Tory government is now increasing the attacks on the working class as the recession is now on the verge of turning into a depression: public sector workers already suffering from a two-year pay freeze will see any increase "capped" at 1 per cent. With inflation running at 5.4 per cent, this is effectively a 20 per cent pay cut over four years. The government announced that 710,000 will go, up from the 400,000 announced last year! Osborne, the Chancellor of the Exchequer said he would do "whatever it takes" to cut the deficit. This means tax breaks for the rich and corporations funded by taking money from the rest of us.

The strike on 30th November can only be a beginning in the resistance against the Tory-led coalition government. The action needs to be escalated with

dates for action set for early next year involving private sector workers. Youth and students need to be involved as stopping pushing back the retirement age would immediately deal with youth unemployment now at a record level of over 1 million or 20% of those under 25.

This is not just a crisis of the British economy. It is a crisis of the capitalist system which is attempting

to make the working class pay for it. The action in Britain on Wednesday 30th November was followed on Thursday by a one-day general strike in Greece and on Friday by joint-union action in Belgium. The need for a European-wide solidarity and joint action is now more necessary than ever to roll back the neo-liberal assault on all of the post-war gains.

RUSSIA

"Let the Streets Speak!"

RUSSIAN SOCIALIST MOVEMENT (RSD) ·

The most boring election campaign in the past twenty years has ended with a crushing moral defeat for the establishment. It hardly matters whether United Russia will gain a super-majority in the Duma or has to share seats with LDPR or A Just Russia. What matters is that, despite all the invocations of stability, all the clever scenarios and vote rigging, the Russian people have loudly declared their right to change. The elections have powerfully demonstrated a lack of confidence in the entire political system as embodied by the "party of swindlers and thieves." Amidst the suffocating atmosphere of stagnation and hopelessness something new can be sensed in the air. Is it a quickly passing Thaw? An Arab Spring? A February Revolution?

From now on, we are faced with an old regime that is unpopular and illegitimate in the eyes of the active part of society, a regime that will inevitably attempt to govern in the old way even as this becomes more and more problematic. On the other hand, we see a huge mass of people who hate the party of swindlers and thieves. What is more, these people publicly humiliated the regime on December 4, only to be cruelly deceived once again. Finally, we have an utterly false and impotent "systemic" opposition, an opposition that people voted for according to the "anyone but them" principle, and whose electoral success was bad news even for itself. As part of the establishment, the systemic parties will undoubtedly seek to form blocs and coalitions with United Russia. The only question is whether they will be able to settle on a price. Echoing Dmitry Medvedev, Sergei Neverov, secretary of the United Russia General Council

Presidium, has already said that the party is counting on forming strategic alliances with LDPR and A Just Russia. "This will be [...] a parliament in which there is serious discussion," he said. "The opposition are not enemies. The opposition are people who have an alternative opinion, a different opinion. And if this opinion coincides [with ours] on certain questions, then they're welcome! We're ready to cooperate," said Andrei Vorobyov, chair of United Russia's central executive committee. He opened wide his liberal arms even as police on the streets of Moscow and Petersburg were beating up demonstrators protesting election fraud.

"Politics is the art of compromise, an art that allows one to find a balance between different political groups," Nikolai Levichev, the chair of A Just Russia, diplomatically declared a few hours after the vote. "Vladimir Putin has spoken of the need to overcome social inequality. We agree with this, but everything depends on what paths are proposed. If these paths don't suit us, then there will be no coalition." Hence, the head of the "party of swindlers and thieves" is pursuing the same good ends as A Just Russia, only the paths taken are a bit different. Well, well, we'll see what happens next.

Igor Lebedev, leader of the LDPR faction in the Duma, is even more straightforward, engaging in outright bargaining, without any ideological embellishments. "We are ready for conversation and reasonable dialogue, but only as equal partners, not as stooges."

It is obvious that, with such an "opposition," working people should not expect any progressive changes in their lives. There has never been and never will be anything in the histories of these parties, including the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, other than treachery. The handful of trade unionists and social activists who have made

it into the Duma and the regional parliaments on the Communist and Just Russia lists will be unable to affect the essence of their policies. The most they can do is to lend support as they are able to the extra-parliamentary movement, as such people as Oleg Shein, Oleg Smolin, and several others have done in past Dumas. At a time when genuine trade unions and civic movements are weak, and pressure from the repressive security forces will grow, this is important albeit secondary.

Now the streets must become the arena of political struggle. Russia will either take its place in the global anti-capitalist movement, or again sink into apathy and stagnation. Voting for "anyone but them" should be replaced by the struggle for clearly perceived social interests. New, independent political forces must replace the old corrupt parties. If the left wants to be such a force, it must become a party of action. We must confront nationalist populism, which derives political capital from anti-immigrant rhetoric, with the simple, clear idea of the struggle against the bourgeoisie and the parasitic bureaucracy inseparable from it, against the rich bastards who have commissioned the hideous farce known as Russian politics!

The Russian Socialist Movement's appeal: "Everyone into the streets! Russia for working people!"

These should be your demands:

Cancel the results of the fake elections!

An end to repression: the police and the army on the side of the people!

The president and government must resign!

No coalitions and agreements between opposition parties and United Russia!

Free elections involving all parties and social movements!

Freedom of rallies, marches and strikes!

Free education and healthcare: suspend Federal Law No. 83 and other anti-social laws!

Nationalization of banks, oil and gas resources!

Progressive taxation: let the rich pay for their crisis!

Price controls on consumer goods!

Worker control in the workplace: worker participation in management and distribution of profits!

Revolution – Democracy – Socialism!

This statement was first published in English at Chtodelat News. For the original see <http://anti-capitalist.ru/skryitoe/p....>

EGYPT

The struggle to come after Egypt's election

LEE SUSTAR ·

In reality, the weeklong mobilization—which included two days of protests involving around 1 million people despite the killing of at least 40 demonstrators since November 19—marked a new phase of the revolutionary movement in Egypt. Large numbers of people who greeted the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) as heroes for ousting Mubarak in February now see SCAF as a counterrevolutionary force.

The protests won a series of concessions, including the resignation of an unpopular civilian cabinet that provided a fig leaf for military rule. But as a replacement, the army appointed as prime minister a former Mubarak henchman, Kamel el-Ganzoury.

The military is determined to hold onto power by proposing a new constitution that would put the armed forces above civilian authorities. Despite an estimated 1 million people flooding Tahrir on November 25, the SCAF announced it would hold parliamentary elections November 28 as planned, but extend the voting by another day. Most Islamist, nationalist and liberal political parties agreed to participate, angering many of their members, who felt the elections should be boycotted to protest the military's repression.

Mostafa Ali, a member of Egypt's Revolutionary Socialists and journalist for Ahram Online, spoke with **Lee Sustar** about the mass protests, the elections and the renewal of Egypt's revolutionary movement.

WHAT WAS the size and political character of the Friday protest on November 25?

THE DEMONSTRATION on Friday was quite large. There were about 1 million people in Tahrir.

A number of demonstrations came from different working-class neighborhoods—one of them was as big as 10,000 people. This is a new thing in Tahrir. We have feeder marches that come from different working-class neighborhoods.

The turnout was massive, as expected. The square was really roaring with chants against SCAF and against its head, Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, and there was a general sentiment that the military council must return to the barracks. The consensus in the square was that a presidential council or a salvation cabinet must take power—and that it should be made up of independent people who have absolutely nothing to do with Mubarak and the National Democratic Party that ruled under Mubarak's regime.

The most important thing here is that whatever form such a government would take, it would be accountable to the people, not to the SCAF.

THE MUSLIM Brotherhood, however, remained opposed to the demonstrations.

THE BROTHERHOOD opposed the demonstration on Friday and boycotted it. Most of the Salafists—a more conservative Islamist current—boycotted it, too, with very few exceptions. But all the liberal and left parties and revolutionary youth groups—about 70—supported the demonstrations.

This demonstration put pressure on a few liberal figures to put themselves forward as being ready to form a national unity government or national salvation cabinet. Mohamed ElBaradei, a key liberal figure, agreed to cancel his presidential bid if he is asked to form a national unity government that would include liberals, Nasserists and moderate Islamists.

That's generally what happened out of the big demonstration in Tahrir. But there were other demonstrations in other parts of the country on the same day. The new development is that there are also demonstrations in Upper Egypt [the more rural, southern part of the country], which is more backward, less industrialized. It wasn't fully a part of the January uprising. So this is a new development. It is slowly catching up with the revolution.

ARE WORKING-class and economic demands coming to the fore in these demonstrations, or are they focused more on getting the military out of politics?

THE POLITICAL and the economic are completely intertwined. There is a general unifying demand among the million people in Tahrir that the SCAF must go. But the underlying reason is that the economic situation has deteriorated in the last 10 months.

Many people tell reporters that life is getting harder, that unemployment is unbearable, and that the previous government failed to improve their lives. The SCAF has failed miserably on this. So the anger over economic hardship and the yearning for political freedom are connected.

The independent unions had a contingent in the rallies, but it wasn't that big—a few hundred people. They are still in a process of building and have just gone through a number of setbacks. There isn't a working class movement that could have an influence on the mass demonstration on Friday.

HOW WERE the marches from working-class neighborhoods organized?

THESE DEMONSTRATIONS are organized by groups formed to oppose the military trials of civilians, by popular committees to defend the revolution, by the Revolutionary Socialists and hundreds of independent activists mobilizing in their neighborhoods. They march to Tahrir, distributing thousands of leaflets along the way to explain what's going on. It's an attempt to build a local, ongoing presence in the neighborhoods.

IS THE political sentiment in Tahrir ahead of the rest of the country? How will that affect the elections?

YES, THE political sentiment in Tahrir is ahead of the country. You can think of it as the revolutionary vanguard in society among students and workers and youth—but it is much larger than in January. Political consciousness has developed tremendously.

These are people who understand that the SCAF is the continuation of the Mubarak regime. They are beginning to understand the connection between political and economic issues. They are beginning to grapple with the role of police in society. And they are the ones who understand that the ruling class played a trick on them by using Mubarak as a scapegoat in order to save the rest of the political system.

So you have a minority in society—symbolized by Tahrir—which has advanced politically and in terms of its consciousness. And it's ahead of the rest of the country in that sense. Back in January, a majority of people in the country wanted Mubarak to go, so they supported Tahrir. At this moment, that isn't the case regarding the SCAF.

The revolutionary vanguard is much, much larger. Its willingness to fight is unbelievable—it fought five days against the police. But the majority of the workers and poor people have not yet concluded that the SCAF must immediately return to its barracks. Or they don't think we have the power yet to push the SCAF to return the barracks.

On a different level, you can think of it this way: It was much easier for the ruling class to get rid of Mubarak. Getting rid of the SCAF, or pushing it back to the barracks, is a much harder task. Many people outside of Tahrir also want the SCAF to go back to its barracks, but they don't think there is the organization on the ground to win something like that.

HOW WILL all this play out in the parliamentary elections?

THE TURNOUT in elections will likely be quite high. A majority of people believe that elections will be the way to establish a civilian government and to get the army out of political life. There is a majority consensus on this, other than a crazy right-wing minority that wants the SCAF to stay in power.

The majority of the country wants a democratic system. They want a civilian government. They want to be able to vote and to exercise political control over their lives. And they believe this is the way to get the army out of their lives for the first time in 60 years.

So even among people who are fighting in Tahrir and those who support them, some of them will vote, because they don't want to leave the political scene to the SCAF, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists. Yet the majority of the people in Tahrir are more advanced than the rest of the country, and want to actually boycott the election.

So you have a bizarre situation. The fact that people will vote in the elections doesn't mean they want the SCAF to stay. They actually want the SCAF out. They just think that voting will be the quickest way to do it. But the majority of those who support the revolution are not necessarily against Tahrir. There is just not enough organization or confidence to push the SCAF out now.

The SCAF wants this election to gain legitimacy on the ground. The military is very weak right now, and it is determined that the election will take place no matter what. They want to use this to bolster their credentials as people who said they would bring about democracy—they want something to show they've kept their word in order to use that to attack the growing revolutionary vanguard.

That's what the people in Tahrir are saying—that this election will not advance democracy, and it will allow the SCAF to gather the forces of counterrevolution on the ground.

However, it's complicated. The SCAF has just come up with a new prime minister—Kamel el-Ganzoury—a founder of the National Democratic Party and

an architect of privatization. Though he was ultimately pushed out by Mubarak, this is someone who is on a no-fly list for leaving the country, because he is implicated in a number of corruption cases in privatization schemes.

Even on that level, people are divided. A majority will go vote, but half the people think that because this man was pushed out by Mubarak, we might want to give him a chance, and the other half are beginning to learn that Tantawi and the SCAF are bringing back the old guard of the NDP, not just the second generation. Ganzoury, who is 77, is an architect of everything Mubarak did over the last 30 years.

By appointing Ganzoury, the SCAF is sending a message that it will not relinquish power. It has said that the new constitution won't change the role of the SCAF by an inch. The SCAF will always have veto power over anything that has to do with the army.

So on the one hand, the military is using the election to bolster its democratic credentials. On the other hand, it is digging in. The members of the SCAF are saying: "We are not going to relinquish power. No constitution, no parliament and no mass movement is going to force us out of power."

Some 25 percent of Egypt's gross domestic product is directly under the control of the SCAF. There was a handmade sign at the protest on Friday listing the crimes of the SCAF. One of them was that its members supported Mubarak for 30 years. Another was that it turned the army into a big business to exploit poor people. Companies owned by the army make macaroni, washing machines, refrigerators and furniture—they build luxury resorts and a lot more. They own a big chunk of agriculture, too, including hundreds of cattle ranches, and they grow all kinds of vegetables and fruit.

That's why pushing the military back into the barracks and having a constitution and parliament to make them accountable is much harder to achieve than making them sacrifice a Mubarak. They have so much more at stake economically and politically.

Then there is the international dimension. The West abandoned Mubarak, but the West will never abandon the SCAF until the very last minute. The U.S. will not abandon the army.

DESPITE THE protests against the SCAF, the Muslim Brotherhood has supported it, despite some tensions over the status of Islam in the proposed constitution. Will that alliance continue?

THE GENERAL feeling in Tahrir is that the SCAF has cut a deal not only with the Brotherhood and the Salafists, but also with the liberals and a section of the left, a coalition called the Revolution Continues. They are going to divide the seats in the new parliament among themselves.

So the Brotherhood opposed the demonstrations in Tahrir, and on Friday, it actually sent many of its members to the square to try to talk people into participating in the elections. They were chased out in many cases. But the Brotherhood is still campaigning.

In the new constitution, the Brotherhood says it will not implement Sharia law. But its version of

Sharia is different from the Salafists, who have a very reactionary view—against women and Coptic Christians, and for carrying out the most brutal punishment for poor who break the law. The Muslim Brotherhood's views are a lot closer to their Turkish counterparts. They are for censorship of art and culture, and changes in some educational programs. The Salafists are right wing and anticommunist.

So there are divisions between Salafists and the Muslim Brotherhood. A very popular Salafist presidential candidate, Hazem Salah Abu Ismail, has a following of millions, and he is all out against the SCAF. So a group of Salafists are attempting to out-flank the Muslim Brotherhood, and these people were supporting the demonstration on Friday.

The Salafists believe the Muslim Brotherhood is cutting a deal that would make it harder for them to implement Sharia. So they want the SCAF out faster. That creates confusion on the ground, because while they want the SCAF out, their ultimate goal is to destroy the whole revolution.

Solidarity with the Freeport workers

There are four basic reasons why workers' wages at Freeport must be increased:

1. PT Freeport Indonesia's contribution to Freeport-McMoRan Copper & Gold (FCX) is well above the average of other companies affiliated with FCX. This can be seen from a comparison between Freeport production levels in Indonesia and those in America and Africa. It is clear that the main source of FCX's profits is from the operational revenue in Indonesia. In other words, the income generated by PT Freeport Indonesia exceeds that of other companies in the FCX group.
2. Increases in the price of primary commodities in 2011 have resulted in a massive increase in PT Freeport Indonesia's profits.
3. The competency of PT Freeport Indonesia workers is equivalent to those of other FCX workers. This has been verified through the System Competency Test, Tools, ATA, International and National Competency, Nosa and ISO-14001.
4. Working conditions and risk levels at PT Freeport Indonesia are extreme, with employees working at an altitude 4,200 metres above sea level, weather that alternates between heavy rainfall and extremely cold air. This region covers Grasberg, Erstberg, underground work, Mile 74, DOM, Big Grossan and others.

PT Freeport's annual income stands at 41.04 trillion rupiah or US\$45.60 billion. Total wages for its 22,000 workers meanwhile are just 1.4 trillion rupiah a year. The wages of the entire PT Freeport Indonesia workforce amount to only 0.34 percent of Freeport's annual revenue (data from PT Freeport Indonesia All Indonesia Workers Union, SPSI). Workers at PT Freeport, particularly those assigned to production work an average of 12-14 hours a day. Clearly their wages should be higher than workers working for only 8 hours a day.

The PT Freeport workers have now been on strike for two months without wages. This situation has had a huge impact on the economic, social and psychological lives of the workers and their families. It is easy to say, "It's your own fault for going on strike, making things difficult". Such comments would not be made if we look at the grounds for the workers' wage demands. Such comments are premature when we look at the fact that the workers work an average of 12-14 hours a day. Such comments are offensive when the police and the military officers providing security receive more money than that paid to workers (according to National Police Chief Timur Pradopo the company paid US\$14 million in "pocket money" to the police and military). Such comments are totally invalid when we look at the damages resulting from mining activities – the loss of whole mountains, the pollution of rivers, the eviction and impoverishment of seven tribes with communal land rights in Timika. Such comments are absolutely meaningless when we realise that everyone wants to live a prosperous and safe life.

The more than two month strike by PT Freeport workers is an important milestone in the history of labour strikes in Indonesia, where the use of contract labour and outsourcing is rampant. Since the strike began, the PT Freeport management has been recruiting hundreds of people to do the jobs abandoned by the striking workers. Yet in accordance with Indonesian regulations and law that are in force, while a strike is in process or an industrial dispute is not yet resolved, companies are prohibited from recruiting new workers, under any status whatsoever, to replace those on strike.

The staying power of the striking PT Freeport workers has been absolutely extraordinary. Pressure from the company as well as personal and family pressures is not an easy thing to withstand.

The financial contributions from different parts of the world for our striking comrades (from around 20 countries) have been one the key factors in supporting this struggle.

The Indonesian government has remained silent, while PT Freeport has insisted that it will not raise workers' wages. Now is the time for the ordinary people of this country to support our 6,000 sisters and brothers in their struggle to improve their welfare.

Now is the time for us to participate concretely in their struggle.

How can we do this. By giving them coins of support. The coins that we given the workers will not just have meaning in terms of how much money, but much more than this it will symbolise that the struggle of the PT Freeport workers is the struggle of workers throughout Indonesia and the world. Solidarity in the fight against injustice needs the broadest possible support. Low wages and cheap labour are a form of injustice for all humanity.

Let us give our full support and solidarity to the Freeport workers to continue their struggle, to obtain their rights, justice and welfare. Congratulate and salute the Freeport workers who have had shown extraordinary courage in their struggle for a just wage. This strike shows the world that regardless of the pressure and intimidation the workers will not stop their struggle for a better life.

Friends,

You can support this campaign by depositing coins in the Solidarity Coin Boxes that have been prepared or by making a donation direction into the Freeport SPSI bank account:

Bank: Mandiri

Address: Kuala Kencana, Timika, Provinsi Papua, Indonesia

Account: Dana Perjuangan SPSI PT. Freeport Indonesia

A/N: 154-00-1025925-1 Swift code: BMRIIDJA

In solidarity,

Alves Fonataba (+62 811486896)

Team Coordinator,

Solidarity Coins for the Freeport Workers Struggle

Koordinator Tim Koin

Solidaritas untuk Perjuangan Buruh Freeport

Organisations supporting this campaign:

The Alliance of Archipelagic Indigenous People (AMAN), the Working People's Association (PRP), the People's Liberation Party (PPR), the Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence (Kontras), the Papua Student Alliance (AMP), Free Women (Perempuan Mahardika), the Papuan Traditional Social Community Against Corruption (KAMPAK Papua), the Indonesian Legal Aid and Human Rights Association Jakarta (PBHI Jakarta), the Indonesian Trade Union Congress Alliance (KASBI), the National Solidarity Committee (KSN), the Papua NGO Cooperative Forum (Foker LSM Papua), PT Freeport Indonesia All Indonesia Workers Union (SPSI PTFI), the National Students Front (FMN), the Association of Independent Trade Unions (GSBI), the Indonesian Independent Union (SMI), the Greater Jakarta Workers Federation of Struggle (FPBJ), the United Indonesian Labour Movement (PPBI), Student Struggle Center for National Liberation (PEMBE-BASAN), the Indonesian Transportation Trade Union of Struggle (SBTPI), the Working People's Association-Organisational Saviours Committee (KPO-PRP), the Green Indonesia Union (SHI), the State Electricity Company Trade Union (SP-PLN), the United Student Action (KAM-Laksi), the Indonesian Workers Association (ATKI), the Indonesian Forum for the Environment (Walhi), National Solidarity for Papua (SNUP), the Indonesian Student League for Democracy (LMND), Praxis, the Indonesian People's Opposition Front (FORI), the Indonesian Association of the Families of Missing Persons (IKOHI), the Jakarta Legal Aid Foundation (LBH Jakarta), the Human Rights Working Group (HRWG), the Indonesian Human Rights Committee for Social Justice (IHCS), the Unity in Diversity National Alliance (ANBTI), the

Volunteers of Democracy in Struggle (REPDEM), the Greater Jakarta Railway Workers Trade Union (SPKAJ), SPTPB, the Indonesian Trade Union Movement (GESBURI), the Petition of 28 (Petisi	28), the Indonesian Islamic Students Movement (PMII), the Indonesian Workers Party (PPI) and national level federated and confederated organisations.
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FEATURES

In-depth analysis from International Viewpoint's Features section



INTERVIEW

Imperialism, the Arab Spring, and the crisis

DAVID BARSAMIAN & TARIQ ALI · 31 December 2011

DB: The revolts in the Arab Middle East, beginning in Tunisia in December of 2010, seemingly took the world by surprise. But before we talk about what's happened in the last year, set the historical context of the postcolonial Arab states.

TA: Essentially what happened in the Arab world after the Second World War was that the weakening of the British and French empires made it very difficult for them to exercise any real control. So it was only a question of time. Saudi Arabia had already been sorted out during the Second World War itself, when Roosevelt and the American government took charge of the kingdom without a word of thank you to the British. Saudi Arabia was then safe with the United States and has remained so till today. In Egypt, Iraq—let's take these two countries to start with—we had European empires still exercising an influence, British troops present, the Suez Canal owned by the West. And then we had the beginning of a set of revolutions, often led by the military but supported by a large section of the population.

The toppling of King Farouk in Egypt in 1952 by Gamal Abdel Nasser and the Free Officers transformed that country. It wouldn't have transformed it had Nasser not decided to nationalize the Suez Canal. That was the key decision that he took in the interests of his country. By taking that decision, he slapped the face of the European empires, which is why the United States was not that concerned with it. Washington was not directly affected. The British response to the nationalization of the Suez Canal was to prepare an invasion of Egypt. Britain, France, and Israel—the dilapidated British lion, helped by the French fox and the Israeli skunk—launched a three-part attack on Egypt in 1956. And the entire Arab world gasped.

The Egyptians, of course, fought back, but the key player—and one has to recognize this—was the United States. They had not been asked permission before this happened. It was a critical moment in the Cold War. They didn't want Nasser to fall into the arms of the Soviet Union, and they thought that the British and French were driving him in that direction. That was the last time the British and the French ever did anything major without asking the permission of the US.

So the Suez invasion created the birth of Arab nationalism at the same time it marked the total end of the British Empire. Africa was yet to be given its independence, but that came to an end. Nasser, of course, treated the triumph in Egypt—the Suez Canal remained under Egyptian control—as a lesson for the Arabs that this is the way you go forward: You fight, you take actions. And a huge nationalist wave engulfed that world. There were times when people felt that we could have a common Arab nation with three concurrent capitals—Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad.

In 1958 there was a revolution in Iraq and the pro-British regime was wiped out. The king and his horrific uncle, the crown prince, were publicly hanged. In Egypt the monarchy had been overthrown. So the crown heads of the Arab world were shaking, tottering. It was an incredible mood, which I remember well as a young person growing up at the time. We were excited by it. Then what happened is, of course, the Israelis were now central to US strategy. They didn't want to use the European powers. The Americans were then in Saudi Arabia themselves and more or less in the Gulf, though not to the extent to which they are now. The Israelis became the central players on behalf of the US.

The 1967 war was decisive for a number of reasons. The defeat inflicted by the Israeli army on the

Egyptians and the Syrians marked the end of the nationalist phase in Arab politics. It never recovered from that. Israel was backed by the West, particularly by the United States. And the US, impressed by the skill and ease with which the Israelis had punished Arab nationalism, became friends for life. It was 1967, not 1948. 1948 was important for the formation of Israel, backed by the US and Britain; but it's not until 1967 that the United States really embraced Israel. And from then on it was "my house is your house" between these two state powers.

Nasser died soon afterwards, and by the early 1970s the US was pushing Nasser's successor, Anwar Sadat, to be a big boy and do the deal with Israel. Because they felt that Egypt, as the most important and most powerful state both in terms of population and military force, was needed in order to end this confrontation with Israel. So the Israeli-Egyptian peace accord was signed. Of course, both these rogues, Anwar Sadat and Menachem Begin, got the Nobel Peace Prize—hardly a surprise. It was the Israeli prime minister, Golda Meir, who made a memorable remark at that time when she was asked, "What do you think of these two guys getting the Peace Prize?" She said, "It's the wrong prize. They deserved an Oscar," because they acted so well.

I think what we saw with the emergence of the Sadat government was a total capitulation to Israel in terms of foreign policy—it was a humiliating peace treaty for Egypt, saying that its armies couldn't move freely within Egyptian borders without the Israelis being informed beforehand; and it meant the abandonment of the Palestinians by the Egyptian state. And thirdly, it meant for Egypt now entering the embrace not just of Israel but also of the West. So all of the progressive reforms of Nasser were dismantled.

By the 1980s, the process of privatization and the removal of the social safety net, which we are now very familiar with, had begun. Islamist groups were used by Sadat to victimize, repress, and destroy the nationalist presence on the campuses. Quite horri-

ble stories came out at that time. They created what became the Egypt we know till the uprising: rock-solid, hard dictatorship based on repression. But the peace treaty split Sadat's supporters within the Islamist ranks, and the group which finally bumped him off cited that as a key reason why they had bumped him off.

His death was not as unpopular as was painted in the Western press, despite the people who carried it out. Many Egyptians said, "Thank God this has happened." Mubarak was present when Sadat was killed, but he was very quick to escape harm by hiding under a table on the reviewing stand. He saved his life and he succeeded Sadat, and he moderated things a tiny bit. But within a few years he was back on track doing exactly the same things and being far more repressive than even Sadat had been.

And so we saw the emergence of this dictatorship, which became more and more moth-eaten, but had to rely largely on repression to maintain order, and on American largesse—billions in aid, so-called, which went mostly to the military and the elite—in order to stay in power. So that was the combination that did it. We know that for the last ten years that tensions had been building, first with the Islamists. Mubarak applied a double-edged policy with them: Don't challenge me frontally on the political domain, and I'll make lots of concessions to you culturally. And that is what he did, which actually made them stronger.

And they didn't challenge him politically. I remember—I was in Cairo in 2002 meeting a leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, who was a doctor, in his clinic because the Brotherhood was illegal. I said, "What are you guys going to do when the Americans invade Iraq?" And he said, "Brother Tariq, let me tell you this. The gates of hell will open." I said, "I look forward to it, because you could actually play a very big part. If Egypt goes up, it will be difficult." "Don't you worry," he said. Of course, when Iraq was invaded, nothing happened. No gates opened up of hell or heaven or anything else. We saw very little opposition in that country.

The Brotherhood was repressed—many of its militants were tortured—but less and less. Largely, Mubarak threatened them because he knew a lot of Muslim Brotherhood supporters were businessmen. So every time they did something he didn't like, he would say, "OK, we'll take all your licenses away." So immediately a section of the Brotherhood leadership would fall back into line. The young who were being recruited were more militant.

But what we are talking about now is basically the only serious political organization that existed in Egypt in these years, because a huge vacuum had been created by the destruction of the nationalists. They were beaten, they had their tail between their legs. They were there, but they did very little. It was the Brotherhood that had a presence when the uprising happened. And what joyous days they were, when the young people poured out onto the streets of Cairo and Alexandria and Suez, just challenging the regime on every front and throwing each ball back into its own court. If you want to repress us, you will have to use the army.

At the same time, the demonstrators, their young faces filled with hope, were fraternizing with the Egyptian military, embracing soldiers and officers, making it very difficult for them to turn the tanks on them. So the combination of this actually led to the toppling of the despot. The Americans finally realized they couldn't keep him in power. Though they tried very hard. Hillary Clinton stated in public, "Mubarak has been a loyal friend. Why, Bill and I regard him as family." Well, of course you do, but the Egyptian people never regarded him as family. Never was this disjuncture between US backed despots in the Arab world and the bulk of the people so clear as in the streets of Egypt in those months. They were really days of joy.

DB: One of the major events in the Arab Middle East takes place in 1969, when Colonel Muammar Qaddafi overthrows the monarchy of King Idris, and kicks the United States out of Wheeler Air Force Base, located near Tripoli. Libya becomes, as in Iraq with Saddam Hussein and in Syria

with Assad, a national security state built around the great leader, fossilizing, concentrating wealth, corruption. The story is well known. He meets his end in 2011. You were very critical of the NATO intervention in Libya. You called it "vigilantism." How do you see in retrospect the rationale that was created by the Obama administration under the rubric of "responsibility to protect"?

TA: The "Responsibility to protect" has probably led to more deaths than the number of people they were protecting in Benghazi, as they were saying. We have had over six months of continuous bombing of Libyan cities; Tripoli, Sirte, Misrata, others. Very few images of these bombed cities have been permitted onto the television screens. Unlike in Iraq, where they were showing how strong they were, even that amount of coverage, Al Jazeera didn't do it because their government was backing the NATO invasion. So Al Jazeera's coverage was totally pro-war, and it has declined considerably. So one can't just attack the Western media. The one independent television station we had is in its death throes as a result of this.

To come back to your central point. Six months of bombing. And they're saying there were hardly any casualties? I don't believe it. I was speaking to someone who shall be nameless, who is well informed and linked to people who do know these things in Britain, and I said, "How many people have you guys killed? About 40,000, 50,000?" He said, "No, not that many." I said, "How many? Give me a rough estimate." He said, "Probably 20,000."

Now, it could be 20, it could be 30, because the notion that this is precision bombing is just nonsense. They can't even do that with their drone attacks in Pakistan. So I would say that is probably the case, though I hasten to add that we have no proof of this so far. Very little reporting has been done. The journalists were mainly embedded. No one actually sent in the reports that we saw during the Iraq War, both through Al Jazeera and through Robert Fisk and others. So we haven't had that in this particular war.

So if this is the case, that they've killed 20,000 to 30,000 people, then what does it show? It shows total, pure cynicism. Essentially why they went into Libya, the Euro-American complement of NATO, was to take it. They had been negotiating with Qaddafi for the last ten to twelve years to bring him into the fold. They had brought him into the fold. Condoleezza Rice publicly stated that Qaddafi was a model for the Arab world as a modernist dictator.

Tony Blair fell into his arms. A lot of money exchanged hands. That is always the case with Blair: nothing is free. The British media began to extol this guy as a statesman. There were all sorts of other things: The London School of Economics was funded by Qaddafi's money. Anthony Giddens, Lord Giddens, Blair's main academic henchman, went to Tripoli, meeting Qaddafi, reading Qaddafi's *Green Book*, and saying,

"This is very similar to what we're doing in Britain. We call it 'the third way,' and it's your third way." This was the extent of collaboration with him. When the West started to attack him, Qaddafi's son gave a press conference and said, "We funded Sarkozy's election campaign." It could well be true. This was the degree of collaboration between these people. And suddenly he becomes a monster because there's an uprising against him? Give me a break.

Essentially, I think they took Libya to win it as a market for investments, for the oil. Libyan oil is of very good quality, produced at very cheap cost—wreck the Libyan coast with tourist hotels, take their business there. That's why they did it, just to get rid of a guy who was dragging his feet, even though he agreed to do it.

And, of course, he humiliated them by arriving in Paris and Rome and saying he wanted to set up his stupid tent in the middle of the city, just making fun of the Western leaders, because he was slightly eccentric. Unlike Saddam and Assad, who were brutes, but they were not eccentric. Qaddafi always had an eccentric side to him. He was very poorly educated. He was twenty-two when that coup took

place, and worshipped Nasser of Egypt at the time. Then he soon forgot him. That is essentially what happened.

And it's not over yet, because, ironically, as we see, or perhaps not so ironically, some of the people handed over to Qaddafi to be tortured were handed over by the British and the Americans as Islamists, al-Qaeda, all that. One of these guys is commanding the Tripoli militia today, and he's demanding a public apology from the British for having tortured him themselves and then handing him over to Qaddafi. So I think this one isn't totally played out.

And I think those people who got very excited and said, "This is the first NATO intervention which we can support because it's genuinely humanitarian," have to answer questions about the civilian casualties and about what is going to happen to Libya. You know my position on this. I have always said, however horrible it is, it is better that these overthrows are organic, that they take place internally. Sometimes it's a long struggle and lives are lost, but lives are not saved by Western military intervention.

I said that in Kosovo during the war on Yugoslavia, and my position hasn't changed on that. For many sort of leftists and former leftists now saying, "This was an intervention we can support," you feel they're desperate to come into the fold. We've seen people like that before. I thought the Iraq War would have disabused them, because all the same arguments could be used to justify the war on Iraq as they're using against Qaddafi, except that Saddam wasn't doing these things at the time he was attacked. The images of Qaddafi coming out of Libya helped enormously.

One person I know and quite like, a writer, said, "You know, if there had been images like that coming out of Iraq before the Iraq War, I would probably have supported the war." People don't even know what they are saying. And they have stopped thinking in serious categories. So humanism, humanitarianism becomes the only serious category, which means they've lost faith in themselves and

abandoned their own intellects, many of these people. So I have no problems with the position I took on the war. I think it was completely justified, as we shall see.

And what are they going to do if the Islamists in Libya now come to power? I have no problems with that. Better them than some unrepresentative person. That's the way people will learn—from their own experiences. In Tunisia, in Libya, in Egypt, you have Islamists in power? Fine. Do business with them, see what they're like. If the people there don't like them, they will push them aside, form something new. It's always the best way. But the West might not be so sanguine.

DB: In fact, in neighboring Tunisia in late October 2011, what's described as a moderate Islamist formation won the election.

TA: Exactly. The Turkish Islamists, NATO's favorite Islamists, won the Turkish elections years ago and are now a pillar of the so-called international community, i.e., supported by the State Department. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the bulk of it will do a deal.

We know what's going on behind the scenes is three-way discussions between the United States, the Brotherhood, and the Egyptian army to work out some compromise settlement. In Tunisia, Ghannouchi's party has won the elections, and we will see. When he was in Britain in exile he was saying that he believed in social justice and all this sort of stuff, so we'll see whether they do anything socially beneficial to their people or just open the country up to more investment.

So essentially you have the same regime but with a democratic side to it. Which is not unimportant. When you create a vacuum, that's when the Islamists come. Someone fills the vacuum. The left can't do it. The progressive forces don't exist or are demoralized or are backing the US in the case of Iraq and Afghanistan. So the Islamists seem to be the only serious opposition party. We will see. In Tunisia a few leftists have been elected to parlia-

ment as well, I gather, so we'll see what they do and what they can do.

DB: This term, "responsibility to protect," is applied quite selectively. Obviously, some citizens of the world are more privileged than other citizens. Clearly, Kashmiris, who are living in Indian-administered Kashmir, who have died in the many, many thousands—the actual figure is 70,000 since an uprising there in 1989—do not fall under this category of "responsibility to protect." Britain, France, and the United States are not very exercised about what's happening to that particular population.

TA: The west basically doesn't care a damn about Kashmir. It's been a brutal intervention by the Indians, much, much worse, let me add, in terms of numbers killed than anything the Chinese have done in Tibet. That's the comparison. The minute there's trouble in Tibet, the whole Western media is up in arms and all the Buddhists in Hollywood start making movies. When the Indians carry out repression on a huge scale in Kashmir, much worse than Tibet—silence.

So the logic, I think, of this, is that if a country is formally democratic, it can do whatever it wants. But if it's not democratic, then we can use the fact that it's not democratic as a weapon against it. Otherwise there's nothing. People are people. The US and its allies have occupied Iraq. They say they're about to leave. Good. Good riddance. But they've occupied Iraq and over a million people have died. Who is going to be charged with those war crimes? Bush, Cheney, Blair, Aznar? They should be before some court as war criminals. No one will charge them.

So double standards are part of the world we live in. And the reason for that is that in the thinking of the majority of countries of the world, the only truly sovereign country is the United States of America. American sovereignty is determined by the US, but certainly Europe and the Middle East countries' sovereignty is also determined by the US.

That's the big difference. So they all fall into line whenever the United States says this has to be done, that has to be done.

The Germans sometimes don't. They don't send troops, but then they fall into line later. The Germans refused to fight in Iraq, they refused to fight in Libya. They sent troops to Afghanistan, which created a huge debate within the German elite. They don't do it, but they don't oppose it either. So the only real sovereign nation today in the world is the imperial nation. The Chinese are sovereign, but that's in their own region, and economically. They never challenge the US militarily either.

The first time they did it recently was to oppose sanctions against Syria in the UN Security Council. And the reason for that is that both the Russians and the Chinese feel they were tricked into supporting the UNSC resolution on Libya because they said this would be a limited exercise, just utilized to prevent Qaddafi from bombing Benghazi. That's why we supported it. These people are misusing it, so we're not supporting it. But that's the first sign of some rift, and I don't think that's too serious either.

DB: Indeed, a no-fly zone quickly became regime change in terms of policy. Talk about the evolving role of NATO. Some have said it has become a military arm of the empire, of Washington.

TA: It is. NATO never fought a single war during the Cold War, when it was created to combat the so-called Soviet threat to Western Europe. It never fought. But since the collapse of communism and the death of the Soviet Union, NATO has suddenly become very active. And I think its function is as one of the possible means for the US to change a regime or get its way in the world. I can't remember which American official it was, but he was very blunt about it. He said, "We're not that bothered. If we can use the UN, we'll use the UN. If we can't use the UN, we'll use NATO. If we can't use NATO, we'll go in ourselves."

In Iraq they couldn't use the UN or NATO, so they went in themselves with the coalition of the willing.

And that was that. One can't take these institutions too seriously. All these institutions—military, international, financial—are by and large institutions that are created by and respond to the United States. That is just a fact of life. When people tell me the American empire is weakening, I say, "Well, it is in some ways economically, but its military and institutional stranglehold remains quite strong. Don't underestimate that."

DB: Talk about your native Pakistan, which seems to careen from one disaster and catastrophe to another— floods, internal violence, and poverty on a massive scale. Years ago you wrote a book *Can Pakistan Survive? As a state it has shown some resilience in terms of staying power. But how much pounding can the population take?*

TA: The state of Pakistan now makes me weep. I have analyzed it, I have written about it, I have done three books on it, and I have written numerous essays on it. I sometimes feel there's very little left to say.

One has said it all, and just repeating oneself, what good is it going to do? What do we have in this country? Natural catastrophes are one thing—earthquakes, floods. Every country can suffer from them. We have man-made catastrophes in Pakistan. The army is one problem, which has never let that country grow up in peace by taking over, again, on the instructions of the US, at critical moments in the country's history. Every single coup was greenlighted by the United States.

DB: Ayub Khan, Zia ul-Haq.

TA: Ayub Khan took power in 1958 because he and the Americans felt that if the country's first general election was permitted in April 1959, parties that wanted to pull Pakistan out of the security pacts into which this elite had taken them might take them out of the pacts, because Nehru's [1] non-alignment and neutrality was popular. So they said best not to permit an election. Do it. Then in 1977, Bhutto took power. [2] The first martial law ulti-

mately led to the breakup of the country in 1971, with East Pakistan becoming Bangladesh.

Then we had General Zia's coup d'état, which in some ways was equally damaging. Ayub broke up Pakistan, and General Zia totally destroyed the political fabric and culture of Pakistan by instituting public floggings, public hangings, executing the country's last elected prime minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto; and doing all this with a cover of Islamism, Islamic laws, and women's rights being taken away. An ugly atmosphere built up in the country, from which it is still suffering.

All that was tolerated because General Zia had become an indispensable ally in the war against the Russians in Afghanistan. One reason for the Americans not doing anything to save Bhutto's life was because he had basically refused to stop building the nuclear bomb. Kissinger warned him, "If you don't desist, we will make a terrible example out of you." And Bhutto replied in kind. But that's what they did: They made a terrible example out of him.

But then General Zia, their favored successor, was the one who completed Bhutto's work and built the bomb. Because what the United States failed to perceive was that whoever was running the country, once India had nuclear weapons, no section of the Pakistani military elite was going to say don't do it. So Zia, with the Americans turning a blind eye, built the nuclear weapons just as he was helping them in Afghanistan to defeat the Russians. I wrote *Can Pakistan Survive?* It did have a question mark.

But I noted in that book in 1984 all the symptoms of Pakistani collapse. They're still there. But what is keeping them together, the spinal cord of the Pakistani state is now a military with nuclear weapons. That makes it very difficult to destroy the country. The US still could, if they wanted to, but the price would be high, very high. The United States does not know where all the nuclear weapons are. They think they do. Some of them have been hidden in areas which are known to only a very few trusted people.

That's an ongoing situation. Meanwhile, we have a so-called democracy with a politician in power, Asif Ali Zardari is the widower of Benazir Bhutto, who was killed fighting an election campaign. And in characteristic South Asian fashion, except she was more blatant about it, she said that "I leave my party to the care of my son and, until he comes of age, my husband." This is sort of a medieval practice, going back to the days of the monarchies of old. Even then, the Mughal emperors usually avoided specifying which kid would succeed them because they didn't want to have a civil war on their hands, though sometimes they did. She was very specific. So the so-called "princess of democracy," as American papers called her, actually bequeathed her party to the family.

The party became a family heirloom. Zardari, to be fair to him, has never made a secret of the fact that his only interest in politics is making money. And as president of Pakistan you can make more money than you could if you're the husband of the prime minister or a minister, though he did make a lot in the years when Benazir was in power. So we have a president who is probably one of the most corrupt leaders in the world—though there's a lot of competition in these matters. And there are hundreds of stories from every quarter on how he makes money.

When the 2010 floods took place, immediately Zardari's sister appealed to Karachi businessmen saying, "We're setting up an appeal in the name of the Bhutto children. Donate to the Bhutto fund." The businessmen, for once, one after the other, stood up and said, "You tell us what is needed. Cement? Rice? Clothes? Medicine? You give us the locations where they are needed. We will buy them and make them available to the people who are suffering. We're not going to put them in any fund." A public rebuff. She walked out of that meeting. Everyone knows what's going on.

People are helpless, and conditions get worse and worse. On one border in the northern flank of the country we have the Afghanistan war. We have the war spilling over into Pakistan, as I predicted in October 2001 was going to happen. We have the

military creating trouble in Balochistan and the Baloch leaders going to the American embassy and pleading for support to create an independent Balochistan. Both sides are just completely bankrupt. And then we have the drone attacks on Pakistan— in Obama's two and a half years in office, there have been more drone attacks than in Bush's entire term of office.

DB: Do you see any parallels between the rhetoric Washington is leveling against Pakistan and what they were saying about Cambodia in the 1960s? That Cambodia was a safe haven, a sanctuary, thus making it impossible for the United States to achieve victory in Vietnam. Cross-border raids were launched, and ultimately a full-scale invasion took place in early 1970. There have been bellicose messages coming from the State Department as well as the chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, that Pakistan is playing a double game, harboring the Haqqani network and indirectly supporting the Taliban. What are the prospects of a US invasion of Pakistan?

TA: I think they are very low. And the reason for that is that the American military will not want to get bogged down in another country. Pakistan isn't a small country. Afghanistan has a population of 26 million. Pakistan has a population approaching, if it hasn't already reached, 200 million.

You invade a country like Pakistan and you have a huge confrontation on your hands. So I don't think the Pentagon is going to permit that, just as the Pentagon has been very hostile to any bombing raids on Iran. Don't forget how bellicose the US has been and how recently they tried to use this totally absurd manufactured incident. Obama himself comes on the air to tell people we have discovered a huge plot, which is that some nutty fantasist is going to kill the Saudi ambassador, and this nutty fantasist has been employed by the Iranians?

Give us a break. Everyone in Iran was laughing. They know that if he wanted to do this, the Iranians

have their own methods of carrying out these attacks, if they wish to. And why kill this little punk in the Washington embassy? Who is he? He's just an ambassador. He changes nothing. Just a provocation to try and turn up the heat on Iran. Utterly pathetic. In the case of Pakistan, of course, it is more serious for them, but they know it. It's not a surprise. They know perfectly well that the Pakistani state, for its own reasons, whether you like it or not, is not going to permit Afghanistan to be handed over to the Indians.

The Karzai puppets are desperately negotiating with India, also for troops, and Pakistani military intelligence is aware of this. So the Haqqani thing was approved not just by the ISI but also by the Pakistani military high command, because this notion that the ISI is a force unto itself is rubbish. It never was. The only period it had relative autonomy was when the Americans enlarged its size to fight the war in Afghanistan. That's the only time.

DB: The war in the 1980s, the jihad against the Soviet Union.

TA: That's the only time the ISI had a semi-autonomous role. Obviously, occasionally certain rogue officers act without permission, but by and large the ISI is a disciplined unit of the Pakistani military. So whenever people say ISI, it's a code word for not attacking the Pakistani military directly. That should be understood. So what happened was that, yes, they unleashed Haqqani's group to show Afghans, here we are in the middle of Kabul chucking bombs and firing on the American embassy and the NATO headquarters for twenty hours.

So why couldn't you stop it? That's what the annoyance was, not that it was a military threat as such. But the psychological and political effect of this was like the Vietnamese National Liberation Front taking the American embassy in 1968 during the Tet offensive, occupying it, being killed, but putting the NLF flag up on the US embassy in Saigon.

That was it. The symbolism actually meant something. This was a similar attack by very different

people, but the military symbolism was not so different. That is why the anger in the United States, especially from Petraeus and others, who feel that this war can be won, and says these wars will go on forever, my children will grow up and these wars will still be going on.

Well, the Afghans don't agree with him. So the size of the insurgency has been growing. And this was Pakistan firing a shot across Karzai and the Americans' bows and saying, "Hey, guys, don't think you can ignore us in all this hanky-panky that's going on with the Indians behind our back. We know what's going on." It was an attempt to assert their place in the post-withdrawal settlement.

DB: You write, "The campaign to reelect Obama began in earnest on May 2, 2011, with the revenge killing of Osama bin Laden." By all accounts, al-Qaeda's operational capability is greatly diminished. Osama bin Laden himself cut a pathetic figure at the end. Here was a man, like an old Hollywood movie star, sitting around, watching his earlier roles on videos in his house in Abbottabad.

TA: Al-Qaeda had ceased to be a serious threat for a long time. Let me correct that. They were never a serious threat. They were a group, maximum 2,000 people, who were determined to create trouble and hit at American symbolic institutions. Which is why they chose the Twin Towers, a symbol of US capitalism, and the Pentagon, a symbol of American military power. And that was that. I never thought they could repeat this again. This was a one-off operation, very theatrical, very dramatic. The whole world sat back and watched the images time and time again.

But this is not new. The image is new, obviously, because no one had done this form of terrorism before. But terrorists groups of different sorts, in different parts of the world, have existed for a long time. The whole point about them is that they don't believe in mass mobilizations or organizing huge numbers of people as a collective to demand some-

thing. They believe in sensational acts. The nineteenth and early twentieth-century anarchists used to knock off crowned heads of state, presidents. That's what they did. And it created a storm and there was repression and special laws were passed to catch them. This business is exactly the same.

I know people, both anarchists and Islamists, have gotten very angry with me, because I described al-Qaeda and bin Laden as Islamo-anarchists. But that's who they are. So they have done their big hit and they've never been able to repeat it. The fact that anyone taking up arms against the US, usually in occupied countries, is described as al-Qaeda is not very convincing. The franchise which was owned by bin Laden and al-Zawahiri is in a very weak state. Other people can claim the name, but essentially it's a tiny organization, much, much reduced.

DB: Let's transition to the economic crash hammering the United States and Europe. How did we get here?

TA: We got here through the big changes that were made in the 1990s, the so-called "Washington consensus," which had two sides to it. One, we no longer face any ideological threat from any part of the world. The Soviet Union has been destroyed. Its presence that posed a threat, even that presence is now gone, it doesn't exist. And the Chinese are our allies. They've been our allies for some time. They've been developing capitalism; we're investing.

They've got a huge labor force; they can produce things much cheaper than we can. So why shouldn't our firms and industries and capitalists depend on cheap Chinese labor to get cheap goods into the shops? And we will invest money to make more money. In other words, capital now is not going to be productive capital at all, but capital is going to be used for financial speculation. That is what happened to the capitalist system essentially in the turbocharged phase of globalization, which is now in huge crisis. And because, as I said to you earlier, what the US says, its acolytes do.

The US went on this path themselves, and so did the Europeans. The British were the most slavish mimics of this, and the British economy is now in serious trouble. They used to boast that in the City of London you had more freedom to do what you want without regulation, in other words, saying the City of London is the Guantánamo of world capitalism. Come here: You can get away with anything. And they did it. But many economists had been predicting that this couldn't last.

Principally among them, I have to say, Robert Brenner at the University of California wrote a huge essay in *New Left Review*, which subsequently became a book called *The Economics of Global Turbulence*, which more or less predicted that this crisis of profits was going to create very huge damage. The speculative character of finance capital in this last period of twenty to twentyfive years created a situation of casino capitalism, gambling with money. That's what happened. It essentially was the casino economy.

Throw a billion here and we might make five billion or we might lose it all. Who cares? And it's not our money anyway. It's the money of shareholders and stockholders and people who have entrusted you with mortgages, pension funds. All that money was used as capital to gamble with. And they got their come-uppance in 2008, when the Wall Street system went into deep crisis.

Here was a key moment in world history for the United States, as the leader of the capitalist world, to say, guys, okay, enough is enough. We are now going to make a change, and this state, which is bailing out the banks and the rich, can be used for other purposes, too. We're going to encourage a massive social expenditure: building works, creation of jobs, transforming the face of America by creating a public transport system, employing people to build the railways. All that could have been done.

But you had a president who came from a system which he believed in and which he wouldn't challenge. In *The Obama Syndrome* I point out

Obama's life as a young Chicago senator in the Illinois Assembly, where he's telling off other African-American Democrats who are attacking the cuts being imposed in Chicago. Obama is saying to them, "We have to learn to be prudent." This is a man who has remained loyal to that caution, the prudence he talks about, for a long time. So this president, who had raised most of his money from Wall Street, who could have appointed even Krugman or Stiglitz to be the treasury secretary but appointed Geithner, this president wasn't going to do anything. Wall Street, Goldman Sachs people openly infiltrated the economic establishment under both Bush and Obama. That's the system they backed.

Essentially what they're creating is a sticking plaster to stem an enormous flow of blood coming from the brain, which is slowly hemorrhaging. They're putting a sticking plaster on it instead of at least attempting an operation to try and save the patient. The situation is now quite critical in Europe: Iceland collapsed, Ireland collapsed, Greece collapsed, Spain and Portugal are on the verge of collapse, Italy is crumbling. Six countries.

And still no change in politics or policies. You have to say that either these sons of so-and-sos are incredibly self-confident because they've seen nothing that can challenge them, or they're blinded and they're going to go under. Greece, I would say, is in a prerevolutionary situation. It probably won't happen, but that is my feeling.

People are so fed up that they want to do away with the whole bunch. And PASOK Party center-left MPs voting for this have been spat on when they've returned to their districts by people on the streets. That's the anger in Greece. So at long last you have an occupation movement growing up here, very nice, well behaved, very angry in some cases. That's tremendous.

It's not enough. Not enough to put on the pressure that's needed, if general strikes in Greece can't force these people to change course because they're so petrified. You need huge convulsions from below

to really turn the tide. Hopefully, it will happen. So far it's not. Nothing else will.

But to come back to your question again, making the Chinese economy the workshop of the world, with Europe free just to borrow money, spend money, consume, that was the model. Consumption through borrowed money, debt. There are kids who will tell you, here and in Europe, the banks were chasing them. Please borrow money. You're not borrowing enough money. Take the money. And the people who did are really suffering now.

For the American economy this is a huge, huge disaster. And it's no good the Democrats saying, "Oh, the Republicans are sabotaging this." You guys had a majority in the Senate and the House for the first two years of the Obama administration. You can't blame the Republicans. Blame yourselves. Hold up the mirror to yourselves. You did exactly what the Republicans are saying. Why didn't you do different? This image of Obama as a prisoner of right-wing forces is just not credible. It's a sign that the liberals in the United States are desperate, because in their hearts they know he's been a disaster. But they can't admit it, because to admit it is to admit that they've got nothing.

DB: Booms and busts are a regular feature of capitalism over the centuries. Is what we're witnessing now substantively different from previous busts?

TA: No, and I would warn against any notion that capitalism is going to collapse. Capitalism has undergone severe crises in its history, and I think it was the Russian revolutionary Lenin who once said, "There is no final crisis of capitalism unless there is an alternative." I think he was right on that, actually. I think that the system is resilient; it has the capacity to pull out of it, it has the capacity to wreak havoc on its people. If the people take it, it will carry on doing it.

That's the answer. There's not going to be any spontaneous collapse of the system. Now we have related to this economic crisis, a political crisis, which I have dubbed the crisis of the extreme cen-

ter. We have country after country, in Europe and the US, ruled by an extreme center, center left or center right. They do exactly the same things. Bush and Obama. Blair and Cameron. Sarkozy and whoever is going to succeed him. In Germany you often have national coalition governments.

This is now creating a situation where young people are getting more and more alienated from this extreme center. Extreme because it has pushed through extremist economic policies, linked to wars abroad, that many people dislike but which they can't change regardless of who they elect to power. That's a dangerous situation politically.

Let me tell you something. The program of the extreme right in France, Marine Le Pen, the program of the Dutch neofascists, even the Italians, they are horrible on immigration and Muslims and all that, but if you look at their economic program, Marine Le Pen, the leader of the French ultranationalists, is cleaning up her act. She's not saying the things her father was saying. Basically, when she is asked, "What do you believe in?" she says, "The French republic, but a French republic in which the state controls the heights of the economy."

So when she's asked, she says health, education, water, gas, railways, all these should be controlled and owned by the state, because these serve the needs of everyone. The combination of chauvinism and xenophobia and a radical economic program is a dangerous one.

The question we have to ask is, why is not a single center-left, social democratic party using these demands, which are, after all, historically their demands? They're not doing it. The right has realized much more than the left what needs to be done in that part of the world. So it's a problem. The booms and busts will carry on. I don't think that this financial economy based on zombie capital can last forever, but they will make changes as time passes, depending on what happens in the country itself.

The capitalist system can vary from being a social-democratic system to being what we've got now. Social democracy they found necessary to compete

with the Soviet Union and say, "This is a democratic version of what they're doing." But now they don't need to do that, because the Soviet Union doesn't exist, so they've come out tooth and claw. We'll do it because we can. We'll exploit you till you drop dead because we can. We'll make wars because we can. That's the system we live under. And I think young people should really study and appreciate it.

DB: The infamous boast of Maggie Thatcher — "TINA, there is no alternative." What do you see evolving in terms of some kind of coherent response to the existing system?

TA: There is always an alternative. And the fact is that it can come into being if people struggle for it and fight for it. What we don't have today is any political party fighting for an alternative. That's why I say we're in the grip of the extreme center.

But movements arise, and movements develop. They have done in South America, they could do in parts of Europe. They might even in the United States one day, if not immediately, or in the Arab world. So I see what is going on now in different ways as the harbinger of what is yet to come. When it comes, it will surprise people, too. But you have to struggle and fight for it.

Don't forget that this whole neoliberal program, which has been set in place and taken over the world, was started in, I think, the 1940s and 1950s by Hayek and others in a tiny group of thinkers called the Mont Pelerin Society, in which they used to meet and discuss these ideas. Everyone used to laugh at them and say, "These are crazy people," including all the Keynesians who were running the world with the help of social-democratic-style governments. "These guys are mad." Mad or not, they took the world.

So we have to start thinking very seriously about alternatives. In my opinion, the central pillar of an alternative has to be the intervention of the state to own and acquire property, without which a social welfare state is no longer possible. It's not just funding it through taxes. That period has long

gone. The state actually has to be a player in the economic system in order to fund a proper health, education, public transport system. If it doesn't do that, things will go from bad to worse.

So this struggle to reinstate the state in the thinking of people is very vital. This is why neoliberals and some anarchists fall into the same trap, that the state can't be used, we've got to devise policy also without the state. The neoliberals are being dishonest, because without the state they couldn't have achieved what they have done, with the state backing them, and pushing through deregulation laws.

DB: And bailouts and subsidies.

TA: And all that. The state, which was considered so evil—the bankers, and the financial speculators finally went on their knees before it, and said, "Dear state, please help us. We're in trouble." A number of people have said that the state is being used to create socialism for the rich. But the real needs of ordinary people are what are far more important. Things like this have to be done.

In Britain, one is discussing the idea of creating committees, groups in every single city with a charter of ten crucial demands to mobilize people who are not even political, but who will see the strength of these demands, and have a march of a million people or more on Parliament to deliver this remonstrance and say, "This is what we want, which none of the parties inside are delivering." And not just as a part of propaganda, but to create something. This can be done in every country in the world, actually. You don't have to immediately build up new political parties, but you have to create the basis for them.

These occupations, even though some of the young people involved in them run away from the idea, should begin to build something that lasts. After all, however nice it is to live in tents for a few weeks in the park it can't last for too long. The kids will get tired and go back to what they were doing before. Then it will be back to business as usual. We need to create institutions that always challenge business as usual.

DB: What about the efficacy of elections in terms of effecting change? Did the election of Obama in 2008 finally disabuse people of that possibility?

TA: In countries where that can happen it is very positive, as in South America, where government after government is elected to bring about change. It doesn't change everything, but it begins to implement that. Obama was never interested in change. His slogans were totally vacuous. "Change we can believe in," which in effect has meant no change at all. Or "Yes, we can," which is one of the most vacuous slogans I've heard in an election anywhere. But it's become popular.

The funny thing about American dominance is that you see these pathetic little European politicians, even though they don't speak English, ending with saying, "Yes, we can. Yes, we can." And you say, "What world do you guys live in? Are you totally out of touch with your people?" The question is, "Yes, we can what?" Yes, we can challenge the powers of capital? Yes, we can stop making wars? No. Yes, we can enhance civil rights? No. Yes, we can lock up whistleblowers? Yes. That's the change we believe in. We'll lock up more whistleblowers than Bush. We'll release fewer people from Guantánamo than Bush.

I don't think that the lesson of Obama has gone through totally, by the way. I think lots of people still have illusions, and so they find excuses for him, that he's a prisoner. This is my favorite one, that we have a prisoner of Zenda here, the prisoner of the White House. Whose prisoner? The guy couldn't wait to enter the White House. He had been campaigning for it for so long, making himself moderate, cautious, post-racial. Post-racial in the US? In a country where now the figures of Black people incarcerated in prison or part of the prison system through parole networks, and hence not allowed to vote, the actual number of these people now is exactly the same as the size of the Black slave population before the Civil War.

This is post-racial America? Someone has to say these things. And I think African Americans are realizing that this is the case but don't want to say it in public. Sometimes people don't like it, but I always say this now, to just break illusions. It doesn't matter what the color of the skin of the president of the United States is or whether it's a woman. You have to judge them not on the basis of their gender or their race, but on the basis of what they do. Because they are not ordinary prime ministers or presidents, they are imperial presidents. That's a distinction that is very important.

DB: You've been a part of many social movements over the decades, both in Pakistan as well as in Britain. You know that they can take an unpredictable turn. There is no saying with certainty that this will be the outcome. So in this moment of enormous economic upheaval, one could venture to say that there is a potential for some kind of revolutionary breakthrough. What that might be, again, is purely speculative.

TA: Look nobody, but nobody, predicted the Arab uprisings. And that shows that history remains very original. You can mimic it, you can echo it, but it's very difficult to repeat it. It finds its own paths and channels. So I would say that, yes, virtually anything is possible. In some countries, in Greece, for instance, it would be a relief to everyone if a revolution took place. Really. They wouldn't care what the structures are. They would just say help us. People would see it as a relief. But whether the people on the left or the masses are prepared to challenge the system frontally is another question. That's a huge risk as well.

And I say this after a great deal of reflection. The Egyptians and the Tunisians and the Yemenis and others who are still fighting won because they were prepared to sacrifice their lives, they were prepared to say, "OK, if necessary, we'll die." When a people loses its fear of death, it can achieve miracles.

The Europeans haven't reached that stage yet. They really haven't. And they've got to achieve a bigger

miracle than the one achieved in the Arab world of two despots being toppled and others being under threat. So, yes, it can happen, but it depends a lot on the political consciousness of a country and its people. Of course, political consciousness, too, is never linear. It can go up and then it can stabilize and be flat for years to come.

And suddenly the situation changes and it can go up very fast. When that happens, you do need some institution, whether it is a popular assembly or a political organization or a party of a new type, to take the decision, with the people and their support, and say, "Now we're going for power." You have to do that. If you say ludicrous things like, "We can change the world without taking power," then you might as well go into the lavatory and flush yourselves down, because you're not going to achieve anything.

DB: You have a sense that there is a possibility of surprise, that there could be some kind of breakthrough.

TA: I think, given what's happened in the Arab world and given what's happened in history throughout time, it throws up surprises. The historical process is original. Things can happen which can take everyone by surprise. I'm not saying this in a mystical fashion. I'm saying that when people have reached a stage where they find that they cannot live in the same old way anymore and the rulers feel they cannot govern in the same way anymore—they have to curb, restrict, become more and more despotic, like despotic capitalism itself—then anything can happen. I'm not saying that our side will necessarily win, but it will certainly fight.

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