

International VIEWPOINT

International Viewpoint—magazine of the Fourth International

IV444 January 2012

CRISIS OF CAPITALISM

A worldwide game of chess... with no winner

ARAB REVOLUTIONS

One year on

DOSSIER

Global Justice Tunisia

Debt crisis
Crisis of capitalism
Japan
Philippines
Ireland
Morocco
Fourth International
Euskadi

Egypt
USA
Kazakhstan:
Arab revolutions
Pakistan
Greece
Russia
Ecology

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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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DEBT CRISIS

Citizen debt audits: how and why?

DAMIEN MILLET ·

Questions to ask

What brought the state to take on continually increasing debt?

For what political choices and social interests has the debt been contracted?

Who has profited from this?

Was it possible or necessary to make different choices?

Who are the lenders?

Who holds the debt?

Do the lenders impose conditions and, if so, what are these?

How much do the lenders benefit?

For what decisions and reasons has the state borrowed? How were these decisions made?

What interest has been paid, at what rate and how much of the principal has already been reimbursed?

How have private debts become public debts?

What were the conditions of each bank bailout? What did they cost? Who made the decision?

Should the shareholders, and directors they chose, who provoked disaster, receive compensation?

What is the portion of the state's budget used to service the debt?

How does the state finance debt repayments?

No need to access state secrets to find the answers

To answer these questions, and many others, there is no need to leak state secrets or access confidential documents from central banks, finance min-

istries, IMF, the ECB, the European Commission, international clearing houses such as Clearstream or Euroclear [1] or rely on leaks from insiders working in these organizations. Of course, a great number of documents jealously guarded by governing bodies and banks must be released to the public and would be extremely useful in honing the analysis. We must demand access to documentation required for a full audit. However, it is perfectly possible to proceed with a rigorous examination of the public debt using documents that are already open to public scrutiny. Important data is already available to whomever takes the trouble to unearth it; in the press, government reports, official websites of parliamentary institutions, central banks, official financing agencies of all sorts, the OECD, Bank for International Settlements (BIS), the ECB, private banks, organizations or groups that have already undertaken a critical analysis of public debt. <http://cadtm.org>, <http://attac.org...>, local government archives, credit rating agencies or Ph.D. Memoranda. There is no need to hesitate about lobbying members of parliament to ask questions in the House or local councilors to raise the issue in their local councils.

No need of specialists to conduct an audit

Auditing is not a task for experts alone. They are of course welcome to take part and may contribute much to the citizens' effort, but these citizens can get started on the audit without expert participation. The groups' research and actions to spark public discussion will strengthen and broaden their expertise and can get various specialists onside. Each of us may take part in analysing the public debt process and bringing it into the open. A national collective for a citizens' audit of public debt was created in France in 2011 <http://audit-citoyen.org>, bringing together many organizations

and political parties. Tens of thousands of people signed the call launching it. Many local citizens' audit committees have since been organized throughout France within this framework. Local realities are also a means of examining the public debt process, starting with the "structured loans" that several banks, particularly Dexia, have sought to impose on local governments. A certain amount of work has already been done on this matter by the association "Public actors against toxic Loans" (*Acteurs publics contre les emprunts toxiques*), which includes a dozen or so local authorities <http://empruntstoxiques.fr>. We may also start by examining the funding difficulties of local health services, such as hospitals. Citizens' debt audit initiatives have also got underway in Belgium, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Spain and Portugal.

Other aspects in the field of private debt may also be considered. In countries such as Ireland and Spain, where hundreds of thousands of families have become victims of a real estate bubble, it is relevant to examine household mortgage debts. Victims of mortgage lenders could provide testimony about their situation and help us understand the illegitimate debt process affecting them.

A very promising field of action

The scope of action for public debt audits is infinitely promising and in no way resembles a routine accountancy operation, merely checking on a series of figures. Beyond keeping tabs on finances, audits play an eminently political role linked to two basic social needs; transparency and democratic control of the state and its representatives by the citizenry.

These are needs that refer to basic democratic rights recognized in international law, domestic democratic law and constitutions, although these rights are continually violated. Citizens' right to oversee the acts of those who govern them, to be informed on every matter pertaining to their administration, their objectives and motivations, is an intrinsic part of democracy itself. These derive from citizens' basic right to exert control over the powers

that be and to take an active part in public affairs, which affect everyone.

The fact that governments, which continually blitz the media with rhetoric about transparency, oppose citizens' audits is an indication that current democracies are in a sorry state. This ongoing need for transparency in public affairs has become a vital social and political necessity. Hence, real transparency is the ruling classes' worst nightmare.

Citizens' audits for repudiation of illegitimate debt

Carrying out a citizens' audit of public debt combined with a strong popular movement for suspension of repayments should culminate in the abolition/repudiation of the illegitimate part of the public debt and a drastic reduction of remaining debt.

There is no question of accepting debt relief decided by the lenders, in particular because of the severe price to pay such relief implies. Cancellation of the debt by an indebted country thus becomes a unilateral sovereign act of great significance.

Why should a state radically reduce its national debt by canceling illegitimate debts? Above all for reasons of social justice, but also for economic reasons easy enough to understand and defend. To emerge from the crisis in a positive way, boosting the economy by relying on public and household demand is not enough. Relying on such a policy, even combined with a re-distributive tax reform, any extra tax revenue would be funneled into public debt repayments. Greater taxation of the wealthiest households and major private firms (national or foreign) companies, would be generally compensated by the income they derive from government bonds. As they hold most of these, they don't even want to entertain discussion of debt cancellation. So it is necessary to simply write off a very large share of the national debt. The size of the write-off will bear a direct relation to the level of public outrage among victims of the debt system (the citizens' debt audit plays a key role here), the course of the political and economic crisis and above all the balance of power that can be built in the streets and

public squares, and in workplaces, through present and future protests.

A radical reduction of national debt is a necessary, but insufficient, means of getting European Union countries out of the debt crisis. Other complementary measures are also necessary: tax reform to redistribute wealth, collectivization of the financial

sector and re-nationalizing other key economic sectors, shorter working hours with no cut in income and with compensatory hiring, and many more measures [2] that would result in a radical change from the current state of affairs that has driven the world into a volatile dead end.

Translated by Mike Krolikowski, Marie Lagatta

TUNISIA

Opportunists and the Revolution

GILBERT ACHCAR ·

One advocate of such a view in the not-so-distant past was Moncef Marzouki, the transitional president of Tunisia, when he was still living in France as an opponent in exile of the previous president, the tyrant Zine el Abidine Ben Ali.

In an article he published on Al Jazeera's website on 19 February 2010, Marzouki cited the French scholar Beatrice Hibou (who belongs to the Orientalist school), author of *The Force of Obedience: The Political Economy of Repression in Tunisia*, to explain Tunisians' alleged "obedience" to their tyrants by attributing it to a mentality ingrained in them over the course of generations (these theses have been powerfully refuted by the Tunisian scholar Mahmoud Ben Romdhane in a recent book in French).

Marzouki argued that whoever reads Hibou's book "understands that what bewilders the Western mind about Arabs is our transcendent ability to obey the most corrupt of rulers, while Western culture is based on the refusal to obey injustice and on legitimizing the right to resist it."

He thus added to the Orientalist image of Arabs an idealized image of "Western culture" as if it were an eternal given, overlooking the fact that the most despotic regimes in modern history were established after the First World War among two of the oldest Western civilizations, Italy and Germany. This is also overlooking the fact that, prior to modern history, the West went through a long period of absolute monarchy.

Marzouki went further, outmatching the French Orientalist: "Take any Tunisian or Egyptian or Yemeni walking down the street and put him in power. There is a 90 percent chance that he will act

in a way not much different from that of Ben Ali or Mubarak or Saleh."

One of the most important achievements of the current Arab revolutions with regard to the image of the Arabs is that it shattered the caricature shaped by Western Orientalism about Arab submissiveness and Arab or Muslim cultural addiction to servility, as if Arabs hated freedom and loved tyranny.

The revolutionary wave that started in Tunisia and is still in its initial stage proved to the entire world that Arabs hate tyranny and yearn for freedom no less than any other people. It also proved that when they "aspired to life" – to borrow from the famous verse by Tunisian poet Abul-Qasim al-Shabi – and managed to break the barrier of fear, they accomplished uprisings that became a model to emulate around the world.

When Marzouki himself returned to Tunisia upon the downfall of Ben Ali, he was so overcome by the revolution's euphoria that, for a moment, he resorted to class analysis in the manner of the radical left, publishing on 10 March 2011 these insightful lines:

"Revolutionaries are not the ones who reap the fruits of the revolution. After the revolutionaries comes the time of the opportunists, and after the epic comes the time of failed hopes. For the poor of Sidi Bouzid return to their poverty and the cemetery dwellers in Cairo return to their cemeteries. No radical solutions are given to their problems, only lots of promises that may or may not be fulfilled."

"As for who gains the most, in our case it is the bourgeoisie: it enjoyed a decent standard of living under despotism but its lives were poisoned by its corruption and its suppression of freedom. With the end of despotism, the bourgeoisie – through the sacrifices of the humble and the poor – adds to its economic and social rights the political ones it had

been denied, while the poor classes themselves get political freedoms that do not feed hungry mouths."

Popular wisdom says that power corrupts. After he became president of Tunisia, Moncef Marzouki could no longer understand why the people of Sidi Bouzid refused to return to their poverty, rejected empty promises, and insisted on radical solutions to their problems. He suddenly found their refusal and insistence so distasteful that he resorted to borrowing the tyrants' usual arguments, as if he wanted to confirm what he had written two years ago.

When asked in an interview on Al Jazeera on 20 January 2012 about the popular protests that have not ceased in Tunisia since the downfall of the tyrant, Marzouki replied that they are, on the one hand, the result of the deposed regime's legacy and of economic paralysis. To which he added:

"But, there is also exploitation, politicization, and incitement from some quarters, either out of irresponsibility or with the intent of sabotaging this revolution – both these factors are at play. There are people that I consider irresponsible like the far left who say now we love the revolution, and they know that this government is in its first month, this is what I consider irresponsibility."

It is an old tune that Tunisians and Arabs generally are familiar with: The masses cannot possibly rise up on their own against their miserable living conditions. There are always "agitators," "subversives," "irresponsible culprits," and "extremists" – of various political colors – inciting them to protest and revolt.

This logic fails to understand that rage over exploitation and misery leads naturally to political radicalization. It reverses this fact into the idea that the radicals are the ones who create public outrage over misery and exploitation.

What the new Tunisian president has failed to understand is that his call last December for a six-month social truce was doomed to fail because it was not accompanied by any program indicating a

real intention on the part of the new Tunisian government to respond to the people's obvious needs and basic demands, for which the people revolted and toppled Ben Ali.

Hamadi Jebali, a leader of the Ennahda Movement and the prime minister of the Tunisian transitional government, did not hesitate to claim on Al Jazeera (22 January 2012) that the economic decline in Tunisia this past year "is due to the phenomena of sit-ins, blocking roads, and wildcat labor strikes." He added that these mass protests prevented the implementation of new investment projects that were going to provide "thousands" of job opportunities.

In Marzouki's own previous words, the gentlemen who are in power today want the masses to end their struggle now that the dictator has been overthrown and want "the poor of Sidi Bouzid to return to their poverty...No radical solutions are given to their problems, only lots of promises that may or may not be fulfilled. As for who gains the most, it is the bourgeoisie: it enjoyed a decent standard of living under despotism but its lives were poisoned by its corruption and its suppression of freedom. With the end of despotism, the bourgeoisie – through the sacrifices of the humble and the poor – adds to its economic and social rights the political ones it had been denied, while the poor classes themselves get political freedoms that do not feed hungry mouths."

One does not need extraordinary insight to realize that the winners of the first post-uprising elections and governments are truly the opportunists and not the revolutionaries, as Marzouki himself rightly said when he was still moved by the thrill and wisdom of the revolution.

Condemning labor strikes and blaming them for the country's economic decline, as well as playing that same old tune of the "extremists" and "subversives" of the "far left," have become the common language of the new rulers in both Tunisia and Egypt, in a way that reminds us irresistibly of the deposed regimes.

But the masses that one day aspired to life and experienced the taste of freedom will not stop struggling and protesting before "fate answers their call," even if only years later.

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A worldwide game of chess... with no winner

CLAUDIO KATZ ·

Two interpretations of this crisis were dominant at its beginning. The neoliberals emphasized the culpability of debtors, who took on loans without being able to pay them back, as well as the irresponsibility of governments, which took on unmanageable liabilities. The Keynesians, on the other hand, underlined the absence of financial regulation and the excesses of speculation. They also insisted on the fall in solvable demand because of the stagnation of wages and social polarization. The two currents also pointed to various errors of economic policy that have led to the present collapse.

This initial explanation of the origin of the crisis subsequently shifted to another problem: the differential impact of the convulsions depending on the regions of the world and consequently the geopolitical modifications, in other words the turn towards multipolarity, the loss of US hegemony, the strengthening of China and the increased role of the emerging economies.

How has the economic crisis developed in each region of the world? What are the strategies of the ruling classes? What kind of scenarios do they profile on a world level?

The fracture of the US economy

When the insolvent debtors could not keep up with repaying their debts ("subprimes"), the real estate collapse triggered the crisis in the United States. The banks were confronted with the lack of liquidity, because 11 million residences were revalued at prices below the level of their mortgages and a fifth of buyers were asphyxiated by debts that were impossible to repay. Thereafter debt emerged in other

fields. Households were confronted with liabilities equivalent to 112 per cent of their incomes and with financial obligations that were 37 per cent higher than those of the previous decade. The entire chain of financing was affected by the morose atmosphere, which led the banks to restrict offers of loans and created a vicious circle of recession and financial fragility.

The orthodox economists accuse the debtors and their adversaries accuse the banks. But both forget that the snowball of consumption financed by credit grew over several decades and that it is the consequence of the capitalist reorganization imposed by neoliberal globalization. This transformation has led to a deterioration of working conditions (destabilization, stagnation of wages, segmentation of qualifications) which have reduced popular incomes and impelled the recourse to credit in order to maintain consumption. Faced with a level of unemployment which exceeded 10 per cent, poverty affecting 15 per cent of the population, wages stagnating at their level of fifteen years ago and a scandalous concentration of wealth [1], debt propped up demand.

The neoliberal restructuring also caused a significant delocalization of companies, which grow rich abroad due to lower wage costs, thus accentuating the loss of employment. US companies create abroad the jobs that they destroy at home and, for this reason, the local recession coexists with an increase in the foreign exchange revenues of the 500 principal companies. [2].

Over the last decades the enormous level of North American consumption was maintained, based on debt, in a context of domestic industrial regression, increased exploitation, a trade deficit and the emigration of companies. This critical scenario was the

result of the competitive pressure impelled by neoliberalism.

The imbalances produced by this new model appeared in the light of day with the emergence of mortgage debt. But its scale became visible with the bankruptcy of the Lehman Brothers bank in 2008 and the erosion of the financial system as a whole in 2009.

The aid which followed finally caused the present nightmare of fiscal and banking insolvency which is making the markets tremble. These entities continue to profit from intensive therapy and public debt has gone from 62 per cent of GDP in 2007 to 100 per cent in 2011 [3].

The US government is managing the budget deficit without any coherence. One day it yields to the pressure of the Republicans to reduce expenditure and the next it launches an investment plan with strong tax cuts. Obama is paralysed between the pressure of the Right, which has taken control of Congress, and an electorate which is still waiting for him to fulfil his promises.

The external reaction of the United States

Basing itself on the G20 and the joint intervention of the central banks, the United States has tried to lead the global management of the crisis. It has, moreover, recourse to several strategies by using its principal economic instruments.

The dollar - which counts for 85 per cent of currency transactions, 65 per cent of world trade and a similar percentage of world reserves – represents their first resource. Half of world debt and the majority of the transactions in oil and other raw materials are made out in dollars. Although the dollar has lost the absolute domination which it had after the Second World War, it maintains its primacy in the absence of a replacement currency. The euro has not acquired the influence necessary to act as a world currency, the Japanese yen has seen its influence regressing and the Chinese yuan is not internationalized as a convertible currency. This lack of a substitute makes it possible for the dollar to

maintain a predominant intervention, which could anticipate a future coexistence of three currencies (dollar, euro, yuan), the return to fixed foreign exchange rates or the negotiation of a new basket of several currencies [4].

In each of these cases, the dollar will be able to maintain the impact that it has preserved, since the end of its convertibility into gold, during the successive stages of the revaluations and devaluations of its rate of exchange. The room for manoeuvre that makes it possible to impose high foreign exchange rates (to attract capital) and low ones (to encourage exports) has been reduced, but it has not disappeared.

US influence is also significant in the reform of the world financial system (the Basel III Agreement of December 2010). This change is underway with the aim of increasing the assets of the banks, and negotiations continue over the amount that these entities will have to provide. The manner of regulating the new mechanisms of speculation (derivatives, CDS and hedge funds) as well as the direct financial transactions of companies are also under discussion.

The internationalization of finance and the interconnection of Stock Exchanges make this normative adjustment essential, which implies a preliminary reorganization of North American entities. It is a recognized leader of the banking clan - Paul Volcker - who is in charge of this remodelling.

On this terrain Wall Street works in close partnership with the City of London. They manage the financial summits together and take care to restrict all regulations to a minimum that is compatible with their business. The heroes of neoliberalism (Greenspan and Bernanke) are on the defensive with regard to this reorganization. They can no longer speak publicly about the absolute efficiency of markets to contain bubbles. Their Keynesian opponents (such as William Dudley) do not manage either to impose more preliminary control of high-tension speculation. But both variants of the reform are defined in the United States [5].

US influence is also decisive in the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In spite of the increasing influence obtained by the new participants in the IMF, it is Washington that sets the tone. In the recent G20 deliberations, Washington succeeded in doubling the funds of the IMF, and having its powers of audit and its control of national economies increased. It is the IMF which currently defines in Europe the sanctions against any obstacle to budget cuts. It suspended loans to Ukraine when the country planned to increase the minimum wage, imposed the reduction of wages in Latvia, demanded privatizations in Greece and was opposed to the result of the Icelandic referendum which called into question the demands of the creditors. Now it does not just limit itself to minor economies but is supervising the rescue of Italy [6].

Starting from these actions the North American establishment is evaluating the strategies for a way out of the crisis and envisaging inflationary options. Since 2008 the Federal Reserve (Fed) has injected two thousand billion dollars through ultra-expansionist policies (known as "quantitative easing", the contemporary equivalent of printing money). It orchestrated monetary emissions which are flooding the planet with dollars and facilitating the export of US imbalances. This policy aims at liquefying the national debt through

inflation, thus repeating the mechanism already used by the United States to drain away its government liabilities by diluting them all over the world.

But this policy is more difficult today, not only because of the resistance of orthodox economists. In the past the inflationary reduction of debt was absorbed by strong growth, which made it possible to reduce the load in comparison with GDP. However, for the coming years, nobody dares to predict such scenarios of prosperity [7].

The European collapse

Many European analysts initially characterized the crisis of the old continent as being simply an after-shock of the US earthquake. This vision has been

refuted by the impressive dimensions of the European economic tsunami.

Its scale is linked to the specific imbalances produced by the formation of the European Union (27 countries) and the Euro zone (17 economies). The purpose of the two initiatives was to adapt the region to the neoliberal rules of world competition, by replacing the former diversity of the economies by a bloc pulled by the German locomotive and by French diplomacy.

The leading role of the German economy was consolidated by the annexation of the Eastern territory (the former German Democratic Republic). The ruling class used the technological capacity and the high productivity of industry to reinforce wage discipline and to thus transform the country into a great exporting power of the Euro zone.

But the present crisis has shown the unfinished character of this bloc. The common currency was introduced to guarantee German surpluses, while putting off until later the organization of a common budget and taxation. This deficiency was deadly. The absence of common state institutions to support the currency undermined the cohesion of the project and reinforced the heterogeneity of the community. Instead of consolidating the nascent structure it increased the distance separating the powerful economies from the less advanced ones.

Initially some people hoped that these gaps would be reduced by the development of a common market and transfers towards the less developed regions. But in the long term the opposite process prevailed, the systematic loss of their positions by the countries with higher rates of inflation and lower indices of productivity. Finally a fracture took place between the surplus economies (Germany, the Netherlands, Austria) and the deficit countries (Greece, Portugal, Ireland) [8].

Public debt and the bankruptcy of banks widened this gap between the centre and the periphery of the Euro zone. The small economies sank first, submerged by the imbalance of commercial exchanges (Greece), the decline of overseas investments (Ire-

land) and foreign speculative financing (Iceland, Cyprus). Then tax collapse reached Italy (the third power of the zone) and it now threatens Spain (which faces a terrible mortgage burden).

All the banks have their portfolios full of insolvent public bonds. The most fragile entities, Greece, Ireland and Iceland have already collapsed and fear stalks the big institutions of France, Germany, Austria and Italy. Interbank exchanges have decreased; the fear of the toxicity of balance sheets is increasing and some funds have already been withdrawn to be placed in surer places [9].

The German strategy

Germany cannot employ the responses, on a world scale, that the United States is trying. It lacks the imperial resources that the first-ranking power still possesses and has chosen a defensive deflationary strategy, which places it at the antipodes of the US inflationary option. Whereas the Federal Reserve has imposed systematic reductions of interest rates, the European Central Bank (ECB) has increased the price of money.

This divergence is often explained by the difference in traditions. The memory of Weimar is opposed to that of the New Deal. According to this view, this opposition between European fears of hyperinflation and US memories of the Great Depression make it possible to explain the gap between the respective influence of the two countries in the international management of the crisis [10].

On the European level Germany promotes an aggressive policy aiming at making workers pay the cost of the crisis. This attack is not just a case of one more adjustment. It is imposing the destruction of the Welfare State built after the war and the liquidation of social conquests, which the workers of other continents had never won. The European unemployment rate is already 20 per cent and under the impact of the precarisation of work, poverty affects a quarter of the population.

Budgetary tightening in order to support the euro constitutes the other pillar of German policy. Over

the last few months, the existence of this currency has been on the edge of the precipice and there has been speculation about it being reorganized, breaking up or disappearing in the near future. But this is a currency which has been the key to the exporting domination of Germany, based on the unification of markets and the elimination of protectionist barriers.

In order to preserve the euro, the recent budgetary agreement at the European summit fixes a time limit for restoring the rules on deficits and public debt. It envisages automatic sanctions for countries which violate them. These budgetary principles are destined to become a constitutional norm and to be subjected to control by supranational courts. These authorities will supervise expenditure and will be able to impose its reduction at any point in the year, thus placing the peoples between the hammer and the anvil. Those who neglected the application of this agenda would be automatically excluded from the Euro zone.

This political hardening is in conformity with the German strategy, aimed at reinforcing its exporting model without emitting its own currency. It seeks to reinforce the role of the European periphery as a supplier of factors of production at decreasing cost. The reduction of Greek wages, the pulverization of Irish social security and the generalized increase in the retirement age anticipate the consequences of this reorganization [11].

Germany is imposing this deflationary strategy by prohibiting all financial initiatives which would threaten its competitiveness. It has blocked the creation of Euro-bonds and the mutualisation of debts. It has blocked the extension of the European Financial Stability Fund (EFSF, due to be replaced by the European Stability Mechanism), prevented the purchase of Treasury bills on the secondary markets and reinforced the bans on direct financing of countries by the ECB.

This rigour by no means implies abandoning bankrupt banks. Germany approves of aid to the banks, while seeking to preserve its industrial potential. It

does not renounce the idea of the future financing of the Euro zone with the federal mechanisms which govern the United States, but on condition of guaranteeing its own fiscal control beforehand. Faced with the vulnerability of the banks and with the impossibility of repeating the progressive absorption of debts - implemented for example by the United States for decades, faced with Latin-American debts - it has accelerated the installation of this supervision [12].

This new budgetary framework has opened up another series of conflicts at the top of the European Union (EU). Britain rejected the Franco-German pact and decided to remain on the sidelines in order to protect the autonomy of the City. It refuses to subject its banks to supervision by Brussels because it did not obtain the right of veto in order to protect its business. The British capitalists are certainly interested in taking part in the continental market, but on condition of preserving the internationalization of their finances.

The Merkel-Sarkozy alliance appears to be winning at the conclusion of the recent summit, but only time will make it possible to evaluate the consistency of this victory. The crisis devours political leaderships and each election leads to outgoing governments being punished. This punishment affects in the same way the social democrats (Ireland, Portugal, Spain) and the conservatives (France, Italy, Germany) [13].

Interrogations on China

The continuation of China's growth at annual rates of 9-10 per cent is an important novelty of the crisis in progress. In the course of the last decade exports of the Asian giant have increased at a frenetic rate. China is capturing natural resources in Africa, strengthening trade with Latin America and has already dethroned Japan as the second biggest economy in the world.

This progress confirms the depth of the changes that have taken place during the period of neoliberalism. China integrated itself into globalization by

using the low price of its labour force, without repeating the time-honoured trajectory which involved protectionist beginnings, the formation of a national bourgeoisie and the deployment of international competition. It integrated itself directly into world capital accumulation.

At the beginning of the crisis many economists supposed that Chinese growth would compensate for the contraction of the advanced economies. Actually we have only seen it playing the role of a partial counterweight. The Asian giant supported financially the United States and Europe at the high points of the crisis, to ensure the continuity of its external sales, while maintaining its domestic demand and reinforcing its international purchases of raw materials. It thus put a brake on the general depression and delimited the geographical range of the recession, but it did not replace the locomotives of the developed world. Will it continue to play this role?

Some people are betting on this continuity and expect strong help from the yuan to the old continent, which would involve enormous acquisitions of government bonds in euros. But China has already acquired a large part of Italian, Spanish and Portuguese debt and a quarter of its reserves are in euros. The increase in such purchases provokes divergences within the Chinese leadership.

The sector more associated with world trade ("the elite of the coast") agrees to take part in the new bail-out in exchange for strong counterparts. It seeks to get sanctions for dumping reduced, to obtain the statute of "market economy" and to take its place in investment in European infrastructure.

This fraction also tries to place China within the future framework of a world currency. This is why it demands that part of any aid be made out in yuans. But such a monetary insertion would also increase the foreign exchange rate of the yuan and consequently would weaken the exporting model. China has resisted a lot of pressure aimed at getting the yuan revalued and it has not accepted the demands that the United States was able to impose on Japan during the previous decade. Nevertheless simply

internationalizing the yuan could lead to a weakening of the autonomy of the principal Asian economy [14].

Chinese investment funds took an active part in the maintenance of the dollar and of Treasury bills. They acquired shares in General Motors and took holdings in the Morgan Stanley bank. But the passage of these acquisitions to another scale (in particular in Europe) would take the country into a high-risk imperial policy. To defend what was obtained abroad would require a geopolitical presence that the Chinese leaders want to avoid.

For this reason many sectors of the Chinese leadership ("the elite of the interior") question the disproportionate increase in overseas investments and underline the need for increasing initially the very low domestic consumption. The recent mobilization on Internet against the financing of the old continent reflects this concern. It should be remembered that GDP per capita in China is still less than 10 per cent of the European average.

The dilemma between support for the exporting model or a turn towards domestic consumption persists, without being solved. There is a strong pressure in favour of the second option, but without a significant result. This turn has not been made. It could lead to the growth of imbalances on a very large scale.

In order to increase domestic purchasing power substantially it is necessary to increase wages and to introduce generalized social security benefits. These measures would run up against the model of low labour costs which made possible the capitalist rise of the country. The reorientation of the flow of investments towards Asian economies, whose wages are even lower than in China, already constitutes an early warning of the problems that such a turn could cause.

The economic orientation is thus subject to multiple tensions. The most immediate imbalance is the real estate bubble: in the thirty principal cities of China housing prices have increased by 50 per cent over the two last years, repeating the cycle of dubi-

ous debt which has affected the United States and Spain. Since a quarter of the Chinese economy is related to construction, an abrupt reversal of its value could affect GDP.

There are also serious financial problems. Although the state maintains control over credit, an enormous market in clandestine loans has developed to finance the consumption of the middle-class and the obscure accounting systems of local governments. These discordances explain the rise in inflation, which over the last decade oscillated at around 2 per cent and which has just reached 6.2 per cent.

The scale of the profits accumulated by the privileged layers is another element of instability. The incomes of the richest 10 per cent of the population are 23 times higher than those of the poorest 10 per cent and the cream of the government receive wages 128 times higher than the general average [15].

This social fracture coexists with the structural problems of over-investment, which has already reached 45 per cent of the GDP. Such a rate of investment requires new markets on a recessive international scene. It also increases the ecological dangers because of a loss of administrative control.

Nobody knows what will be the impact on China of a new retreat of the worldwide economy. Certain economists think that this effect will be assimilable (Stiglitz); others forecast serious consequences (Roubini). But all are in agreement to underline the central character of this factor for the immediate evolution of the world economic situation [16].

BRICS, EAGLE and emerging economies

China has not been the only economy which has so far been able to avoid the world recession. A group of intermediate economies (variously called emergent, rising or BRICS) have also been able to weather the storm. This nucleus of countries forms the semi-peripheral conglomerate of the present world stratification.

This sector has maintained its growth over the last year and significantly increased its investment rate, as well as its participation in world GDP. If these tendencies persist, localization of production and employment will experience an important shift over the next period. These modifications are in conformity with the new international division of labour, which privileges the Asian continent.

The rising economies are the spoiled children of capitalism. They receive praise from the IMF and they have been the stars of the recent forums of leading entrepreneurs in Davos. The new multimillionaires of China, Russia and India are rapidly being integrated into the club of the masters of the world.

The distribution of world reserves is another indicator of the modifications that are underway. They amount to 6,500 billion dollars in the emergent economies and to only 3,200 billion in the countries of the North. The foreign debt of the first group has been reduced and some of its members are already in credit. At the other pole a new category has burst onto the scene: "the heavily indebted rich countries".

However, erroneous conclusions are often drawn from these changes. The principal confusion lies in indiscriminately classifying of the whole of this rising group under the sole heading of BRIC. This denomination - initially Brazil, Russia, India and China - was extended to BRICS (with South Africa), then to BRIICKS (with Indonesia and South Korea). Another recent extension designates the EAGLE ("Emerging and Growth Leading Economies" i.e. the principal emerging and rising economies), involving Mexico, Egypt, Taiwan and Turkey) [17].

It is the banking operators (Goldman Sachs, BBVA) who are at the origin of these names. They include or exclude countries from their list according to the occasions for financial investments. The conjunctural character of such an evaluation is glaringly obvious. But the principal disadvantage of these names is to put in the same bag a country which is

advancing towards the status of a central power (China) and intermediate economies whose future evolution is uncertain.

The distance between the Asian giant and each of the other countries designated as emerging is enormous, with regard to production, exports and financial reserves. This gap is particularly visible in relation to another economy which has recently experienced strong growth (India) and in comparison with another neighbour which preceded China's progress (South Korea) and which has regressed in the face of the explosive rise of China [18].

By putting all these countries in the same basket we forget that many of them have developed as suppliers of the basic commodities which China needs. They have not been drivers of world growth but have been pulled along by it. It is also important to note the division which exists between the protagonists of industrial development and the actors whose development is based on the rise in the rent from oil (Russia) or agriculture (Brazil). These differences imply strong diversity in the coherence of their growth.

The distinctions between the emerging countries are even more categorical on the geopolitical level. The autonomy of the imperial policies of Russia and China does not extend to India, Brazil or South Africa. These latter countries continue to have very close links of association or dependence with the powers which define the world order. That is why the way the countries known as BRICS work together has not given rise to the adoption by them of common strategies. It is certain that the greater political stability of this group contrasts conjuncturally with the generalized disorder which reigns within the central powers. But this characteristic does not determine either a model of common international action.

The new South-South alliances, to the detriment of long-established connections with the metropolitan centre, have a limited range and do not anticipate the "second globalization", led by the emerging economies, that some analysts have forecast. Until

now, the most significant element has been the integration of emerging countries into the G20, with the aim of reinforcing the support for capitalism in crisis [19].

The trials and tribulations of the periphery

The exception of the intermediate countries has not extended to the rest of the periphery. The crisis is again striking, with increased virulence, the most impoverished economies, reiterating what has been the norm for the convulsions of capitalism. This impact can be observed on the terrains of employment and income. Emigrants face even more obstacles to reach the First World, aid is drying up and the waves of refugees are multiplying.

Whereas the press speaks only about the central and emerging economies, the vast majority of countries are outside the G20 and have to face the dramatic effects of poverty on a daily basis. That is where we can find the 2,050 million people who do not have access to basic health care and the 884 million who do not have access to drinking water.

The new phenomenon of the present tsunami is the convergence of these sufferings with the tragedy of famine. The rise in food prices, which preceded the crisis, was not reversed by the recession. In many areas the drama of denutrition has been accentuated. In Somalia, for example, we can see all the symptoms of a food catastrophe. The total number of the hungry comes to 1,020 million people, but the threat extends to the 2,500 million who live in poverty. This plague is increasing with the rise in the prices of cereals, which reflect the consolidation of an export-centred neoliberal agriculture, destroying smallholdings, destroying traditional local food chains, generalizing the dispossession of the peasants and greatly increasing rural emigration.

This capitalist reorganization of agriculture determines the lack of food which brings distress to a sixth of humanity, whereas the total production is sufficient to satisfy food needs. The reign of profitability and control of agricultural trade by a handful of transnational oligopolies (Archer Daniels Midland, Bunge, Cargill and the Louis Dreyfus

Group) increases the tragedy of famine. The hopes that the deflationary effect of economic slowdown would attenuate this problem have not been confirmed. The rise in food prices, which began in 2003, is continuing without any significant modifications.

Many authors think that this rise is due to the formation of a new bubble. Speculating on the future prices of cereals has become a very profitable operation. It makes it possible to channel the surpluses of liquidities resulting from the loss of possibilities for profitable investments in the developed countries [20]. Other analysts consider that the rise in food prices is a more structural problem which derives from the increasing demand from new Asian consumers. They also underline the increase in production costs and the declining productivity of the agricultural sector [21].

These are two complementary explanations – in the short- and long-term - of the same phenomenon. But in any case the financial manoeuvres and the structural imbalances between supply and demand augur the aggravation of the food crisis that is forecast by all the experts of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

This situation is further worsened by the pressure of the agribusiness industry, which blocks in the G20 any international regulation of prices. The G20 involves the countries which produce 77 per cent of cereals and control 80 per cent of agricultural trade. The hunger of the powerless is the other side of the coin of the good business that is being done by several members of this association.

Multipolarity and hegemony

The diversity of regional situations in the present crisis has generalized predictions of a turn in world domination towards multipolarity. This context differs from the bipolarity which followed the Second World War (the United States against the USSR) and from the unipolarity of the 1990s (supremacy of the United States). The decline of the United States is associated with the advance of China and

the emerging countries. Some analysts also underline the exhaustion of neoliberalism and forecast a developmentist growth of the periphery, based on state intervention and exchanges between the economies of the South [22].

But these points of view do not take into account important elements of continuity which link the present period to the preceding one. Multipolarity could modify the relationships of force between the powers but it does not change the pillars of neoliberal globalization. The role of transnational corporations persists, as does world competition for the profits based on the exploitation of the labour force.

Moreover, this internationalization of capital determines the continuity of free trade and cross-border financial flows. Unlike what happened in the inter-war period, the present multipolarity is not the forerunner of the emergence of protectionist blocs ready to fight for the conquest of markets by means of war.

The stagnation of the centre does indeed determine greater interaction between the intermediate economies. But these bonds are developing in close partnership with the companies of the First World. This collaboration is not a technological requirement and it is not determined by financing needs. The emerging bourgeoisies have extended their range of operations in common with foreign capital and they continue to reinforce these links.

Their strategies have nothing to do with anti-imperialist propositions, nor with "non-aligned" initiatives. Nor do they encourage the para-mercantile planning of trade (as did Comecon) or interdependent projects (in the spirit of Bandung). They act according to the criteria of profitability, which tend to rebuild the traditional inequalities of the relation centre- periphery- semi-periphery.

Globalization has modified the geographical frameworks of these links. Maintaining territorial proximity between the dominant economies and their suppliers is no longer essential. The relationships

of domination thus begin to go beyond their traditional range.

It is impossible to predict the final profile of this mutation, but it is obvious that all the players will not come out of it as winners. Accumulation demands balancing the advances at one pole with the losses of the opposite sector. If one region prospers, another must decline, so that the enrichment of the winning capitalists is paid for by the population of the losing zones.

Multipolarity does not modify this selective principle of bourgeois development. Capitalism is incompatible with growth that is shared in the long term and with the progressive elimination of all socio-regional inequalities. The admirers of the new scenario are unaware of this extension of the fault-lines. They often imagine multipolarity as a change of political hegemony in favour of China and to the detriment of the United States. But they never clarify what significance they give to the concept of hegemony. This concept can be identified with imperial supremacy or with forms of consensual management in opposition to military coercion. In the first case people suggest that Chinese expansionism would replace United States domination. In the second, they suppose that this substitution will be peaceful, i.e. it will be the result of an overwhelming economic primacy. The errors of the two hypotheses are glaringly obvious.

Since the end of the Second World War the United States has exerted an explicit imperialist domination. It has acted as the military guarantor of the reproduction of capital and ensured the protection of all the ruling classes with regard to popular revolts and the instability of the system. The Chinese leaders themselves do not imagine being able to play such a role in the future.

Those who imagine that a substitution of one force of coercion by another would be pointless because of the sole fact of the economic power of the East do not explain how world capitalism could function without any form of military guarantee. Such a vision forgets that a system of competition for profits

obtained by exploitation cannot develop without the use of force.

The identification of multipolarity with the retreat of the United States or its European partners from using military power is an ingenuous hypothesis. In any "de-Westernisation" of the world economy the US gendarme will continue to oversee invasions, occupations and massacres. It is certain that the leading power does not at present act with the omnipotence which it had in the 1990s, but it leads NATO, represents half of world military expenditure and maintains a close association with all the countries with which it was aligned during the Cold War.

The principal members of this alliance are not in the habit of calling into question this familiar relationship when they reinforce their economic power. The invariable loyalty of the oil bourgeoisies of the Gulf is an example of this attitude. The submission of Japan is even more symptomatic, because it did not look for ways of political autonomy to resist its stagnation. The Japanese economic regression has deepened, with the biggest public debt of the developed world and with the failure of the plans of reactivation put in place following the earthquake [23].

The central role of the United States was verified recently at the time of the extension of the G7, with the co-optation of the intermediate countries, and during the re-launch of the IMF to preserve the existing imperial order. The world gendarme will also use its power to try and regain lost ground. It is already demonstrating the means of pressure that it has in relation to its Chinese rival by organizing naval operations in South Korea and exercises in Mongolia, as well as by preparing to install a military base in Australia. It is testing the reaction of its rival through the disputes with Taiwan, the arguments with India and the question of the status of Tibet. However, these tensions have not so far called into question the associative framework with China, which has been in force for several decades. The Asian giant has also had a hierarchical approach to capitalist solidarity. Instead of supporting the collapse of the Western banks it rushed to

their aid. During the recent European collapse it even reinforced its convergence with the IMF and conditioned its future credits to audits by the Fund. This integration reinforces the hostility of the Chinese leaders towards any local or international protest against neoliberalism [24].

Neoliberals and Keynesians

The economic debate on the crisis continues to be dominated by the opposition between orthodox and heterodox visions. The neoliberals attribute the crisis to "fiscal irresponsibility" and fulminate against the governments which have wasted money in unproductive expenses. But they forget to recall that this expenditure initially supported the expansion of the industrialized economies and that the subsequent loss of control is the fruit of the rescue of the banks. For example, before 2007, most European countries had a budget surplus.

The neoliberal discourse dissimulates this aid and attributes the present failure "to peoples who have lived above their means"; as if to improve the standard of living were a sin. Nor does it explain why the rich are exempted from any sacrifice. The durable character of the crisis is also used to justify attacks against the standard of living. Although no one dares any longer to present flexibility of work as a passport to prosperity, they explain to us that we have to tighten our belts in order to survive [25].

In the United States the same arguments are used by the Republicans to demand new reductions of social "expenses" while maintaining the privileges of the bankers, military expenditure and tax cuts for the rich. They demand the fixing of a strict ceiling on debt, supervised by the popes of the Establishment, and forget to mention that the aid granted to financiers contradicts all their open market principles.

The Keynesians, on the other hand, consider that the crisis is the product of financial deregulation and the contraction of demand. This is why Krugman proposes to tax the rich, to re-launch

public investment and to increase incomes. In harmony, Stiglitz calls for the cancellation of mortgage debt and for punishing the banks [26].

These authors indicate rightly how the disorganization of the control of risk, accounting tricks, packaged and derived financial instruments unleashed the present tsunami. But they omit to notice that this bad management developed as a result of the competition to manage the debt that capitalism imposes. The same applies with regard to household debt and social exclusion, which are not only a consequence of the errors of economic policy.

The heterodox theorists forget that accumulation itself produced the divorce between consumption and production by cutting the link between the increase in productivity and the increase in purchasing power. These contradictions have been exacerbated by the competition which neoliberal globalization has extended on the scale of the planet.

The Keynesian economists also consider that it is possible to attenuate these imbalances through a fair distribution of the costs of the crisis. They propose a uniform distribution of financial losses between debtors and creditors. But it is enough to observe the reaction of the bankers regarding the devaluation of Greek debt to see what a hard battle this would be. The announcement of this devaluation unleashed a storm in the credit rating agencies and precipitated the budgetary adjustment of the European Union. The same virulence marked the previous reaction of the financiers concerning the proposals for the suppression of tax havens or the cancellation of the colossal bonuses of their top managers.

To neutralize this resistance of the bankers it would be necessary to adopt firmer measures, like the cancellation of the payment of the debt, the audit of liabilities and the nationalization of the banking system. The same applies with regard to the revival of growth and the creation of employment. The realization of such objectives requires turning off the tap of payments to creditors, controlling the move-

ments of capital and introducing a radically progressive system of taxation [27].

The present conjuncture has narrowed down the space making it possible to carry out social reforms without resorting to anticapitalist actions. We live in a climate of everyone for themselves, with very little room for manoeuvre for the policies of "humanitarian capitalism". It is the reign of the pressure to deal with bank bankruptcies, to purge companies and to devalue labour. These tendencies are not just determined by the dominant right-wing ideology or the dominant influence of the financiers. All the ruling classes support the bankers in imposing adjustments. This coincidence is also reflected in the behaviour of the European social democrats. When the time comes for them to alternate in government they are not different from their right-wing adversaries and they accept the authoritarian verticality imposed by Merkel and Sarkozy. For example, they all approved the sacking of Papandreou, who had had the audacity to ask for a popular consultation, thus sending a firm message of neo-colonial intervention to Greece [28]. The same tendency appears in the indifference of the US government regarding the petitions of the liberals. This attitude contrasts with the permeability to reformism which marked the 1930s under the presidency of Roosevelt.

Many Keynesians admit the adversity of the situation. But they consider that it is possible to generalize on the international scale the intermediate solutions applied by Argentina after its cessation of payment by cancelling and renegotiating part of the debt [29]. They however omit to take into account the specific conditions which made this experience possible. Argentina could remain relatively disconnected from international financing because it is inserted in world trade as an exporter of food. It was able to enjoy the rise in international prices and it transformed itself into a privileged supplier of the rising Asian economies. Moreover, it used the enormous revenue from exports to reinvigorate domestic demand following a brutal devaluation which at the same time purged capital, lowered wages and

thus facilitated the cyclical recomposition of the rate of profit.

It is obvious that the majority of the dependent economies affected by the crisis have neither the resources nor the conditions to make such a recovery possible. They could indeed adopt some of the initiatives employed by Argentina, but only as a starting point for much more radical and daring measures [30].

The intensity of the crisis makes it necessary to adopt an anticapitalist approach that marks a break with the various alternatives of the present social system. However, the economic thinking which dominates at present is unable to go beyond this restriction and remains captive of a choice between the Anglo-Saxon model, the German schema or the Chinese option [31]. These analyses deny the intrinsically capitalist roots of the present crisis and occult the contradictions which the process of accumulation generates periodically and extends in an itinerant fashion. A system based on rivalry for the appropriation of the profits that come from exploitation inevitably produces the type of crises that we are seeing at present.

To conceive of another range of alternatives in order to solve the crisis it should first of all be admitted that capitalism is neither the only nor the best possible system. Such an opening makes it possible to overcome resignation, to consolidate the will to fight and to imagine solutions that would be advantageous for the majority of the population.

Social resistance

The evolution of the crisis can be abruptly modified by the popular actions which have gained ground over the last months. The analysts who do not take account of these reactions reason as if the economic process proceeded in a social vacuum or at least in the shelter of the offices of civil servants and financiers.

The beginning of the crisis initially caused great confusion among populations who were accustomed to identify disasters with the Third World.

This stupor was also marked by the fear of unemployment. But at the end of the year 2010 the uprisings in the Arab world introduced a new element into this attitude. They showed how it is possible to conquer great democratic victories.

This example deepened the resistance in Greece, which has become the principal bastion of the popular fightback. The demonstrators who occupy the squares and encircle the Greek Parliament are in a state of quasi-insurrection. These protests encouraged in their turn the Spanish *indignados*, who question aid to the bankers and demand "real democracy". This movement has won legitimacy, new support and is a reality in the whole of the Spanish State.

Other social reactions have taken place in England, both among the young unemployed harassed by the police and among trade unionists. In Italy strikes are breaking out and in Portugal there are mobilizations. These struggles are starting to spread and the benevolent image which the European Union enjoyed is becoming blurred. A victory imposed from below could revive the great tradition of rebellions of the old continent.

However, the most striking event of the year took place on the other side of the Atlantic, with the sudden appearance of the "Occupy Wall Street" movement. This initiative has already a national dimension and enjoys popular sympathy, the solidarity of intellectuals and trade-union support. For the first time in decades it has reintroduced in the very heart of capitalism mass demonstrations which escape institutional control.

The movements of struggle which are affecting China attract less interest in the media. However during the last year 180,000 protests were recorded, in their majority inspired by demands against the exploitation of workers. A new generation of workers, already emancipated from rural migration, has regained self-confidence and is winning gains in direct confrontation with the employers [32].

On all the continents young people are raising their heads and building movements by using the social

networks to get information and to organize. The first embryo of an international movement appeared last October 15, when the world marches mobilized multitudes in 950 cities in 80 countries. A coordinated action on this scale had not taken place since the mobilizations against the war in Iraq in 2003.

If the regional and international convergence of these resistances was reinforced it would be possible to develop a response to the bourgeois attempts to confront the workers country by country. The leaders of Germany have taken the leadership of this strategy and repeat to whomever wants to hear them that German workers "have already made sacrifices" and that they "should not pick up the bill for the lazy South". This message seeks to pit workers against each other by concealing the profits that

the capitalists draw from this division. The campaigns of the Right against immigrants have the same goal [33].

A progressive way out of the crisis implies resisting this fracture within the world working class. The tensions between German and Greek, American and Chinese or Spanish and Moroccan workers lead to making the people pay for the consequences of the present crisis of capitalism.

Internationalist responses would neutralize this threat and would make it possible to bring together again the young people and the sectors of the working class which have not yet been able yet to get on their feet after the neoliberal attacks. The year 2012 gives us the chance to change the scenario of the crisis in favour of the workers.

Buenos Aires, December 21, 2011

JAPAN

Japan : Financial outcome of our solidarity campaign in 2011

DANIELLE SABAI ·

At present, we are focusing our efforts on the two other campaigns (Pakistan and the Philippines), but the calamity situation in Japan still continues, both on the social and nuclear spheres. We will thus come back on developments afterwards.

Fund-raising report and solidarity

At the end of 2011, 15 337.73 euros were raised in the framework of the fund-raising solidarity initiative launched by our association, ESSF [2].

From this sum, 14 795 euros were sent to Japan.

Costs

Costs incurred amounted to 312.53 which included bank transfer charges of 183.53.

There is a remaining balance 232.20 euros which will soon be given directly to someone (to avoid transfer costs on such a small amount).

Origin of the donations :

Germany: 1000 € (individual donation by an ISL member)

Congo : 20 € (individual donation)

France: 6610 €

NPA: 1500 €

Individual donations: 5110 €

Great Britain: 1658.54 €

Individual donations : 578.54 €

donations by Socialist Resistance members: 1080 €

Hongkong : 2820 €

Pioneer Group : 2320 €

October Review : 500 €

Italy: 200 € (individual donation)

Norway: 782.19 € (Pax Forlag As)

Pakistan: 35 € (LPP)

Philippines: 110 € (RPM-M)

Quebec: 141 € (individual donation)

Sri Lanka: 50 € (NSSP)

Taiwan: 745 € (individual donations) [The funds collected in Taiwan were transferred directly to Japan without passing through the ESSF account.]

Turkey: 500 € (individual donations)

International network: 686 € (Focus on the Global South)

That is to say, 12 countries, including 1 in North America, 1 in Africa, 6 in Europe and 5 in Asia – plus an international network working on Asian issues (Focus).

East Asia thus represents one of the most important country contingents. There is an expression of a certain solidarity « of proximity » among the movements that have tied regional links through the social forums and thematic campaigns, and which, in addition have all undergone calamity situations.

Among the individual donors, we find particularly persons who regularly respond to solidarity appeals launched by ESSF. Even if unequally, a network of political organizations also responded to the appeal launched from Japan by the JRCL and the NCIW (in support to the ESSF initiative) [3], two groups that have linked ties with the Fourth International. As the funds collected by ESSF were intended for a

trade union organization operating in the affected region (the northeastern branch of the NTUC [4] – National Trade Union Council), contacts have been established with organizations like, in France, the trade union Solidaires or ATTAC, and the appeal was circulated in electronic forums like that of the European Social Forum. Solidaires published a paper of the NTUC which we had translated in the bulletin of the international commission [5]. We also led a joint information campaign with these two organizations, especially at the occasion of the G20 meeting in the Havre.

The choice to send the funds to the northeastern branch of the NTUC was not only to ensure that our material aid would reach the people directly (with less costs at that !) but also to strengthen the capacity of action of social movements so that the cost of the crisis would not fall again on the most deprived sectors of the population.

Note also that other movements launched their own appeals for financial support, like Via Campesina, (intended for their sister peasant organization Noumiren) or the Friends of the Earth (support to Peace Boat or the Chernobyl Japan Foundation), while the association like the Criirad offered its resources and know-how to the Japanese anti-nuclear movement (we contacted them to get contacts on the occasion of their mission in the archipelago).

Thanks especially to the help of our contacts in Japan (and in France), we were able to have the translations of articles and documents produced by the Japanese social and anti-nuclear movements –

posted on-line on our website as well as on other websites too. Information sharing is part of solidarity actions and this is a continuing effort of ESSF. We likewise contribute, according to our means, to the mobilizations for a nuclear-free world.

To send donations

You can send donations via Europe solidaire sans frontières (ESSF)

Cheques

cheques to ESSF in euros only to be sent to:

ESSF

2, rue Richard-Lenoir

93100 Montreuil

France

Bank Account:

Crédit lyonnais

Agence de la Croix-de-Chavaux (00525)

10 boulevard Chanzy

93100 Montreuil

France

ESSF, account number 445757C

International bank account details :

IBAN : FR85 3000 2005 2500 0044 5757 C12

BIC / SWIFT : CRLYFRPP

Account holder : ESSF

PHILIPPINES

In memory of the murdered environment, in memory of the murdered people: environmental destruction in Mindanao at its worse

CHA N. LAVANDERO ·

A disaster

The deaths of thousands and the destruction of people prompted the government to investigate why such a "weak storm" had caused massive destruction on the lives and properties of the people. Task force Sendong was created to investigate the presence of thousands of cut logs along the shores of Iligan city. These logs have caused the killing of many people and destroyed thousands of houses and properties during the flashflood. These logs are traced to come from a Makati based logging company in Manila. Now government officials are starting to pin point on who is to be held responsible to this incident. Whose term and whose administration allowed the logging operations of logging companies.

Murder

Philippines according to the 1995 Philippine Forestry Statistics comprise a land area of 30 million ha., wherein 53% is a forest land. Forestry had played a vital role in the socio economic development of the country but due to deforestation in late 1980s, it had depleted. The increasing deforestation in the Philippines was attributed to the ineffectiveness of our forest laws and its enforcements. No wonder why a Makati based Logging Company operating in the Lanao del Sur Province after the total log ban declaration, was still able to operate clandestinely and openly and there is not only a single

Logging company that operates in the Philippines, in Mindanao-there are numbers of them not including yet the foreign companies applying for Mining in the Philippines, particularly in Mindanao.

The issue of logging in the Lanao provinces can never be an isolated case, in fact almost all provinces in Mindanao have logging operations and Mining operations. To name a few, almost the entire area of CARAGA province have logging operations and even open pit mining operations, in Zamboanga Peninsula wherein mining companies have started drilling holes in the Ancestral Lands of the Indigenous Peoples. In Mt. Diwata, Compostela Valley which a number of Mining operations for gold recently has a landslide which killed more than 20 people and about 100 were still missing. The incident in Compostela was just few weeks after the incident in Iligan City and Cagayan de Oro City. Another tragedy that happened while Iligan and Cagayan de Oro City were still in the process of rehabilitations. Moreover, this government has encouraged foreign investors through the Public-Private partnership program, to invest in the Philippines and most of these investments evolved around mining, crop conversions, and land conversions.

The wrath of nature is its own way of crying as she had been continuously murdered. And the deaths of thousands of people can never be just considered as part of the collateral damage-it is murder. It is murder perpetrated by national and multi-national companies backed up by government line agencies through its policies. They have murdered our environment; they have murdered our people and they

will continue to murder our future unless we the people of Mindanao and other parts of the country should act upon this by exposing the rotten system that brought catastrophe on the lives of the majority poor victims. We didn't cut trees and yet we have

paid the price. Thousands of lives had been taken away by our negligence, how many more?

Never again.

January 6, 2012.

Iligan City, Mindanao

PHILIPPINES

A progress report on the campaign of solidarity with the victims of Typhoon Washi / Sendong in Iligan (Philippines)

PIERRE ROUSSET ·

According to official reports on a provisional basis, Typhoon Washi (international name) or Sendong (its Philippine name) was responsible for 1 260 deaths and more than 750 000 victims on the island of Mindanao (not just in the province of Iligan)

RDRRAC puts accurate information about its solidarity activities on its website on a regular basis [1], information is reproduced widely in the English section of the ESSF website [2].

In summary:

* RDRRAC has mobilized a network of grassroots organizations, associations and NGOs in Iligan and in the surrounding provinces to collect aid, including in kind, bringing together logistics, especially for vehicles [3] and bring up dozens of volunteers.

* It has received support (financial or material) of a wide range of organizations both in the Philippines and in Europe or North America. It announced that it had received on January 8 296,936.50 pesos (Philippine currency), 765.38 USD, 200 Canadian dollars, Euro 2230, 760 pounds. It also received food (bags of rice and flour, cans of sardines ...), and various essential items (from blankets to kitchen utensils, clothes to toothbrushes) for families who have lost everything in the disaster.

* RDRRAC is itself based in Iligan, its members were victims of the floods, even if no one has died, and logistics have been disorganized. However, they quickly reorganized to start providing relief (a

preliminary list of actions on the ground has been put online).

* It has mobilized medical teams of popular and alternative medics (including acupuncturists) to bring emergency care and counseling [4].

* It has trained volunteers in emergency management and Internally Displaced People's camps with the help of Tri-Peoples Organization against Disasters (TRIPOD) Foundation that has accumulated significant experience in this area of Mindanao.

* RDRRAC has informed displaced people of their rights, victims who often feel they don't have any - in fact they often feel no longer require or deserve any respect, depend entirely on charity and goodwill of the institutions [5]. Similarly, they became interested in displaced persons who have not found a place in formal childcare centres and that the administration does not list. This did not prevent the RDRRAC to answer a call of the municipality to adopt an evacuation centre in the city of Iligan, the elementary school Mangga (barangay Tubod). More broadly, it coordinates with the competent authorities to "ensure that relief and rehabilitation aid arrive on a regular basis to survivors, whether they are in or outside the camps."

* The campaign initiated by RDRRAC in response to this emergency is called "Duyog Iligan Tri-People Solidarity for Sendong Survivors" [6]. This brings together volunteers from the three "peoples" of Mindanao - Christian communities, Muslim (Bangsamoro) and Lumads- in a region that is the scene of violent conflicts - that are often at root socio-economic but take intercommunal and sectari-

an forms. This solidarity with all communities affected by floods gives an opportunity to strengthen solidarity between communities, something which is an issue of major importance.

Because it relies on a network of militant popular organizations - including in areas directly affected by the disaster – RDDRAC's action can be sustainable and help the victims to overcome a situation of absolute dependence and to regain control of their own destiny. It also helps to break with a fatalistic attitude - "It was the fault of the Typhoon" - which exempts state enterprises and large property owners from their responsibilities. It is obvious that the magnitude of the disaster is due to the massive deforestation of mountain slopes, as a result of uncontrolled logging and the activities of the mining companies, together with the impotence and complicity of the administration. In addition, numerous fallen logs, gathered along the river were washed away doing terrible damage in their wake [[See <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spi...>]]

Financial solidarity

Our campaign of solidarity is conducted in a militant way and does not have the same administrative costs as mainstream NGOS but it obviously requires a lot of resources. ESSF involved in a program of international solidarity. Donations can be transferred directly to the account of RDDRAC in Iligan, or when it's easier, sent to ESSF

By 22 January 2012 we had received € 3,548.87 on behalf of ESSF for typhoon victims in Iligan

These were gifts from:

Germany: 1270 (individual donations)

Spanish State: € 100 (IA)

France: € 1,230 (individual donations)

United Kingdom: € 58.48 (individual donation)

Japan: € 400 (JRCL-NCIW)

Quebec: € 250 (individual donation)

Switzerland: € 240.39 (GA)

For financial solidarity

Ranaw in Disaster Response and Rehabilitation Centre, Inc. (RDDRAC)

Donations can be transferred by bank transfer or through Pay Pal. Information available on their website: <http://rdrrac.wordpress.com/donate>

You can also send donations through ESSF:

Do not forget to write "Philippines" on the back of cheques or during transfers.

Cheques

Cheques in euros only and payable in France to the order of ESSF to be sent to:

ESSF

2, rue Richard Lenoir

93100 Montreuil

France

Bank:

Credit Lyonnais

Agency Croix-de-Chavaux (00,525)

10 Boulevard Chanzy

93100 Montreuil

France

ESSF, in No. 445757C

International bank details:

IBAN: FR85 3000 2005 2500 0044 5757 C12

BIC / SWIFT: CRLYFRPP

On behalf of: ESSF

In France, these donations are eligible for tax deductions. To send you a tax receipt, we need your address (usually indicated on the cheques).

Part V: Indignadas and Indignados of the World, Unite !

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT ·

For the Occupy Wall Street movement – OWS – and its counterparts in the rest of United States territory, will the current phase of repression and the rigours of winter take its toll on the movement's impetus? Will attempts by the Democrats to appropriate the OWS for the purposes of the 2012 election campaign succeed in dividing it?

In the case of the Indignados in Europe, apart from Greece where it directly opposes the government, we shall see if it manages to consolidate in Spain, gather new strength in Portugal, take hold in Italy, and whether it will eventually affect Ireland and other European countries. In the case of Greece, Spain and Portugal, the movement was born when the Socialists were in power and applying their neo-liberal policies to the benefit of the bankers responsible for the crisis. Since then, elections have brought back the right, which is intent on imposing an even harsher austerity cure. In Greece, the return of the right came without an election with the forming of a national unity government between the Pasok, the right and the extreme right. With the political context thus modified, will the Indignados Movement recover its strength and come into direct conflict with these governments? The outcome will be decisive for the country's capacity to weather the worsening crisis. Will the Irish people shake off its present torpor? Will there be an Outraged Irish movement?

Italian social movements played a decisive role in the early 2000s during the rise of the anti-globalization movement and the European and World Social Forum. This was followed by a certain ebb, by a period of adaptation to the social liberal policy

of Romano Prodi's government and of demoralization following the return of Silvio Berlusconi. What will happen with the big-business government of Mario Monti and the partial placing under guardianship of Italy by the European Commission and the IMF? Will the Indignados movement take on a specifically Italian colouration in 2012, or will resistance be mainly pursued through other channels? As for France, which saw a powerful social movement in 2010 for the defence of pension rights and which remained on the fringe of the Indignados movement in 2011, will this movement finally take root when the new austerity measures come into full force, whether under Nicolas Sarkozy or François Hollande? And what of the United Kingdom, Germany and Belgium, for instance? If the private banking crisis brings new bankruptcies in the wake of the collapse of the Franco-Belgian Dexia in October 2011, what will be the effect on the populations concerned?

Whatever the various outcomes, it is clear that thanks to the Arab spring, the Indignados movements and Occupy Wall Street, the bottom line for the year 2011 is a positive one for the struggle of social movements. The people have rid themselves of dictatorships in North Africa, and in the United States, Occupy Wall Street has upstaged the Tea Party, while in several European countries resistance is being organized on a large scale and through new channels.

One thing is certain: the issue of the debt will increasingly be the cornerstone of the fight to resist austerity programmes and the wanton destruction of social benefits. Repayment of the public debt is both a pretext for imposing austerity measures and a powerful mechanism for the transfer of revenues

from those low down on the scale to those at the top (from the 99% to the 1%). The fight to break the infernal cycle of debt is a vital one. If it is not energetically pursued, there is little chance of overcoming the next neo-liberal offensive. In addition, in countries like Spain and Ireland where the bursting of the real estate bubble affected hundreds of thousands of families, cancellation of the mortgage debt

and the guarantee of a right to decent housing are becoming key issues.

In a number of countries (Greece, France, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Ireland, etc.) the creation of citizen debt audit collectives is a significant step towards reinforcing the Indignados movement dynamic wherever it is operating and for mounting a counter-offensive on a European scale.

Indignadas and Indignados of the World, Unite !

How to change the world?

ESTHER VIVAS ·

Fighting in the streets and in social movements is the first premise, as there will not be spontaneous changes from above. Those in power today will not give up their privileges without this. Any process of change will depend on the consciousness of those below and the fight to take back our rights in the street, defying the powers that be. This is what history shows.

But it is also necessary to build political alternatives that go beyond social mobilization, since we can not just be a lobby of those who rule. It is necessary to formulate alternative policy options which have their centre of gravity in social struggles, antagonistic to today's ruling class. We are well aware that the system cannot be changed from within the institutions but rather from the street, but we can not give up spaces that also belong to us.

Today institutions are hijacked by private interests and capital. A social minority, which is the one with economic power, is totally over-represented in these institutions and has the full support of the majority of those who hold elected office. The dynamics of "revolving doors": those who are currently in the institutions and tomorrow on the advisory boards of major companies in the country, is a constant and a reality. We present here the socially dominant neoliberal ideology — and the fact that it is untrue. We think that anti-capitalist and anti-systemic voices would be useful in breaking the hegemonic political discourse of the institutions, proving that "other worlds" are viable and that "another political practice" is both possible and necessary.

We must move in both directions, subjecting the latter to the former, creating mechanisms for con-

trol from the bottom up and learning from past mistakes of both the political and social left. On the basis that no one knows the absolute truth, that the process of change will be collective or it will not happen, that we must learn from each other, that is necessary to work without sectarianism or tailendism and that labels more often separate than bind. Without however falling into relativism or ideological resignation. Surely these are the most difficult lessons: to break the moral and ideological domination of the capitalist and patriarchal system.

And how to change the world is not something that will happen in two days — it's a long-haul task, which requires consistency, perseverance and "slow impatience" as Daniel Bensaïd used to say. We have to go forward in our utopias starting from daily life in parallel with social mobilization against the current policies and in defense of alternative measures. We have to change the world in our own lives, demonstrating in practice that "another way of life" is both possible and desirable. Alternatives learning from the cooperative economy, self-management, critical consumption and agro-ecology, ethical finance, the alternative media — all these initiatives are essential to move towards a different model of society.

We have to be aware that these prefigurative models are not an end in themselves but a means to move forward without losing sight of the goal of more just and equitable society for everyone. Fighting for an economy based on solidarity in daily life and demanding a progressive tax policy, in which those who have more pay more, which will eliminate unit trusts, where tax evasion is prosecuted, which builds agroecological projects and works to ban GMOs, in favor of a public land bank, to have our savings in a credit union but to claim a public banking service from below. The way for-

ward is shown by walking it and this cannot wait until tomorrow.

We should not forget that our model of social change requires the conscious mobilization of the majority of the population and a process of breaking the current institutional and economic framework. The emergence of the "revolution" in the political landscape again, following the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, despite their weaknesses and limits, was the great and unexpected news that 2011 has brought us.

We also need to understand our role in the world and the impact of our practices on the ecosystem. We live on a finite planet, but the capitalist system ensures that we often forget this. Our consumption has a direct impact where we live and if everyone consumed as we do here a single planet would not suffice. But we are also encouraged in unbridled, compulsive consumerism, with the promise that more consumption means happiness, though in the end the promise is never fulfilled. We must begin to ask whether we can "live better with less".

Anyway, we want to hold responsible those who impose such practices. We are told we live in a con-

sumer society because people like consumption, which is why we have industrial agriculture and genetically modified foods — lies. Our model of consumption is based on the logic of a capitalist system that produces goods on a large scale and needs someone to buy them to keep the model running. They want to make everyone accomplices of policies that benefit only themselves. Fortunately, this great myth has begun to crumble. The ecological crisis we live in has turned on the warning lights. And we know that the climate crisis is rooted in a system that is productivist and short-sighted.

Today, a wave of anger is sweeping across Europe and the world — breaking the scepticism and resignation that for years have prevailed in our society, and restoring confidence in collective action which is useful and necessary for changing the existing order of things. We have seen the Arab Spring, the movement against the debt in Europe, the Icelandic people, the popular uprising, general strike after strike in Greece and now Occupy Wall Street in the "belly of the beast" which says we are the 99% opposed to the 1%. The time is short and moving quickly. We know we can.

IRELAND

"Be patient and never to give up the struggle"

TOMMY MCKEARNEY ·

Imprisoned in 1977 for alleged IRA activities Tommy participated in the H-Block prison struggle including the blanket and dirty protests. In 1980, Tommy went fifty-three days without food as part of the first hunger strike led by Brendan Hughes. While in Long Kesh Tommy and other prisoners developed a left-wing critique of the Republican movement and, leaving the Provisionals in 1986, formed the League of Communist Republicans with like-minded prisoners (those interested are encouraged to read Liam O'Ruairc's history of the League for a fascinating look at this oft over-looked episode from the Troubles).

Released from prison after serving sixteen years in 1993, Tommy became one of the most principled and far-sighted critics [1] of the Peace Process and the Good Friday (1998) and Saint Andrew's Agreements (2006). Rejecting any return to war and advocating a strategy of working class mobilization, Tommy was a founding member of the Irish Republican Writers Group which sought to foster debate within the Republican movement over course of the Peace Process and the future of Irish republicanism.

To help foster that debate, Tommy helped to found and co-edited the highly respected journal *Fourthwrite* (now an online publication). A socialist and an internationalist, Tommy has since become an organizer of the Independent Workers Union, which seeks to organize Irish workers north and south, native-born and immigrant, outside of the duplicitous 'Social Partnership' arrangements between the mainstream trade unions and the capitalist Irish government. In 2011 Tommy published a highly regarded book, *The Provisional IRA From*

Insurrection to Parliament, in Pluto Press. In the book Tommy follows the path of the Provisional movement, analyzes its strengths and weaknesses, its history and aims all the while seeking to promote a working class alternative to the current cul-de-sac republicanism in Ireland has found itself in. Unfortunately, reactionary visa restrictions prevent Tommy from visiting the United States, so a book launch here has not been possible. However, all those involved or interested in the Irish revolution and the Irish solidarity movement in the US would do well to read Tommy's work. The book is now available in shops in the United States and online.

Following is an interview with Tommy (the links are the editors, not Tommy's, and meant to provide useful background to the issues, organizations and events raised in the discussion). Following the interview is a fascinating and very worthwhile talk Tommy gave in 2009 to a gathering of young Irish revolutionaries around the group *eirigi* on the working class, James Connolly, Irish republicanism and the 1916 Easter Rising. In the talk he firmly places the working class, in Ireland and internationally, into the context of the struggle for Irish national liberation and socialism. Many thanks to Tommy for his time and generosity in making this interview possible.

Interview with Tommy McKearney

Q: In your book you write of the ending of the recent conflict: 'However, as the Orange state was being buried, it was, by degrees, giving way to a sectarian state.' Given the sectarian nature of the Northern state how should socialists and democrats approach such a state? How does our political hostility to sectarianism relate to a state built on such sectarianism?

TM: The new sectarian state is, nevertheless, an improvement on the old 'Orange state' if only because there is now no longer any material advantage in being a member of what once was the privileged Protestant working class. Speaking objectively – admittedly a difficult thing to do in Northern Ireland – this means that there is no barrier of self-interest preventing the promotion of class based left-wing politics in this region.

Of course, just as civil rights legislation in the 1960s didn't lead to class based politics in Mississippi, an end to Orange domination will not lead inevitably to socialist politics in N. Ireland. Socialists and progressives have to continue to point out the democratic deficit that is in N. Ireland and support demands for a transformation of the state.

Q: As a former prisoner and hunger striker, what are your thoughts on the situation republicans face in prison right now?

TM: For a start, all prisoners – political or non-political – deserve decent and humane treatment from their gaolers. There is little doubt that the Northern Ireland prison regime is a flawed and outdated service that is clinging on to perks and privileges that depend on the existence of a state of high alert in the prison.

As always, it is the ruling political authority that must take ultimate responsibility for prison conditions and irony of ironies; with policing and justice powers devolved to the Sinn Féin/DUP led local government coalition, the Sinn Féin party shares responsibility for conditions in Maghaberry prison.

Prisons everywhere are a barometer of a society's level of development and the huge prison population in the US is a sad reflection on that country's lack of well-being. Most recent swift increases in US prisoner numbers coincided with the enormous transfer of wealth from middle to top that came from the Reagan led neo-liberal agenda. The privileged elite found it necessary to contain the inevitable unrest and discontent by criminalising and imprisoning it and thus the increase in numbers.

The answer – as the cause – lies outside the prisons. An old gaol maxim is that the only real victory a prisoner wins is when he walks through the gate or gets over the wall. Hunger strikes and other prison protests have no impact if not supported by those outside the prison. Decent, progressive America must loudly identify the excessive use of imprisonment for what it is, and campaign against it as it has against imperialist adventures abroad and legalised robbery at home.

Q: The hunger strikes of 1980-81 were a seminal moment in the history of the Irish liberation movement. You yourself spent 53 days on hunger strike in 1980; what did that era teach you about political organizing?

TM: The biggest lesson from the hunger-strike period has to be the risk of having a mass movement captured by bureaucrats and apparatchiks. This is always a problem in the absence of a well-informed and radical cadre willing to challenge the drift towards centrism.

There is also the need to be clear about the nature of the core demands of a popular upsurge. If the core demand/s are not inherently radical and can be monopolised by a centrist tendency, the original mass movement may ultimately reinforce the status quo ante. The hunger-strike was about prisoners and those who controlled the loyalty of the prisoners were able to exert control over the mass movement.

Q: What are your thoughts on Ed Moloney's 'Voices from the Grave'? And the Boston College controversy?

TM: I believe that the research project led by Anthony McIntyre was a good and useful piece of work and something that Anthony carried out diligently and with integrity. On reflection, it may have been better if the embargo had been for something like 50 years instead of the life of the interviewee but it's easy to be wise after an event.

I thought the book 'Voices from the Grave' was an interesting work but its overall message was a little

spoiled by the obsessing with Brendan Hughes' critique of Gerry Adams.

The Boston college controversy is a shame on both the British and US authorities. It is highly unlikely that the contents would ever stand up in court as evidence in the first instance. Moreover, what on earth is the US government trying to do risking unpicking a settlement that they have boasted about brokering?

Q: For many years Ireland was a country that workers emigrated from, since the late 1990s the trend was in the opposite direction with immigrants coming to Ireland. Recently, with Ireland's severe economic crisis, emigration is again plaguing Ireland's young. What's happening with immigrant rights in Ireland? What has the return of emigration meant?

TM: Most immigrants to Ireland are citizens of the European Union and therefore have, in theory at any rate, equal rights with people born in Ireland. There is a difficult to measure undercurrent of resentment against "foreigners" but it has not often manifested itself in the open. What really we are missing are workers' rights that would protect migrant and indigenous alike and help prevent the exploitation of vulnerable migrant workers in low paid "sweat-shop" jobs and this is all the more important at a time of high emigration.

Emigration from Ireland has a deeply corrosive impact on society. For the most part it is the young and energetic that emigrates from any country and this is also the case in Ireland. Losing a significant percentage of a generation deprives that country of a crucial amount of aggregate social and material product and accelerates the downward economic cycle. Emigration removes the age cohort most likely to disrupt the status quo (hence the emphasis by Irish Governments and right-wing Irish Americans to promote Morrison visa initiatives – contemporary equivalent of 19th century 'assisted passages'). Emigration leaves a country old, tired and demor-

alised and that is where we are heading in Ireland if we can't change the current drift.

Q: You write that after the 2011 general election in the south there was a debate in Sinn Féin over whether to 'concentrate on a left-wing strategy, or whether to move on to the space formerly occupied by Fianna Fail.' What has been the progress of this debate? How did the campaign of Martin McGuinness for Irish President reflect that debate?

TM: As far as I can see, the debate never went beyond a few rhetorical questions that led back to the pre-ordained decision to displace Fiann Fail. No party with its economy spokesperson talking about building an economy on small and medium enterprises and condemning any suggestion of raising corporation taxation can genuinely claim to be socialist.

Q: In late 2010 the United Left Alliance came together to contest the February 2011 general elections in Ireland, winning five seats. What is your assessment of the ULA?

TM: The ULA is a positive and progressive development. The fact that organizations of the left have come together at any time is good and that these groups are doing so at this time of capitalist crisis is heartening and encouraging. The ULA has also given some needed visibility to the left through its articulate and high-profile spokespersons such as Richard Boyd Barrett and Joe Higgins.

Q: The United Left Alliance has continued to debate its future role in Irish politics; whether to become a party, etc. Can the ULA become political alternative for the Irish working class?

TM: There remain some significant working class elements outside of the ULA. The working class Irish republican constituency, the Labour left and Communist Party influenced groups (much larger than CPI membership) would need to be involved in order to make a really potent alternative. There

is a history of suspicion and rivalry between these groups and it would not be easy to bring them together but objectively speaking – that is a task demanding addressing and resolving. The ULA is well placed to act as a focus or catalyst to assist this development. At the same time, any move made by the ULA in this direction has to be reciprocated and that is a task for us all.

Q: As you know, the 'Occupy Wall Street' movement has captured the imagination of many, not just here in the United States, but around the world including in Ireland. In Dublin activists are continuing Occupy Dame Street. What do you think of the Occupy movement?

TM: The Occupy movement is something of immense significance.. It may or may not achieve immediate success and indeed it may falter and dissipate completely in its current form. The real importance of this movement is that it has signaled a change of mood in the mind of multitudes across the globe. If the Occupy movement stumbles in the short term, it will, nevertheless, have helped launch a new phase in the struggle against capitalism.

Q: How did you come to identify as a socialist? Has your definition of socialism changed over the years?

TM: I can't really remember when first began to believe in socialism. I was a teenager in the 1960s when it was a reasonably fashionable thing to be a leftist. This was helped in my case by the reality of being a Catholic in N. Ireland where the resistance to the state was being organized by left republicans and socialists. The real change came for me in prison when I had time to reflect on socialism and began to grasp the difference between Utopian and Scientific socialism.

Apart from my early juvenile infatuation with Utopian socialism, my definition of the principles has changed little. What has changed though is my view of the means for bringing socialism into being. I'm much more skeptical of the 'Leninist' party organization than I once was but that's an organiza-

tional matter not a definition of the meaning which to me remains control by the working class of the means of production, distribution and exchange.

Q: For several years now you have been an organizer for the Independent Workers Union (IWU); what has the IWU taught you about organizing?

TM: To be patient and never to give up the struggle. Perhaps the biggest lesson is not to try and replicate the role of other conservative unions just because they are large and apparently well resourced. There is huge need to look beyond the established norm and persist with building what is needed rather than what appears convenient.

Also, be tough on membership criteria. Be careful about allowing people abuse your ideological commitment and your desire to recruit at all costs. Some folk who have no loyalty or regard to organized labour, try to use a new union to settle their immediate issue and thereafter don't even take out a year's subscription. This is very unfair to other loyal members and ultimately is very counter productive.

Ireland's mainstream unions and members have had two decades of social partnership (i.e. a corporatist deal between state, employers and unions) that ultimately only benefited capital but gave some short-term advantages to skilled workers and public sector employees. As a result, both union leaderships and members grew used to a cosy arrangement that required little militancy and/or grass roots organization. This has led to a situation where the unions, leaderships and members, are ill prepared both mentally and organizationally for struggle. They now know that they are in difficulty but are sitting helplessly on their hands, waiting for someone else to help them.

Q: What Irish activists of the 60's/70's generation do you admire most? What activists of the 00's generation do you most admire?

TM: Undoubtedly the activists from the 1960s/70s that I most admire are Bernadette McAliskey and

Eamonn McCann. I'm not including my IRA comrades in this list since I feel that they were part of an insurrectionary organization rather than individual activists. Those I admire most at the moment are the young people of the eirigiand Irish Occupy movements. They have a leftist outlook and are active in promoting their cause.

Q: You have been involved in the struggle for socialism and democracy in Ireland for over 40 years. The war you and your comrades fought resulted in far less than many had hoped. You, your family and comrades have paid a tremendous price for your ac-

tivism; when you look to the future with hindsight are you optimistic or pessimistic (or both) when, surveying the current realities, you look to the future.

TM: Capitalism is in systemic crisis and young people from Oakland to Athens to Moscow to Damascus are on the streets. How could one be pessimistic? All the powers of the old world are in alliance – IMF, Yankee presidents, German chancellors, French bankers and British ministers are again fearful of the spectre awaiting them.

This interview was first published in Against the Current.

TUNISIA

22nd congress of the UGTT

NIZAR AMAMI ·

The new Executive Bureau (EB) is clearly better than the old one. It is based on real activists involved in the struggles, who are not corrupt.

An alternative list had been constituted around those close to the federation's former deputy leader. It includes some self styled independents, of whom some were in reality close to the Islamists currently in power (about 10 % of congress participants were estimated to be linked to the Islamists).

The overwhelming majority of members of the new EB belonged historically to the trade union left, and this is a victory for that left. Half of those elected are not, or are no longer, members of a party. This is for example the case with the new general secretary. He was part of the minority on the old EB and belongs to the democratic and left movement. He was a member of the Communist Party twenty years ago.

What facilitated the election of the victorious list was the fact that the political sentiments were not there represented by the party leaders. Sami Tahri from secondary teaching and Mohamed Msalmi from the Regional Union of Benarous, for example, are respectively in the MPD and PTPD. But they were elected to the EB as trades unionists, and do not belong to the leadership of these parties.

The PCOT did not behave in the same way. One of their activists, Hfayed Hfayed, was on the list which won as the representative of the primary teachers union. But the PCOT wanted one of its activists, Jilani Hammami, to also be on the bureau. The majority of the members of the winning list considered that it was not possible to have a second PCOT activist on the Bureau.

What is important now is to see what this new leadership will do in a situation where numerous demands are expressed at the democratic and social level. For now, it is not possible to give it a free pass. The past of those elected is known, but that does not allow us to predict what they will do now.

There was very little political discussion at this congress (Motions were however adopted with a left content, against unemployment, for jobs, against the ultra neoliberal economic project).

The orientation which results from it is not well defined, but I think that this will come. The new Bureau is seeking to transform the UGTT. A big job has started, and a change in the statutes is planned in particular.

The winning list was constituted not on the basis of ideas but so as to win the elections. That is one of the reasons there were no women on this list: those who constituted it thought that this would not allow sufficient votes for the list to win (97 % of congress delegates were men, whereas 47% of UGTT members are women).

For me the winning list should have nonetheless included a woman. The fact that there are no women on the EB is the most unacceptable choice made by this congress. It is not democratic and this has shocked many activists (Women are 50% of postal workers, and are in the majority in sectors like teaching, health or tourism. More than 60% of textile workers are women. Women have participated in the struggles to bring down Ben Ali in the same way as men).

A debate will be opened on a change in the internal rules so as to include quotas for women in the leaderships, starting in the regional unions and branches. It will be necessary to await the next congress for women to participate at last on the EB.

MOROCCO

"We have a collective responsibility to strengthen and develop the February 20th movement (M20)"

AL MOUNADIL-A ·

Conscious of the historic responsibility of all the tendencies of the Moroccan left at this historic moment of the development of the movement of the struggle of the oppressed layers of our people against despotism, the Al Mounadil-a current launches this appeal to the forces of the left to take collective responsibility for strengthening and developing the M20, shedding all forms of sectarianism and anti-democratic practices which have marked the previous experiences of struggle.

We understand by the Moroccan left the political forces which in different degrees oppose the political, economic and social choices imposed on our people and who have never assumed the responsibility of applying these choices in the puppet government.

We address ourselves then in the first place to the forces of the revolutionary left, convinced that definitive rupture with the dependent capitalist system in place in Morocco in all its dimensions is the sole way to realise the aspirations of the toiling classes to liberty, dignity and social justice. This means principally all the forces and groups originating from the Marxist-Leninist movement and the different components of the rank and file current in the universities.

On the other hand, we address ourselves to the forces of the reformist left convinced that it is possible to democratise the regime by the accumulation of reforms and render more social the existing capitalist choices, that is a sort of social democracy, as defined historically in the imperialist countries, with the Moroccan specific that this left has

emerged from a national liberation movement and not from a workers' party.

These diverse forces have a role to play today in the dynamic of struggle which has been unfolding in our country since the beginning of the M20 in assuming, with the youth who are politicising in the context of the revolutionary process underway in the Maghreb and Arab region, the task of continuing the struggle inside the M20.

There is no doubt that the struggle of the M20 is a historic conquest for the toiling classes in Morocco and for all the forces who aspire to change. This is a concretely combative mass movement which has left aside the sterile methods of imploration specific to the historic opposition (Union socialiste des Forces populaires (USFP), the Parti de l'Istiqlal (PI) and the Parti du Progrès et du Socialisme (PPS)), and follows the path of a real mass democratic struggle, based on social demands in contradiction with the social and economic choices imposed by despotism.

One of the most significant lessons of the last ten months is that only popular mobilisation has forced the regime to make concessions such as the formal revision of the Constitution which has been demanded for decades by the opposition and material concessions have never been conceded in this scale in such a short period [wage increases for workers and civil servants,, injection of funds into family allowances, youth employment and so on].

Which offers favourable conditions to those who struggle for democracy and social rights, whatever their strategic vision. to build a movement of popular struggle capable of attaining its objectives. It is a historic opportunity which is offered to the Moroccan left to confirm its ability to lead the

struggle of the Moroccan people to emancipate itself from dependency and despotism. The left has lived for some decades in a climate of repression and physical liquidation, in almost total isolation from the popular masses, and all its strategies thus suffered from the absence of an effective social base. Today, and since the beginning of the M20 and the wave of popular protest that accompanies it, the left can at last emerge from its historic dilemmas and build a strong movement of mass struggle.

To ensure the continuity and development of the M20 movement, we should all the same remind ourselves of a negative heritage of the Moroccan left which has already missed opportunities to build a genuine movement of popular struggle. And the first useful thing to stress is, for example, the experience of the movement of Co-ordinations against price increases. The movement has shown real possibilities of development, in particular in certain regions like the town of Bouarfa in eastern Morocco, but the forces of the Moroccan left have sought to control from above, which has contributed to the aborting of this experience. Other experiences of struggle have suffered from the presence of left forces side by side and have shown the difficulty of fruitful cooperation and a management of divergences to the benefit of the movement of popular and workers' struggle.

The plurality of actors in a mass movement is natural to this movement and the sole solution to ensure the continuity and development of the movement rests in the democratic management of divergences, the practice of a broad democracy, and the respect of the right of those without political affiliation to expression and participation in the construction of the movement. And unhappily the Moroccan left has no credible heritage of democratic practices in the conduct of struggles and confidence in the initiative of the popular masses.

The general objectives for which the M20 has been launched are liable to unite all the opponents of despotism and social injustice in a common struggle where each party keeps its independence and

the freedom to express its opinion on the course of the movement, and respect of the right of those without political affiliation to expression and participation.

Complete and exhaustive agreements on the precise objectives of the movement of popular struggle represented by the M20 are not a condition for the cooperation of the forces of the Moroccan left to build it. And all the polemic on the limit of demands is only an artificial obstacle to destroy the movement, when these demands are finally subject to the dynamic of the movement and strengthened by the struggle. Even the demand for parliamentary monarchy, for example, very controversial among the left forces, is impossible without an extremely powerful and combative mass movement.

The struggle of the M20 movement in recent months has shown that the relationship of forces is still in favour of the regime in spite of some jolts, and that the political consciousness of the toiling classes is still basic. And that the task of the left is to contribute to the organisation of the masses around their immediate demands stemming from the needs of the oppressed people, so as to allow the development of their experience of struggle from the partial and local to the global and national, in other words the political.

The task of the left today is to make its presence felt in the different fronts of struggle: student, trade union, in the human rights movement and the fight against unemployment, a lever of struggle to strengthen quantitatively and qualitatively the M20. The left has no existence outside of the popular struggle, and the polarisation today should be made on the basis of a clear position towards political and economic despotism. The task of the left is to elaborate its positions on the demands which would most favour mobilisation and unification and allow the people the freedom to judge the pertinence of these positions.

Let us then make this historic moment an opportunity for a new élan for the M20, benefiting from the setbacks and successes of recent months and ori-

enting our critique and our struggle against despotism in all its variants, against imperialism and for a full national and popular sovereignty.

– collective responsibility demands the defence and development of the gains of the M20

– collective responsibility demands the establishment of relations of healthy common struggle between the forces which make up the M20 movement

– responsibility demands stressing the interest of the development of the M20 through the healthy

management of divergences, the adoption of the broadest democracy, a deep implantation in the popular layers and the crystallisation of this implantation in its own organisations.

– responsibility demands that left trades unionists assume a policy independent of the bureaucracy which collaborates with the regime so as to effectively involve the working class in the dynamic of current struggles, as the only class capable of changing the relationship of forces.

* Published in Arabic on the site of Al Mounadil-a.

A seminar on Daniel Bensaïd

FRANÇOIS SABADO ·

Some thirty people met in Amsterdam on January 13th, 14th and 15th, 2012, in the International Institute of Research and Education (IIRE): intellectuals, militants, friends, and his companion. They were all comrades who had liked, worked, thought, and been active in close collaboration with Daniel. Other close friends and comrades who had wished to participate could not in the end come to the Netherlands.

There was a strong international dimension to this seminar, with the presence of leaders from revolutionary or anticapitalist left organisations from Brazil (PSOL), Portugal (Bloco de Esquerda), Britain (SWP), France (NPA), Belgium (LCR-SAP), Italy (Sinistra Critica), the Spanish State (Izquierda anticapitalista) and the Basque Country.

It was also international because Daniel's thought - since the 1960s - always started from "a world vision", a dialectical perception of class struggles on a worldwide scale.

Political philosophy, theory, experiences, organisational responsibilities: it is difficult to separate them in Daniel's history and work, they overlap so much in his theoretical work and his political activity, in building or rebuilding an open and critical revolutionary Marxism. The work of "refoundation" he started in the 1980s and continued until the end of his life, a point that many of the contributors underlined.

We nevertheless tried during the three days during, to alternate theoretical questions and political experiences.

We started with a series of contributions on "Daniel's Marxism", presented by Samy Johsua,

Philippe Pignarre, Michael Löwy, Cinzia Arruzza, Alex Callinicos, Philippe Corcuff and Carlos Carujo of Portugal.

Catherine Samary, for her part, introduced a discussion on Daniel's texts concerning the Stalinist counter-revolution and the "strengths of Communism" which could make rebuilding socialist thought possible.

Alain Krivine underlined his common political experience with Daniel, in May 68 and the years that followed, and the importance of the organisational responsibilities that he assumed. This was also the occasion to note the major role he played in education work in France, the youth camps in Europe and the international sessions of the Amsterdam Institute of – all undertaken in the perspective of renewing political leaderships.

This discussion was continued with remarks on the relations between Daniel and our sister organizations in the revolutionary upsurges in Portugal, in Euzkadi and Spain in the mid-1970s.

Joao Machado, today a leader of the PSOL, reconsidered the links between Daniel and Brazil over 30 years, and the help he brought, as much at the moment when revolutionary groups and militants gathered to build the Brazilian section of the 4th International as during the course of the historical experience of building a mass workers' party framework of the of the Brazilian Workers' Party. Machado also explained the lessons of the degeneration of this party into a social liberal party, and the crisis that divided our Brazilian section.

Pierre Rousset gave a presentation on the place of the theory of the permanent revolution in Daniel's theoretical and political work, as well as on the questions raised today, at the time of a "power

swing" in the world, with the emergence of new world powers and of the Arab revolutions.

Esther Vivas, of Izquierda Anticapitalista, examined the continuities and discontinuities between the global justice movement and the Indignant movement, in particular in the Spanish state, in the light of Daniel's most recent writings.

Lastly, the seminar ended in with a contribution of François Sabado, member of the FI secretariat, on Daniel's political action for our movement and his contribution to our perspectives for building the International.

After this seminar, whose contributions and discussions were of good quality, the wish of all and all is to continue. To continue to work on the questions raised by Daniel, to transmit his ideas, the memory of its combat. A first decision was made immediately: to publish the principal contributions to the seminar on various dimensions Daniel's thought as a book.

Sophie, his partner, also presented the project of a website devoted to Daniel - not only his texts, but a living site, which makes the link between the fundamental texts of Daniel and the developments in contemporary thought and political action.

Lastly, we learned the excellent news, that Carmen Castillo, former leader of the Chilean MIR, partner of Miguel Enriquez, and well-known film director has managed to raise funds to make a film about Daniel and militant involvement: an advance on box office receipts has been obtained from the National Center of French cinema.

In short, a lot of work, not only to keep Daniel's thought alive but, in these difficult times, to try to transmit a capital which can help the current and future revolutionary generations.

For the works of Daniel Bensaïd currently available online see our archive.^o

TUNISIA

The Bouazizi Spark: The Beginning of a Long Revolutionary Process

GILBERT ACHCAR ·

It is great honor for me to join you in celebrating this first anniversary of the beginning of the Tunisian revolution in this very city of Sidi Bouzid, the city of Mohamed Bouazizi, from where the first spark of the revolution was ignited that spread like a wildfire throughout the Arab world, wonderfully illustrating the famous Chinese saying, "a single spark can start a prairie fire."

I was pleased to notice in the invitation letter from the Committee for the Commemoration of the First Anniversary of the 17 December 2010 Revolution that the group chose to name the Tunisian upheaval the "December 17 Revolution" after the day of the first spark, instead of naming it the "January 14 Revolution" after the day when the despot Ben Ali fled.

In the discussion now developing in Tunisia about which of these two designations is the most appropriate — excluding the misleading and Orientalist "Jasmine Revolution" already used for Ben Ali's coup in November 1987 — I am strongly in favor of naming the revolution after the day it started, just as the Egyptians named their own revolution the "January 25 Revolution."

My preference is due to the same reason that led me to characterize what we are witnessing in the Arab region as a long-term revolutionary process, not a completed "revolution" that some people would like to reduce simply to the ousting of the old regime's chief.

In reality, Ben Ali's flight on January 14, much like Mubarak's resignation on February 11, was nothing but one stage in an ongoing revolutionary process,

which may well continue for a long time much like the French revolution. It began on 14 July 1789 and — according to most historians — was only completed ten years later with Napoleon Bonaparte's coup of "18 Brumaire" (9 November 1799).

Socioeconomic bases of the Revolution

To be sure, my assertion that we are facing a long-term revolutionary process does not stem from any propensity to project the French model upon the ongoing Arab revolutions. I very much hope that our own revolutionary process will not lead to coups by the likes of Bonaparte, though such outcomes are possible indeed in a part of the world that has seen so many military coups in contemporary history. Rather, my insistence on the long duration of the process is based on a fact that should be obvious to anyone who contemplates the current uprisings — that they are fundamentally driven by deep-rooted socioeconomic issues, even in countries where the popular movement fought or is still fighting for democracy and political freedoms against a despotic regime.

This reality comes out clearly if one considers the current revolutions within the context of the rise in social struggles that paved the way for them during the preceding years. It should also be abundantly clear to anyone who contemplates the true meaning of the revolution's first spark here in Sidi Bouzid.

For, it was not primarily Bouazizi's discontent with the nature of political rule in Tunisia that led him down the path of martyrdom, but the miserable living conditions imposed upon many young Tunisians like him, forced to resort to marginal and precarious sources of income in order to get by. These conditions are now well symbolized by the

stone-carved monument representing a street seller's cart that has been erected in Sidi Bouzid's central square in memory of the man.

This reality was best expressed by the slogans that prevailed in the first days of the mass uprising in this province, and afterward in the neighboring impoverished provinces that constitute what a Tunisian newspaper aptly called yesterday the "revolutionary basin." The uprising's slogan in Sidi Bouzid — "Employment is a right, you band of thieves!" — was a direct echo of the 2008 uprising in the Gafsa mining basin that centered on the issue of employment.

Moreover, if we consider the tripartite motto "Work, Liberty, National Dignity" that encapsulated the Tunisian revolution's agenda on the pattern of the French Revolution's famous motto "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," we find that what has been achieved until now is only liberty, however important it may be. As for the first demand regarding employment, its fulfillment does not even appear on the horizon, and while getting rid of Ben Ali's despotic custody over the people partly achieved "national dignity," there can be no complete dignity without a dignified life free from the humiliation of unemployment and poverty.

Unemployment and the Arab Revolutions

Two main features that distinguish the Arab region from the rest of the world emerge when one tries to identify the causes of the huge revolutionary upheaval that is sweeping all our countries. The first is fairly clear. Our region is home to the world's highest concentration of despotic regimes in a single geopolitical space. By contrast, the second feature is often overlooked. For many decades, we have had the world's highest rates of unemployment (including graduate unemployment, which in the case of Tunisia went from 5 percent to over 22 percent since Ben Ali took power in 1987).

Not only does our region stand out for the highest female unemployment rates in the world — a major feature of our underdevelopment — it also has the

highest youth unemployment rates among men and women under the age of 25. The youth unemployment rate in what international organizations call the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is about 24 percent, whereas it is no more than 12 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa and 15 percent in South Asia, even though they are quite a lot more impoverished and populated than our region. This is notwithstanding the fact that these figures are based on official statistics provided by states, and everyone knows that they are far below reality.

Moreover, unemployment as counted here is limited to those who claim to be seeking a job and do not report even one hour of economic activity during the days preceding the survey. This means that the large numbers of those who have given up on finding employment, or are engaged in marginal activities that can rightly be categorized as "disguised unemployment," do not show up on the radar.

It is this basic social reality that constitutes the deep source of the revolutionary explosion that has swept through our countries. Record unemployment results from poor development and increases it in return, thus entrenching our countries in a vicious circle that produces social marginalization and misery, both material and moral. Seen from this angle, the victories in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya are only the first stage of a revolutionary process in three countries that lacked freedom and democracy to varying degrees.

Money and politics

This first stage has consisted in winning political freedoms and achieving a formal democracy predicated on those freedoms. True democracy, however, cannot be fulfilled unless equality is added to freedom — not only equal rights, which remain strictly formal, but equality in material resources as well.

Indeed, the principal shortcoming of Western democracies — reflected in their deep crisis that translates in the low proportion of eligible voters

who actually participate in the voting — is that they represent "the best democracy money can buy," as one American critic aptly put it. The electoral process in such a deficient and illusory democracy depends highly on money, including television which is the main propaganda tool in our societies of the spectacle.

There are attempts to limit the gaping inequality created by money in politics in a few Western countries, where the state has put a ceiling on election campaign budgets and participates in funding them, also granting all competitors the chance to present their platform to the public on television. These attempts have a limited impact compared to the huge influence of money in politics, but they represent at least an acknowledgement of the problem.

What we have achieved thus far in Tunisia and Egypt is a formal but deficient democracy that places little restraint on the role of money in politics in keeping with the unbridled form of capitalism that prevails in our region. Both countries have held elections for a constitutional assembly that have been blatantly dominated by money resources. The funds received by religious parties from oil countries in the Gulf played a prominent role in the elections, in addition to the privileged coverage that these parties get from the most important Arab television network: Al Jazeera, whose connection with them and support for them is known to everybody.

Money and television did not only profit religious parties, however. It also played a decisive role in the electoral results of lists such as the Popular Petition in Tunisia led by Mohamed Hechmi Hamdi and the coalition of the Free Egyptians Party led by Naguib Sawiris, two entrepreneurs each of whom owns a major television station.

The religious parties enjoyed important resources in addition to the prestige stemming from the fact that they constituted the principal opposition force for the last few decades (and managed to build an extensive organization over the years in Egypt), not

to mention their religious demagoguery and their playing on the emotions of believers.

It is no wonder then that the primary goal for these parties after the fall of the dictators in both Tunisia and Egypt became expediting elections. They argued that they want to speed up the consolidation of the "revolution" and prevent it from being hijacked, but in reality they are rushing to reap the fruits of the revolution's labor before others get a chance to deny them.

Development without corruption

As a result, the basic problems that sparked the social explosion and set off the revolutionary process in our region, best epitomized by our record unemployment, were almost non-issues in the elections, which were dominated instead by the lures of identity — religious, sectarian, regional and even tribal.

The forces that came to dominate the political scene uphold "programs" (if one may call them that) that do not differ significantly from the previous regimes' in the social and economic realms, except for a few vague slogans and false promises of the kind voters are accustomed to on the eve of elections. These are empty promises and slogans that are not backed up by any serious plan of implementation; in fact, they are premised on the ignorance of ordinary voters.

All the forces that dominate the electoral scene adhere to the neoliberal principles prioritizing the market, the private sector, and free trade, the very same principles that led our countries to the current quagmire in the first place. The grave problem of development that our societies suffer from results indeed from the type of capitalism that prevails in our countries, along with the dominance of the oil rent over our economies. It is a capitalism of quick profits, with no incentive for long-term productive investment capable of inducing intensive job growth, especially as it fears the lack of stability that characterizes the Arab region.

The truth is that the revolutionary conditions that are unfolding in our region, with the corresponding

rise in social demands, will only worsen the unwillingness of the prevailing capitalism to engage in job-creating investment.

The inescapable truth therefore is that our economic development will not come about by relying on private capital. It requires a clear break with the neoliberal model in order to put the state and the public sector back in the driver's seat of development, and devote the country's resources to this major priority through progressive taxation and nationalizations.

For all their drawbacks, the developmental policies that were implemented in our region from the 1950s to the 1970s did have a better impact and social effects than the neoliberal policies that followed. What is needed today is a return to the developmental policies of these times without their concurrent despotism and corruption, whereas the regimes that replaced them have only done away with developmentalism while keeping despotism and taking corruption to a much higher level.

The fact that the masses have got used to making their voices heard in the streets and squares ever since the revolution started in Sidi Bouzid provides the key condition for popular democratic control over the concentration of the nation's potential in the hands of the state. This is a necessary condition if the Arab world is to finally tread the path of development without corruption, after having experienced development with corruption and corruption without development successively since the 1950s.

The workers and youth movements

Because it is at the heart of the production process, and combines the knowledge and expertise of the working class, the worker's movement is the most qualified to oversee state development policies — so long as it remains independent and free.

We know the crucial role that the worker's movement played in both Tunisia and Egypt in the revolution's first stage, bringing down the dictators and sweeping away the symbols and institutions of the old political order. Nobody can ignore the funda-

mental role played by the Tunisian General Labor Union in this respect, nor the decisive role of the workers' strikes movement in Egypt which began to expand in the days leading up to Hosni Mubarak's resignation. These also led to the creation of the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions whose ranks swelled to nearly 1.5 million members within a few months.

Herein lies the paradox of the revolutionary process that we are witnessing. The men and women of the labor movement paved the way for the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, and played a decisive role in ousting the old regime, but they have been completely absent from the electoral stage. While the labor movement is arguably the only progressive force that has popular roots and a national reach capable of beating the conservative parties and raising itself up to the leading position in order to implement the necessary revolutionary change, it was physically absent from the electoral battle, as it lacked political representation. Hence it was also absent politically, with the parties that dominated the electoral scene almost completely ignoring the working class's problems and demands, pushing them at best to a very secondary position.

The same goes for the youth movement, with its significant female component, which initiated the uprisings and revolutions, and continues to stand at their forefront everywhere. Yet, it was almost completely absent from the electoral stage, which has been dominated by political organizations led by older men who advocate a puritanical moral regime and an obscurantist cultural regression, far away from the aspirations of the vast majority of the revolutionary youth.

In short, we stand before a historical discordance in social nature between, on one hand, the forces that paved the way for the revolutionary movement, ignited it and pushed for its radicalization, sweeping out the institutions of the old regime; and, on the other hand, the forces that came to dominate the electoral scene and win the majority of parliament seats, all of which joined the revolutionary mobi-

lization after it had already started and after having initially denounced those who set it off.

It is a discordance in nature between, on one hand, the deep problems that provoked the revolutionary explosion and continue to afflict the workers, the marginalized, the women and the youth; and, on the other hand, the forces that have seized the political spotlight and are trying to reduce the battle to a struggle between "secularism" and "Islam." They claim to represent "Islam," which they put forward as "the solution," thus illustrating the appropriateness of the critique of the use of religion as an "opiate of the masses" intended to distract the people from facing the basic problems afflicting them.

This discordance can only be overcome through the build-up of the political representation of the work-

ers' movement and its entry into the electoral arena with the aim of coming to power in alliance with the independent youth and women's organizations. As long as this is not achieved, the causes that provoked the revolutionary upheaval will not fade away but indeed will get worse, thus ensuring that the revolutionary process that was first ignited in Sidi Bouzid on 17 December 2010 will truly be a long-term process.

This lecture was delivered in Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia on 18 December 2011 by invitation from the Committee for the Commemoration of the First Anniversary of the 17 December 2010 Revolution.

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Euskadi: Between hope and uncertainty

JOSU EGIREUN ·

It was bad news for the Spanish right which tries by all means to minimise the presence of the coalition inside Parliament (by preventing it from having its own parliamentary group) and marginalising the Basque conflict: there was no reference in Prime Minister Rajoy's inauguration speech to the new phase opened with ETA's definitive ceasefire. And it also bad news for all the constitutionalist parties (including the Socialist Party) who are once again confronted with the obligation of resuming the debate on the model of state and constitution. This debate is known under the formula: "opening the second transition".

The second transition

During the referendum on the Spanish state's constitution in 1978, the draft constitution only obtained a third of the vote in the Basque country. The approval of the Status of Autonomy of the Basque country only obtained 53.96% of the Basque vote, a weak score which historically has left open the resolution of the national problem in the Basque Country.

The electoral success of Amaiur during the recent parliamentary election, like that of Bildu (Amaiur without Aralar) on May 22, 2011 in the elections for the municipal councils and provincial councils (one of the main institutions of the Basque Country Autonomous a Community, responsible for collecting direct and indirect taxes and thus defining tax policy) shows clearly that the transition is not finished in the Spanish state. They put on the agenda the necessity of starting a second transition to resolve the national problem, among others.

Even if, in certain milieus, it is usual to attribute this success to ETA's decision to declare a ceasefire, the exact opposite could be argued: ETA should have stopped because for a long time, above all after 1998, its military strategy had become, in the southern Basque Country, an obstacle to the expression of a vast social sector - very much broader than the social base of the nationalist left alone - which demands the right of the Basque people to decide its destiny.

The origin of the present situation is explained by the exhaustion of the Status of Autonomy which had been supported in 1979 by all the political and trade union forces, except the radical nationalists and the revolutionary left. After the "Tejerazo" - the failed coup of February 23, 1981 - there had been a process of regression which emptied the status of its advanced content for the Basque Country, to the point where even the PNV (bourgeois nationalist party) and ELA (the majority Basque trade union) began to demand clearly the recognition of the Basque people as political subject.

This shift in position led to the "Lizarra-Garazi agreement" on the right to self-determination of the Basque Country and to ETA's 14 month truce. The Basque country would then know an exceptional period of mobilisation and initiatives with, as corollary, during the elections of October 25th, 1998, a strong electoral polarisation between the political forces of Lizarra-Garazi (60.74%) and the Spanish centralist forces (39.26%), or the best score ever attained by the nationalist left: 224,000 votes.

The breaking of the truce by ETA, 14 months later (December 2, 1999), put an end to this dynamic and the Basque coalition government (PNV, EA and IU/EB) announced in 2001 the elaboration of a new Political Status (which envisaged a future

Basque state "freely associated" with Spain, with its own separate legal system and representation inside the European Union) based on three pillars:

- The recognition of the Basque people (the seven provinces of the North and South) as a people with a specific identity in Europe
- Its right to decide its future
- Respect for the decisions of the population of each community (Basque Country Autonomous Community, Navarre and North Euskadi) on the future project.

This initiative takes place within a broader statutory reform in the Spanish state in a context where the dissatisfaction of the Basques as to the functioning of democracy in Spain was very strong: 79% dissatisfied among nationalists and 53% among non nationalists. The viewpoints concerning the Basque question were 30% in favour of independence, 32% for autonomy and 35% for federalism. Only 1% were favourable to centralism.

This proposed status was rejected by the Spanish parliament in January 2005, with the PP, PSOE, Coalición Canaria, IU and Chunta d'Aragon voting against. From then onwards the Basque political situation was blocked, caught between the centralist constitutionalism of the PSOE-PP and ETA's armed activity which had become an obstacle for the nationalist left itself.

Turn of the nationalist left

In 2009, conscious of the risks – delegitimation and political marginalisation – and the traps of this situation of blockage, the political party and the galaxy of the nationalist left decided to start a political debate to put an end to the military strategy and orient towards an exclusively political and democratic strategy. The objective was to recover legalisation, even if that meant openly condemning ETA's activity. 2010 thus marked the shift, internally, of the nationalist left, from the hegemony of the military leadership to that of the political leadership.

But despite this condemnation, the nationalist left did not obtain legal status since ETA continued to exist. To overcome the difficulties and participate in the elections of May 22, 2011, it decided, after a strategic agreement with EA (Eusko Alkartasuna), to set up the electoral coalition Bildu. A necessary choice, because these elections proved essential both from the viewpoint of the objective of recovering institutional representation and to show to ETA that the political road is more useful than the armed struggle.

The excellent result obtained at this election gave a strong legitimacy to the option of the political leadership and lifted the difficulties in advancing towards a declaration as envisaged by the Guernica Agreement, or a "permanent, unilateral ceasefire verifiable by the international community as the expression of the will to definitively halt its military activity". This declaration was supported by a broad spectrum of social, trade union and political actors in the Basque Country. But this agreement was not signed by the PNV or the ELA trade union which had previously signed the Lizarra-Garazi Declaration.

Nonetheless, all these movements and even the definitive halt by ETA did not revive the social dynamic we had known in 1998.

Time of hope, time of uncertainty

Despite the firm position of the PP and the new Spanish government, nobody can turn their back on the new situation: neither to ETA'S definitive ceasefire or still less to the results for the Amañur coalition at the elections. But the Rajoy government will try to control the political timing, to lead a war of attrition against the nationalist left and the Basque popular movement whether on the peace process – legalisation of the left nationalist "Sortu" party, political prisoners, reconciliation, and compensation to victims and so on – as on the basic political problem.

This basic problem is brought out in the 4th point of the Aiete Declaration elaborated by Kofi Annan,

Gerry Adams, Bertie Ahern, Jonathan Powell, Pierre Joxe and Gro Harlem Brundtland: "the non violent actors and the political representatives should meet and debate together the political questions (...) and consult the citizens. That is would allow arriving at a situation without conflict."

These are the two questions on which it would be necessary to develop political initiatives and mobilisations to shift the position of the Spanish and French governments.

But if ETA's definitive ceasefire and the result of the nationalist left open the way to a hope to advance in the resolution of the Basque conflict the uncertainties are still there.

First an element which proves the degradation of the relationship of forces is the non-resignation of the Basque government: it was set up profiting from the exclusion of the nationalist left; indeed the last two elections show to what point this government is illegitimate, but also to what point the sole force of the electoral results is not enough to bring it down.

Then, because of the agenda that the nationalist left gives itself: an agenda self centred on the national question, where the social question occupies a subordinate place. One patent sign: the tensions between the ELA union and the left nationalist union LAB. Working in stable alliance since the outbreak of the economic and social crisis - three general strikes in the Basque Country since 2009 - their relations have deteriorated. Notably because of the criticisms of ELA - whereas LAB remains silent - in relation to the policies of the Bildu coalition which manages the General Council of Guipúzcoa and several municipalities. According to ELA, the agreement signed by Bildu for the merger of the three Basque saving banks leads to their privatisation.

This situation could get worse since Bildu has just reached a budgetary agreement with the bourgeois PNV party and another tax agreement with the Socialists, both within the framework of neoliberal policies.

It could also worsen because, in the context of the Spanish parliament, the position of Amaiur - according to what has been said in the press and according to their document drawing a balance sheet of the elections - is to participate only in questions relating to the Basque Country. A position difficult to understand. Thus they abstained - and have not then voted against! - during the election of Rajoy. A sort of: "it isn't for the Basques to get involved in the election of the Spanish government"...

Numerous uncertainties weigh then on the future. The resolution of the Basque conflict demands the construction of links with the working class, the popular classes and the social and political anti-neoliberal left of the rest of Spain, this left which votes against Rajoy.

And when we know that the Basque nationalist left brings together the most significant and active sector of the activists mobilising against the crisis. on the ecological questions or against the oppression of women there is a risk of a weakening of this activist force to the benefit of a delegation of responsibilities to the institutions.

For now, it is urgent to advance on the questions of the prisoners and victims. But beyond that to resolve the Basque question, it is indispensable to work towards the reconstruction of an anti-capitalist and nationalist left. An anti-capitalist left which takes up the national question as an element in the emancipation of the peoples.

In conclusion - even if this point goes beyond the limits of this article - I wish to note that anti-capitalists should pay attention to the national questions, including their "French" aspect. The experience of Southern Euskadi shows that, for an anti-capitalist party, it is not only about limiting oneself to demanding the right to self determination and democratic rights, outside of the "abertzale" galaxy. It is necessary to get involved in the social and political processes of construction of the identity of the Basque people: the defence of language, of culture, of territorial recognition (Basque

department), thinking of the Basque people as a political subject across frontiers.

| EGYPT

Egypt's Unfinished Revolution

ATEF SAID ·

Against the Current: We're speaking during the first round of the parliamentary elections in Egypt. How do you assess the information so far about the large turnout and early results?

Atef Said: Before discussing the election, I would like to remind the readers of *Against the Current* what happened in the Egyptian revolution in January/February 2011. After the mass revolt that started on January 25, Egyptians succeeded in ousting Hosni Mubarak, the 30-year ruling dictator. Before leaving office he transferred authority to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF).

In March, Egyptians voted for an interim constitution stipulating that SCAF will transfer power back to civilian government (a parliament and then a democratically elected president). The fact that SCAF is running the transition is the main dilemma of the Egyptian revolution and its future. It is a problem that the revolution did not choose its leaders and did not end by taking power.

Since February 11, SCAF has proven to be working against the revolution. An Egyptian critic described the current situation as a half coup d'état and half revolution. It is half coup d'état in the sense that the military is showing that it wants to control the future of Egypt, and to limit this beautiful and powerful revolution into a superficial change, one controlled by a military regime. And it is half a revolution, in the sense that no significant social and economic changes have occurred for the benefit of the majority of Egyptian people.

In February, some liberal writers in the United States said that it was the U.S. administration and the leaders of Egyptian army who "saved" this revolution. On the contrary, many activists in Egypt expressed concern about how close the army leaders

are to the United States. They saw SCAF running the transition as the perfect means to block the radicalization of the revolution in its final days (after the working class had joined) and protecting the interests of businesses and ruling elites as well as U.S. interests in the region.

Now to talk about the election. There are several key points. First, the turnout in this round (the first of three) was at least 60-70%, and even 100% in some areas. That shows how fed up people were with the staged "elections" under Mubarak. Second, the irony is that the leaders of the military interpreted this turnout as showing confidence in themselves. But most activists see it differently — the people want to get rid of the army as soon as possible.

Third, there's the vote for the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafist Islamists. The Brotherhood is pragmatic, very political, almost opportunist. The Salafists are the extremists — not terrorists, but mostly young people who can do violent things. Their strength is very scary for secular forces, liberals, women and religious minorities. The Salafists won some seats in the first round, certainly not as many as the Brotherhood, which got up to 40 percent of the vote.

It should be noted that secular votes were divided among many forces. The liberals are mainly to be blamed because they included in their coalitions some corrupt members from Mubarak's ruling party. Of course, socialists and revolutionary independent activists refused to join such a combination. Hence, secular votes were divided.

The elected parliament is supposed to be responsible for drafting the new Egyptian constitution — procedurally, they are to choose the drafting committee. That's why people were really eager to vote.

My view is that whoever is elected is better than the army, which has proven to be the leading force of the counterrevolution, working with the support of Saudi Arabia and the United States. Their purpose was to crush — not simply slow — the reform process. So I say that any elected body is better than SCAF staying in power.

According to the current interim constitution, the writing process for the new constitution is mainly the responsibility of parliament — the General Assembly that will write the constitution is to be chosen by the parliament and Senate [an "upper house" to be elected following the current vote — ed.]. But the army is trying to impose its conditions.

Instead of the original plan for the constitution to be written under an elected parliament and president, the army is pushing for the constitution to be written before the election of the president — the trick being that the constitution would be written while the army still holds executive power.

In the last few months during the wave of protests, the army proposed what they described as "extra-constitutional principles" where they pretend to act as a neutral body to protect society. In fact these would guarantee the separation of the army budget from the state, with special rights for the army to "supervise" the writing of the constitution and any laws affecting the military.

This move is completely tied to the U.S. empire and the yearly \$1.3 billion in military aid it provides. Since the army controls 40% of the Egyptian economy, it would create a military state-above-the-state.

SCAF also is closely tied with the U.S. military-industrial complex. Now, activists in Egypt are worried not only that SCAF and U.S. government may be working together to control the change in Egypt, but that the Muslim Brotherhood may make a deal with SCAF to create a superficial stability, thus protecting the interests of the elites and the United States.

A few days ago, Senator John Kerry visited the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood in their headquarters. They assured him that they will not call for any changes to Mubarak's economic policies or the Peace Accord with Israel. It is ironic that while the American media continued to fuel the fear about the rise of Islamists in Egypt, the U.S. government did not stop talking with the Muslim Brotherhood. Both the United States and the Brotherhood seem to be in agreement with SCAF about not touching free market policies.

ATC: Can you discuss how this political tug-of-war and the electoral turnout will impact the protest movement in Tahrir and throughout Egypt? Will the protests lose momentum?

AS: Many are worried, and so am I, that people are exhausted. What the military's done is taken straight out of the manuals of counterrevolution from the empire and dictators — to attack, arrest and kidnap people.

No fewer than 15,000 prisoners are now held in military jails, many of whom are leading activists and bloggers from the February revolution. There are two main events that really proved the army is committed to preserving the Mubarak order — really their own interests too.

One event, in October, was the attack on the peaceful march of the Coptic population. There had been at least four or five incidents of destruction of Coptic churches by the Salafists, right under the eyes of the army — creating an atmosphere of chaos.

These attacks, abetted by hundreds of millions of Saudi dollars, are part of the plan to keep everybody scared. Then, in a Coptic protest march on October 7, more than 25 people were killed and 800 injured.

The second big incident occurred late November in Tahrir, when snipers from the police and security forces shot people in the eyes, and 2000 were injured by the use of toxic teargas, as verified by doc-

tors and human rights observers. This is CS gas that is banned by the U.S. military and by international law for use against civilian protests.

The Egyptian army is now responsible for killing on the same scale as the Syrians, but it's done in the guise of police and blamed on "some bad soldiers." [1]

These events show how committed the military is to crushing the reform movement. Many people said let's give the army a chance, they just want to go slow because they aren't experienced — but with this brutal crackdown on activists, the army's intent is clear.

ATC: The workers' movement emerged strongly during the anti-dictator struggle. Has it continued to develop?

AS: In the last days of Mubarak, as I mentioned earlier, the workers' movement became really crucial in the mobilizations, even if this wasn't reported in the mainstream media. There were many important strikes including public transport, public sector steel workers, and the textile workers in Mahalla too. These were decisive in scaring the United States and the army into sacrificing Mubarak. This is central to any left analysis.

After the revolution the first thing the army did, on the one hand, was issuing a decree to support free trade unions forming outside the state-controlled structure. But workers really won this freedom through their own actions, moving the struggle beyond Tahrir, in a social direction.

On the other hand, this declaration was combined with a military law to ban strikes. Many work places were attacked, even with tanks, but strikes resumed after being frozen for a couple of months.

Workers won a Supreme Court ruling for a minimum monthly salary of 1200 Egyptian pounds, around \$250, but this hasn't been implemented. Some people only make \$30-50 bucks a month, if you can believe it. And the army has continued to attack strikes.

There are now more than 15 unions outside the official structure. Some of them are very important — particularly teachers, tax collectors, shipping and airport workers, and public transportation — and have established a Federation for Independent Trade Unions in Egypt. They have been very active in the protests in Tahrir. [2]

Some activists express some concern that the new independent unions are not militant enough or strong enough to contribute to the continuation of the revolution. This may be somewhat accurate. But the story of the birth of these unions is worth learning from. Nothing happens in one night.

Workers and the poor are still waiting for an outcome of justice from the revolution. In many cases, they continue to strike despite military courts and the emergency law. But the ruling elites and SCAF are still insisting on attacking workers and their unions. This cannot continue. Otherwise, workers will be back on the streets.

ATC: If we can come back to the elections, we know there were forces in the protest movement that wanted a boycott. How do you assess this question?

AS: This is a very important question. After the crackdown and the murders by the military in Tahrir, some youth and revolutionary factions were so angry that they said we had to boycott the election because it would give legitimacy to the real enemy, the real leadership of the counterrevolution, the leaders of the army. The Revolutionary Socialists for example called for a boycott. [3]

But others said a boycott would be meaningful only if everybody boycotted. The army leadership also played a trick, and refused to ban the old NDP (Mubarak's National Democratic Party) figures from running in the election. Those people will be loyal to the army to preserve their own corrupt interests. So most of the unions and the left encouraged a vote, although a section of the radical left, ultraleft I would say, called for a boycott.

ATC: My sense in general is that the attraction of voting is very powerful after a dictatorship, even when the elections are flawed and manipulated as you're describing here.

AS: Yes, and this was shown by people standing in long lines, including women, everyone.

ATC: What's the prognosis going forward now?

AS: People are thinking about this every day. The army appears to be cracking down, attempting to divide and polarize society between secular and religious, tolerating the scary religious extremists and the attacks on Coptic churches, all to break the unity that was crucial to ousting Mubarak.

As a lawyer, I know for sure they are taking things out of their old Mubarak manuals. There's a new law for lawyers and judges — there are more than half a million lawyers in Egypt — to create divisions between them. The military hold power, and the United States and Saudi Arabia love the military leadership.

But the activists and the youth are now very angry, because between us and the military there is now a line of blood. And with the new parliament taking office in January, there will be some conflicts between the army and the Muslim Brotherhood. Military leaders will try to prevent the parliament from naming a prime minister and forming a genuine government. The parliament will fight for its power to act.

There is a horrible possible scenario that the Muslim Brotherhood will cave in to the military in exchange for some favors. But the Brotherhood is not as corrupt as the religious leaders have become, for example, in Pakistan. People are worried about going to a Pakistan model, where the Brotherhood would give the army the presidency. We know the army is in communication with them — but things are not so gloomy.

The army continues to produce division and chaos. People are worried. There are a hundred thousand

thugs and ex-convicts who worked for Mubarak, and now the army is colluding with them.

But workers are now on the scene. People are angry about poverty and attacks on workers. Those who participated in the revolution in order to win economic justice have seen no gains. [4]

ATC: What should we be doing here in support of the struggle in Egypt?

AS: Call the State Department, call the White House, carry signs in the Occupy demonstrations supporting the democratic struggle in Egypt. When I say call officials, I do not by any means believe that they can create change or are interested in change. But it is important to pressure them and expose the official politics that are really against democracy in Egypt.

Under the old constitution, the power could have been transferred (from Mubarak) to the Chief Justice. They violated their own constitution when they transferred power to the SCAF.

I want to note that much of that \$1.3 billion in military aid Egypt receives every year isn't even for the army — it's for high-level corrupt deals that we know nothing about, hidden from any oversight, including the import of the U.S.-manufactured toxic gas.

U.S. activists need to create awareness campaigns about the role of U.S. foreign policy, especially the Middle East and in the context of the Arab Spring. By comparing the different stances of the U.S. administration in the different Arab countries, it's easy to conclude that support for democratic change doesn't drive U.S. foreign policies, particularly in this region.

We are hoping our struggle has not been betrayed. Nonetheless I want to end on an optimistic note. There is an Occupy the Cabinet taking place in Egypt now. The Cabinet (government) headquarters is located two minutes distance from Tahrir Square and from Mohamed Mahmoud Street, where many activists were killed.

Since November 20, despite the large number of activists killed and injured, protesters still occupy the street in front of the Cabinet. The new (military-appointed) prime minister has not been able to reach the Cabinet building. [This interview was completed before the military and police assaults

on protesters during the December 16-18 weekend. — ed.]

The area is decorated with banners and stands as a symbol of resistance against the army. The only way to enter is on a top of a tank and kill us.

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USA

Pushing demands at OWS

STEPHANIE LUCE ·

First, I don't think the left that I tend to work with has done an adequate job of theorizing the state and how to relate to it. I think we have a good critique of the structural ways in which the state supports capitalism, and we've thought a lot about non-reformist versus reformist demands. I believe non-reformist reforms are not only possible, but necessary.

We, the left and social movements, actually won a lot of demands in the past century. But some of those demands were never even implemented, or were implemented poorly. Some of the demands were co-opted once passed. As I found in my living wage research, anti-sweatshop work and elsewhere: it takes one kind of power to get a law passed, and another kind to get it enforced. (We know this from our labor work as well — a contract is only as good as our ability to enforce it).

We as the left won space in the state (as well as in public institutions like universities and schools), and then often struggled mightily to maintain it and run it well. We faced opposition inside the state as the agencies we worked in were usually the ones underfunded or first cut in tough times. We didn't always know how to manage ourselves, each other, or our programs.

Then, when underfunded and poorly run, we sometimes further marginalized the people we meant to serve: welfare recipients, students of color, new immigrants. We alienated others who didn't have the money to get their needs met elsewhere and depended on the state for support: laid-off blue-collar workers, downsized middle managers, people struggling with a mortgage, people living in a high-crime area.

Do we have a good collective understanding of these failures?

We fought ideological opposition that was growing quickly to take advantage of our weaknesses. While we found openings in the state to push our demands, capital found even greater openings and used those to crush us. They exploited our weaknesses and blamed it on the state itself, on the left, on "liberals," on the whole concept of collective and public space.

Do we have a reason to believe we will be more vigilant and effective in countering the right's attempts to capture the state?

We push for institutions that take effort and time to run. We assert that people are capable of governing themselves, but then when people do not have the time because they work too much or commute too far, when they don't have the skills because they never learned them, when they don't have the energy because they feel cynical and demoralized, we didn't have great answers for how to keep our projects up and running and democratic.

What Does Democracy Look Like?

We chant, "Tell me what democracy looks like!" and respond, but do we actually know what it looks like? I hate that chant because usually we are saying it while surrounded by barricades and police, and on the defensive. Yes, democracy is bringing large groups of people together to act collectively, but certainly it is more than that.

I'd like more discussion about these challenges before we rush into the next round of framing demands. I'd love a public jobs program, but I'd also love to know who will run it and how.

We know capitalism does not work well on a whole range of dimensions, and we know the world can do better. But we have also seen many supposed left models fail as well. And as far as I can tell, none of the models have done well at answering the questions of how to expand democratic self-rule, and self-governance.

Do we know how to govern ourselves within the 99%, acknowledging and dealing with all those divisions within the 99% that have historically divided our movements, understanding the way that racism and patriarchy, nationalism, and heteronormativity intersect with self-organization and self-rule?

Second, I am just feeling humble about trying again what feels like a familiar left pattern: we frame demands (often through messy compromise, since someone's demand is always left out and we are forced to prioritize), coalesce our forces, look for leverage, build a campaign, debate about compromise, end up with something that doesn't look like we wanted in the first place, figure out how to regroup.

It seems that the model hasn't worked so well. Even where we have won, we seem to be losing the bigger picture. We've been winning small campaigns here and there but losing in terms of the material reality of everyday life for most people, and losing the hearts and minds of those who have hopes and dreams for another kind of world.

Finally, it seems to me that OWS has already put forward some demands, and is winning! In New York they claimed a private space for the public. Here and elsewhere, they have asserted their right to protest and freedom of speech.

As my friend Catherine Sameh says, "Intentional or not, this act is more than symbolic. They have won back public space and they have fundamentally ruptured what seemed like intractable neoliberal ideology about public goods, the public good, the collective." They have demanded the right to create public and open community, to take care of one another, and have dialogue and debate about fundamental issues.

For me, the beauty of Occupy Wall Street is that it's pushed me into a new space where I have been asked to be patient and trusting, and where I focus more on process and less on immediate outcomes.

I don't want to lose this space or momentum, just like the rest of you pushing for demands. I just worry that we haven't learned enough yet from our own past, and that winning any demand without having sufficient movements and organizations to enforce it, and without a deeper understanding of democratic governance and the real and deep divisions within our 99%, could end up as a loss.

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USA

A Convergence of Realities

MALIK MIAH ·

Yet the social composition of most OWS occupations (some 10,000 including college campuses) has had few Black faces including in urban areas with large Black populations. The reality of high unemployment, few job opportunities, poverty and inadequate health care has most poor people trying to survive. It is why African Americans are not visible in large numbers.

In many cases, however, African Americans are taking to the streets and using civil action to protest police brutality and the shutdown of community schools, hospitals and obvious acts of discrimination. These protests, while widely known in the Black community and Black-oriented media, rarely get prominence in the mainstream newspapers and networks.

In Oakland, for example, at the same time Occupy Oakland was center stage with cop violence on protesters, there were community actions to protest plans to shut down local schools.

Taking a Leadership Role

Historically African Americans will march and rally around issues of racism that directly affect them. There is little faith that politicians or the legal and political structures will act without such extra-parliamentary and civil disobedience tactics.

The most energized and committed group in unions ready to take on the bosses are African American workers, because of their understanding of how change is won. Disproportionate to their numbers, Blacks have taken leadership roles in fightbacks. Their actions have inspired and mobilized others to fight for their own interests and join in broader coalitions as occurred in the 1960s and '70s.

Blacks understand from their history the inequality and social injustice of American capitalism — what African Americans have lived under before the Great Recession and continue to suffer today.

The OWS movement is a convergence of African American reality with the broad working class and "middle class" concerns due to the housing crisis and demise of "good" paying jobs. Temporary jobs with no benefits are increasingly what wealthy "job creators" offer even to educated whites.

The key point is that the social injustice and inequality gap that fuels the OWS movement is the reality that Blacks have experienced for four centuries.

The ruling-class counteroffensive against the gains of the civil rights revolution of the 1960s and 1970s hit African Americans and unionized workers the hardest. Nearly six million manufacturing jobs have disappeared since 2000. More than 40,000 factories have closed. Outsourcing of better-paying jobs is still rampant. African Americans have endured what has been described as the greatest loss of collective assets in their history. Millions have been thrown into severe poverty and desperation.

What's called "the Black middle class" is not based primarily upon small business owners, entrepreneurs and professionals. It is actually the better off working class group, largely employed in government jobs or blue collar union jobs that are in decline or under attack. Labor joining the Occupy movement reflects a fundamental coming together of unions with high Black memberships and issues that reflect the broad interests of the African American community.

Attack on Postal Service

A case in point is the United States Postal Service (USPS) that the right wing has targeted during the past decade. The adoption of a 2006 law by Congress makes the Post Office (a self-financing body but under the Congress's direction) put aside billions of dollars in ten years' time to cover health and pension benefits for the next 75 years.

No other government agency or private sector company has a similar obligation. The goal is the destruction of the Postal Service as we know it. It is the only government agency authorized under the U.S. Constitution and thus can't be eliminated without an Amendment to the Constitution.

A radical restructuring of the USPS will mean the elimination of Saturday mail service, closing of post offices and reduction of 200,000 jobs — one-third of the workforce. Some 25% of the USPS workers are African Americans. Many other employees are Latinos and Pacific Islanders. These jobs are the backbone of stable families in most urban Black communities. In addition, they are unionized; and thus relatively better paying jobs with good benefits.

Conservatives have targeted the public sector (Federal, State and Local) since the so called Reagan Revolution that began in 1981, when Reagan declared the "government as the problem" and began the three-decade redistribution of wealth from the bottom 80% to the top one percent. Corporate taxes were slashed and the top personal income taxes sharply reduced for the top one percent.

Recent studies by the Brookings Institution and the Center for Labor Research and Education at the University of California note the great impact of this class warfare to public sector jobs. About one in five Black workers have a public sector job, and African-Americans workers are one third more likely than white ones to be employed in the public sector.

"The reliance on these jobs has provided African Americans a path upward," said Robert H. Zieger, emeritus professor of history at the University of Florida, and the author of a book on race and labor.

"But it is also vulnerability." (See "Public Sector Sheds Jobs; Blacks are Hit Hardest" by Timothy Williams, The New York Times, November 29, 2011)

Old and New Robber Barons

The power of the demand of defending the 99% against the one-tenth of the one percent is that it unifies all races and ethnic groups suffering what African Americans have endured for decades.

From a historical point of view there has been a link between the rise of new progressive movements and the state of Black America. That convergence has helped to build powerful protest campaigns against the capitalist system and its elites, which include ruling Republican and Democratic parties.

The wealthy elites respond with violence and use racism to divide suffering whites from oppressed Blacks. It is still a widely used weapon today especially in the Old South. It targets not only African Americans but Latino immigrants. The objective is to reverse gains and reestablish old white dominant relationships, which in the long run as demographics change cannot last — but in the short run can delay change and roll back important social gains.

The first major counteroffensive occurred in the 1880s and '90s with the defeat of the Radical Reconstruction period that began to bring some equality to freed slaves. Both ruling parties, like today, served the interests of the corporate robber barons in this Gilded Age of U.S. history.

A progressive movement arose after the 1893 financial crisis. The backlash against the elites led to the popular campaigns that produced antitrust legislation, labor legislation and the women's suffrage moment. It included, in 1913 following a series of financial panics, the creation of the Federal Reserve that the libertarian right has attacked as undermining free markets.

Black civil rights, however, made little progress even though African Americans backed the pro-

gressive movement.

The second gilded age came in the 1920s. Again it came after the rightward push against immigrants, Black civil rights and labor unions. The decline of organized labor was drastic in the 1920s. Unions were crushed; Black militants like Marcus Garvey and his urban-based movement came under fierce government attack. Thousands of Blacks who migrated from the Caribbean during the First World War were arrested and deported.

White vigilante violence escalated. The "Roaring 20s" was the heyday of the new rich and hell for Blacks and the working class.

In the 1930s African Americans began to push for social justice during the Great Depression. The white unemployed fought back and the rise of the trade unions as a fighting force occurred. While legal racism still reigned, the unity of Black and white workers in the North developed to a degree never seen up to that time. While still rampant, racism began to recede as industrial unions emerged in the North.

Some of the most significant labor laws and restrictions on the Robber Barons occurred as the 99% gained more power. It shook the super-rich and Wall Street to their core. The socialist and communist left joined the antiracist campaigns and helped integrate the trade unions.

The retreats after WWII and rise of McCarthyism did not wipe out the gains of the 1930 and '40s. The growing postwar influence of the civil rights movement inspired organized labor, helped to radicalize students and sparked the 1960s social movements. The big gains for Blacks and other social groups weakened the one percent and its supporters.

New Reaction, New Response

The counteroffensive that opened in the Reagan era came at a time when African Americans had already won some of their greatest gains. Many of the movement's leaders had become prominent elected officials, and others won seats at the table including on Wall Street. But the steady decline of the social movements set the stage for the rise of the new Gilded Age that we live in today.

Labor lost tens of thousands of members, a resegregation of big urban cities and schools accelerated, and much of the new Black professional class moved to the suburbs. No groups stood up to the far right's ideological offensive that the public sector was "evil" and had to be cut down to a size that it could be "drowned in the bathtub."

African Americans have always played an objectively vanguard role in responding to the one percent — raising protest on behalf their own interests, and making demands on the state and system. What's happening now with the OWS movement is the convergence of African American interests and the broader community, shaking up the political system.

While Blacks are not the "leaders" of OWS, the example African Americans have played in U.S. history shows the potential of the new social movement. It also explains why the political and economic elites are so intent on their brutal class warfare against the oppressed and exploited: The fear of Wall Street is that the masses will not stop with simply demanding higher taxes on the rich, but will demand political power for the 99%.

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Part IV: Common features of the various 2011 mobilizations

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT ·

1. Demonstrators reclaimed public space, they even settled there, they organized many marches. In the past radical actions have often started at places of work or study and involved their occupation. Although strikes and factory or school occupations did take place in some countries such as Egypt or Greece, the most common form of action consisted of reclaiming public space. For a significant number of protesters it was impossible to organize anything at their workplace, mainly because of repression and the dispersal of workers. Many are unemployed (this is one of the reasons for their involvement) or have to make do with some casual part-time job. In some countries we find many unemployed graduates among the demonstrators. In countries such as Spain, which was badly hit by the real estate crisis, or Israel, where there is a severe shortage of low-rent housing, many are the victims of the real estate crisis. Beyond these reasons, the determination to occupy city squares expresses the will to get together, to muster up forces in a show of strength to governments that are perceived in Tunisia, Spain, Greece, Egypt, or even in the US, as completely impervious to the needs and demands of the majority of their citizens. The demand for genuine democracy (*democracia real*) is at the very heart of those movements.

2. In several countries communication and mobilization partly relied on social networks such as

facebook or twitter, though this should not be over-emphasized.

3. The reliance on 'meetings' has been another common feature. In the same vein we notice reticence or downright refusal to elect representatives. There is a call for direct participative democracy.

4. In many cases, civil disobedience has been systematically used as an act of resistance in the face of totalitarian governments (as in Tunisia or Egypt) or of a government that is so cut off from the people that it uses repression to evacuate public squares or prevent meetings (as is regularly the case in the US). This is a far remove from traditional demonstrations, that were more like processions than to protest marches.

In some respects the movement is the expression of a qualitative leap. Until now, the dominant ideology and repression had succeeded in splitting people up and making them feel isolated through fear of repression, fear of losing their jobs, lodgings, retirement benefits, savings, etc. But the depth of the crisis and the critical number of demonstrators have made it possible for many to break out of their isolation, feeling that there was not much left to lose. For many demonstrators this is the first time they have been part of a collective protest with a political dimension.

5. In most cases no list of demands was drafted, though the Indignados' working committees did produce proposals and declarations. In this respect we ought to underline the significance of the joint declaration of protesters on Puerta del Sol and on Syntagma Square (Sol-Syntagma): 'No to the payment of illegitimate debt. This is not our debt. We owe nothing, we sell nothing, we will pay nothing.'<http://www.cadtm.org/Appel-Sol->

Syntagma In the case of Tunisia and Egypt, they agreed on a central demand, namely that the dictator should step down fast: 'Dégage!'.

6. Protesters did not come together on any community basis, whether political, generational, religious, social, or ethnic. There is a real medley, even if some of the categories that are the most exploited are sometimes under-represented. The Occupy Wall Street slogan was soon adopted all over the world: 'We are the 99%'.

We could add a seventh common feature: nowhere have the World Social Forum, the European Social Forum, or the Social Forum of the Americas served as reference. Nor is there any reference to an antiglobalization or global justice movement. In this respect the cycle that opened with the creation of the WSF in 2001 seems to be completely over, another cycle has started, we will see what it opens onto. What matters is to be part of it.

As well as these common features, there are glaringly obvious differences. In North Africa and the Middle East the main targets are dictatorial regimes (though the social issue is indeed present and even a triggering element). In more industrialized countries the targets are banks and lackey gov-

ernments. Defending public goods is a demand they share. The social issue is voiced by refusing precarious jobs, rejecting the privatization of public services (education, health care, etc.), demanding a solution to the housing and mortgage crisis (particularly in Spain and in the US, where students also have to take out loans that amount to USD 1,000 billion), and more generally by refusing to pay for a crisis that was caused by 1% of very rich people...

Among industrialized countries there is also a marked difference between the radical Greek movement, with its similarities to the pre-revolutionary crisis seen in Argentina in 2001-2002, and the situation in Spain, not to mention the US. The diverging histories of the social movements in these countries and the different degrees of recognition of hard left political parties (the Greek radical left with the Communist Party amounts to 25 to 30% of voters and can thus have a significant influence on trade unions, as indeed in Portugal, while the situation is completely different in the States) have not been erased by the movement that emerged in 2011.

Translated by Christine Pagnouille in collaboration with Vicki Briault

From Occupy to

AGAINST THE CURRENT EDITORS ·

Let's assume that the worst-case scenario of a collapse of the euro and widespread bank failures can be avoided. Even then, the post-2008 recovery at best will remain weak, with bitter austerity in southern Europe and too few jobs created in the U.S. economy even to accommodate the growth of the work force, let alone seriously reduce the appalling prevailing unemployment rate. Savage cuts in public employment are wiping out, in particular, much of what was called the African American "middle class." A new generation of students, already crushed by debt, is entering a labor market without jobs to offer them.

No wonder then, as the United States becomes a more unequal, more unfair and nastier society, that the anger over corporate and banking pillage — to say nothing of the brutality of police assaults on city encampments and on college campuses — all of which fuelled Occupy Wall Street and its amazing proliferation, will grow and will find new forms of expression and mobilization.

What forms? We don't claim to know. But let's begin by reviewing what this movement accomplished in only its first two months of existence. While "Occupy" has won some grudging respect from mainstream media, recognizing that its protests resonate among huge sectors of the population, the movement is snidely criticized for seeming to operate on instinct and tactical innovation rather than some crisply articulated "program." But if this may be partially true, the movement's instincts have been generally brilliant.

First of all, this movement is not narrowly aimed against "the right wing," as vicious and appalling as

the Republicans' offensive in state legislatures and the freak show of the party's presidential candidates certainly are. The movement quite rightly targets the system, particularly Wall Street and the banks, in full knowledge that the disastrous deregulation of the financial industry was a thoroughly bipartisan affair and that the Obama administration itself loyally represents the interests of banks and hedge funds. The powerful flow of the Occupy upsurge will not be easily channeled into the usual stagnant pool of Democratic electoral politics in 2012 and beyond.

Second, the people actually engaged in "Occupy" are not only fighting on behalf of other folks or for a righteous cause, as important as those can be — they are fighting in many cases for their own survival. They may be students confronting education cutbacks, huge tuition increases, unpayable debt burdens from student loans, and jobless futures. They may be employed or recently unemployed workers staring at foreclosure and homelessness in their own lives. They are looking at capitalism's crisis not as an abstraction or as some less fortunate folks' emergency, but as a central aspect of their own lives and futures. That's where the movement's demands come from, rather than some "programmatic" manual.

In this sense the popular chant "We are the 99 percent!" takes on more than rhetorical meaning. It may not be perfect sociological or scientific terminology, but it certainly beats the sad-sack "save the middle class" pleas coming from the labor leadership. It lays the basis for genuine — and most importantly, ongoing — solidarity in its full meaning of common struggle.

Third, the Occupy movement has begun to do precisely that — to find hookups with already existing points of struggle in its own communities — and

thereby to begin blazing its own future, as in connecting with the Sotheby workers' struggle in New York, with student battles to save their education in California, with homeless folks in many of the encampments, with city workers in Detroit and people cut off from welfare by the Michigan state legislature, and in other examples yet to be publicized.

Fourth, the movement has shown fantastic tactical creativity and, in general, amazingly disciplined combativity. The way people poured into the streets on two occasions when police raided the New York Liberty Square/Zucotti Park encampment; the mass mobilization that blocked the first police move on the Occupy LA camp; the successful shut-down of the port in response to the attack on Occupy Oakland; the student resistance to police assaults at the University of California at Berkeley — and most astonishing of all, students at UC-Davis nonviolently driving campus police away with their tails between their legs after the pepper-spraying attack that instantly went viral — these are signs of a movement with roots and staying power, even if it now faces a moment of tactical and strategic decision following the forcible breakup of most encampments.

The Global Context

We've already noted the interconnected global nature of the crisis that sparked the Occupy upsurge. Activists have rightly drawn some inspiration from Egypt's Tahrir Square and the democratic Arab Uprising, which are fuelled by mass youth unemployment and economic discontent as well as political blockage, but a more direct parallel lies with the response to the austerity programs that are ravaging countries like Greece, Spain and now Italy.

In Greece and Spain particularly, austerity — severe cutbacks in public employment, services and pensions — have been enacted under governments led by nominally social-democratic parties (PASOK in Greece, PSOE in Spain) that have turned sharply "social-neoliberal" in the past decade. In other words, these are parties that are supposed to represent the rights of working people and the social

safety net, but have now become overt destroyers of those interests. (Something similar has occurred in the Israeli state, where the Labor Party long ago ceased to be a workers' party in any sense, even a party of Jewish workers.)

It is this vacuum of political representation that has given the response to austerity by the indignato movements and the unions in southern Europe — and now also by public sector unions in Britain — a sharp, militant and not so easily controlled character. One can only imagine the scale of anger and resistance that might erupt in Europe as the elites attempt to impose a "fiscal union" in which countries' budgets would be under direct EU discipline, bypassing national parliamentary rights and procedures.

The European upheaval has a certain parallel with the United States, where the Democratic Party — although it has never been a social-democratic or labor party — was known as the party of the 1930s New Deal and has traditionally posed as the defender of labor rights, Social Security and the so-called safety net. The Democrats' long record of capitulation to the right wing, their failures on health care and labor law reform, the wars Obama inherited and continued, and the takeover of the party by huge-money corporate and banking interests, have hollowed out that reputation to the point where the Occupy movement certainly doesn't look to that party for leadership — and generally doesn't want to listen to politicians of any stripe.

A strong economic recovery is not the likely perspective now. Rather, the crisis is grinding on and will be protracted even if it doesn't produce a full-blown global collapse. Combined with the lunatic logic of deficit-cutting regimes that are further depressing producer and consumer demand, pushing the economies of Europe and the United States further into the ground, conditions are developing for a real social explosion — and the Occupy movement can be seen as the potential forerunner of the truly massive phenomenon that a crisis on this scale might produce in the United States.

That potential is what the system's managers truly fear — not so much the small inconvenience of encampments in city squares or parks as the emergence of possible organizing centers for mass action of colossal magnitude, fuelled by a spirit of systemic resistance manifested in activist networks ready to move flexibly and creatively when action is needed.

Going Forward

With all its positive accomplishments in hooking up with existing struggles, the Occupy movement has an unfinished agenda. Prior to the breakup of most large encampments, it hadn't strongly connected with immigrant communities under attack, particularly Latinos and Muslims — a difficult undertaking to be sure, given the fears sweeping those communities — and it had remained majority if not overwhelmingly white.

It's possible that the tactical setback suffered in the breakup of the major encampments may be offset by smaller-scale "Occupy the hood" efforts, closer and more accessible to immigrant and people of color communities and struggles. Or maybe the movement will invent new ways and means of direct mass action and disobedience to keep the forces of repression and austerity off balance. It doesn't necessarily require a physical space, although that's helpful where possible, and most certainly not a staffed or foundation-funded NGO-type apparatus which may be useless or worse.

New directions are being tested. The much-debated December 12 attempted shutdowns of West Coast ports yielded mixed results, to be carefully sifted for lessons about the possibilities and central importance of building connections among communities, union leaderships and rank-and-file workers. In a number of cities, Occupy activists are moving to direct action against home foreclosures — taking back already-seized properties for their rightful occupants, and protecting threatened families both by legal and by physical means — in what can become an ongoing campaign of national significance.

The central points to grasp, we believe, are first, that this movement is only at its beginning, because it captures the anger and the real, deepening grievances of huge sectors of society that indeed add up to something like "the 99%," and second, that its possibilities for social mobilization have barely been touched. And not only in the big cities: At the height of Occupy Wall Street, hundreds of folks came in from New England, mid-Atlantic states and from farther-away Midwest and even Plains locations. What experiences, lessons and inspiration are they bringing back to the smaller cities, towns and communities where the capitalist crisis is striking with savage force?

In the city where this magazine is published, Occupy Detroit has been spirited but not among the largest manifestations of the national movement. But the crisis in Detroit — where bus service has almost collapsed, where the public school system is being torn apart under a second state-appointed "emergency manager" and where somewhere between 1000 and 2300 city workers will face layoffs early next year — is the mirror of the future for many U.S. cities. What will be the response of the city workers and their unions? Will the Occupy movement be capable of answering the call to action at a critical moment? And what about your city or town, wherever you are?

None of us know, but we need to be part of making it happen. In this issue of *Against the Current* we present self-portraits of the Occupy movement in several cities, not a definitive collection by any means but a representation of what activists are thinking about their experiences and the future.

It's long past time to speculate about "the coming crisis." We know now that the crisis is not "coming" — it's here, it's global, and the political circus and the elections of November 2012 will not resolve it. The Occupy movement, even if its next forms or tactics are still in the process of becoming, is the revival of hope.

ATC January/February 2012 <http://www.solidarity-us.org/site/n...>

Part III: From the Arab Spring to the Indignados movement to Occupy Wall Street

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT ·

From 25 January 2011 on, the movement spread to Egypt where the population had been subjected to decades of neoliberal counter-reforms dictated by the World Bank and the IMF, with a dictatorial regime allied, like Tunisia's, to the major Western powers — as well as being totally compromised by an alliance with the Israeli government. On 11 February 2011, less than a month after Ben Ali's demise, Mubarak too was obliged to resign from office. Repression clamped down on other countries in the region as civic unrest spread like wildfire. The process of struggle throughout the region is far from over. In Tunisia and Egypt, the ruling classes, helped by the major Western powers, are trying to control the situation to prevent the movement from becoming a full-blown social revolution.

The wind of rebellion has swept across the Mediterranean from North Africa towards southern Europe. In Portugal, on 12 March 2011, hundreds of thousands of temporary workers demonstrated in the streets but the movement did not last. On 15 May, the protest reached Spain and carried on until 23 July, before escalating to a global level on 15 October 2011. Meanwhile, the movement had reached Greece from 24 May 2011. Puerta del Sol Square in Madrid, Catalunya Square in Barcelona, Syntagma Square in Athens and hundreds of other squares in Spain and Greece vibrated to the same rhythms in June 2011. In July and August, social protest also shook Israel: the Rothschild Boulevard in Tel Aviv was occupied but with no threat to the

government and without seeking to connect with the Palestinian cause.

In September, the movement crossed the Atlantic. From the East Coast of the United States, where it started in New York and Wall Street, it spread over a large part of U.S. territory to the West Coast where Oakland was the site of the most radical action. On 15 October 2011, the date fixed by the Indignados movement in Spain, over a million people were demonstrating around the world, from Japan to the West Coast of the United States, mainly in the highly industrialised countries.

The most imposing of the 15 October demonstrations were those in Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Athens and Rome. In Spain, where the action started, almost half a million demonstrators marched through the streets of about 80 different towns, including at least 200,000 in Madrid. Demonstrations took place in the planet's main two finance centres, New York and London, as part of this vast movement.

In over 80 countries and nearly a thousand different cities, hundreds of thousands of people, young and old, marched in protest against the way governments were dealing with the international economic crisis. Governments had rushed to the aid of the private institutions who were responsible for the collapse and who were taking advantage of the crisis to enforce neoliberal policies such as massive redundancies in the public sector, drastic cuts in social spending, massive privatization, measures undermining collective solidarity (cutting retirement pensions and unemployment benefits, sabotaging negotiated agreements between employers and workers, and so on.) Everywhere the need to repay the public debt is the pretext invoked to justi-

fy increased austerity measures. Everywhere demonstrators condemn the banks.

There is no permanent organization behind this movement and it has not sought to establish any kind of international coordination; nevertheless, communication is clearly functioning well.

Part II: The global crisis that preceded the Arab Spring, the Indignados, and the Occupy Wall Street movement

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT ·

In 2008, the food crisis caused hunger riots in more than 15 countries, as the number of starving people increased from 850 million to more than one billion. [1] The economic health of China, which is the workshop of the world, led to workers' strikes in the former Middle Kingdom that resulted in wage increases (which were at that point very low).

The worldwide crisis in governance is obvious, as the following three examples show:

1. The process to further deregulate trade, defined in Doha in November 2001, is at a standstill, and the WTO is simply spinning its wheels.
2. Between 2002 and 2008, the IMF experienced a radical crisis: two Managing Directors in a row did not finish their term of office; emerging countries reimbursed their debt to the IMF in advance in order to escape from its direct supervision and to follow partly heterodox economic policies;
3. The G7 (the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, Japan, France, Italy, and Canada), where the financial and economic crisis originated, cannot pretend once again to find and impose solutions, because the emerging economies are in good economic shape, have substantial currency reserves, and have reduced their debt (at least their external debt). The leaders of the most industrialized countries convened the G20 in 2009, and asked the emerging countries to help them get out of the economic quagmire in which they were stuck.

Great promises were made: the capitalist system will be reformed or even rebuilt on new founda-

tions, the international finance system will be cleaned up by regulating the tax havens, bankers and their traders will be forced to stop their extravagant behavior, speculation on foodstuffs will be limited, major institutions like the IMF and the World Bank will be reformed to give a little more voice to emerging countries, solutions will be found to mitigate climate change... In the final analysis, none of these promises have been put into practice.

Meanwhile, the IMF has returned to the centre stage. Whereas it had to take the pressure off emerging countries and was on the brink of financial suffocation (to such an extent that it had to lay off staff), it decided to attack again, but this time the Northern countries. In 2008-2009, it imposed its neoliberal prescriptions in Iceland and in several countries in Central and Eastern Europe (former members of the Soviet bloc which became members of the European Union or candidates for accession). [2]

In 2010, it was Greece and Ireland's turn. In 2011, Portugal was once again submitted to some brutal financial waterboarding. The G20 decided to bailout the IMF even if the process was complicated to enact since the major powers were reluctant to give the emerging powers the role they deserved, even though they had asked them for financial support. [3] At a European summit in December 2011, the EU, without the help of the United Kingdom, decided to channel 150 billion euros to the IMF.

In 2008-2009, the crisis in the most industrialized countries adversely affected the Chinese economy, where the authorities reacted by launching a vast economic stimulus package financed by the State

(which the IMF had always refused to do when Southern countries were facing such a crisis).

In 2007-2008, the dominant classes and governments in power in the most industrialized countries became frightened: the capitalist mirage was quickly evaporating, capitalism was caught up in its own contradictions and starting to appear to be the very cause of the crisis. To avoid massive protests, which might become quite radical or even anticapitalistic, at the end of 2008 and in 2009, Washington (where Barack Obama had arrived in January 2009), the European Commission, and the capitals of the Old continent created social shock absorbers, except in European periphery countries such as the Baltic Republics, Hungary, and the Ukraine. The shock doctrine really started being implemented in 2010. In 2011, it was applied more violently. The attacks against what remained of the rights acquired by workers after World War II were brutal, particularly in the periphery countries, within or outside of the European Union.

Meanwhile, in 2008-2009, the epicenter of the crisis, which had been in the United States moved to the European Union for three reasons:

1. The organization of the European Union accentuated the crisis because the instruments for aid and for transferring funds to the most fragile countries were progressively disappearing;

2. Private European banks threatened to collapse and to cause a new financial cataclysm similar to the one created by the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers. Saved by the States, they continued taking tremendous risks with the money lent to them for almost nothing by the Fed, the ECB, Bank of England, and Swiss National Bank;

3. Instead of adopting an economic stimulus policy and imposing strict rules on the banks, the European commission and national governments imposed severe austerity measures, which reduced demand and resulted in depressed economic activity. As a consequence, public debt, which was much lower than the debt held by private corporations, exploded. In several European countries, including Spain, Ireland, the United Kingdom, and Hungary, when the housing bubble broke hundreds of thousands of heavily indebted families lost their homes or apartments creating dramatic situations for them. Hundreds of thousands of construction jobs were also eliminated. In 2010-2011, the European governance crisis took on major proportions. Increasingly frequent crisis summits were held to concoct bailout plans, which have not yet been able to solve anything. Banks are once again on the brink of disaster, and if they have not yet fallen off the cliff, it is only thanks to the additional support provided by national governments.

Translated by Charles La Via

KAZAKHSTAN:

Nazarbayev regime murders strikers

ESENBEK OUKTECHBAEV ·

When the strikers, joined by the local population, began to defend themselves, the police opened fire. The official government press release spoke of 11 deaths, 86 wounded (including 6 police officers) and 70 arrests, but independent sources speak of dozens of deaths and hundreds of wounded. Military reinforcements were rushed to Zhanaozen, the authorities blockaded the town, cut communications (telephone, internet and so on), invoking a state of emergency and curfew from 11 pm to 7am.

We publish below an interview with Esenbek Ouktechbaev, president of the new "Janartou" ("Renaissance") trade union and one of the leaders of the Socialist Movement of Kazakhstan, a Kazakh anti-capitalist organisation. Ouktechbaev, a leader of the oil workers strike, had to go into exile in Moscow this autumn, because the regime of Noursultan Nazarbayev had prosecuted workers in the oil workers on strike in the region [Oblast] of Mangystau, as well as taking measures against the independent trade unions and left activists who worked with them. In this interview, carried out in Moscow before the latest attacks on the workers, Ouktechbaev presents the situation of the new Kazakh trade union movement and the oil workers' struggle.

Against state terror in Kazakhstan, the Kazakh workers need the solidarity of the world workers' movement. The website LabourStart is organising a campaign of petitions against the repression: <http://www.labourstart.org/cgi-bin/...> (J.M.)

Tell us about your first involvement in the workers' movement...

I worked in an electric train repair factory in Almaty. I began as a worker, then I received a technical education and became an engineer. During the five years which preceded the strike, I headed the department of standardisation and I was the Internal Audit Director [responsible for the verification of financial reports] I had access to the documentation originating from all the subdivisions of the factory.

The enterprise had nearly 3,000 employees and 53 departments. According to an official decree of the government of Kazakhstan, it fell into the category of strategic factories and could not be privatised. It was however privatised without the prior agreement of the whole of the workforce. We suspected that this was not a clean business and that somebody was profiting from it. All the more so in that the factory was located in the very centre of Almaty and that the land there was very dear — up to 200,000 dollars per 100 m². The whole factory occupied more than 3 km². The factory did not have the least problem, as its main client was the state through the company "Kazakhstanemirjoly" [Kazakhstan Railways] - it was responsible for the repair of passenger trains and locomotives.

However, starting from 2008, wages began to be paid late. Delays of one or two months were common. Then the number of employees fell from 3,000 to 2,200, or 800 redundancies. Wages fell by 50% in a period of inflation when the factory was not short of work. In June 2009, wages had not been paid for five months. According to my analysis as auditor, the company had been brought to the edge of bankruptcy. It could only survive for two or three months. I decided to oppose this. I began to set up a strike committee. That was done clandestinely, from May 2009. Discontent grew, not only among the workers, but also among the manage-

ment — supervisors and foremen. The workers did not even have money for a meal in the factory canteen or to go home on public transport. Some walked many kilometres and others did not even leave their workplace, so as not to waste their strength. That is what obliged us to form a strike committee. I began to mobilise the most reliable people among the supervisors. The number of participants in the strike committee gradually rose to 50. The meetings took place outside of the factory, in the greatest secrecy. We prepared the strike for around a month and a half. The date planned to start it was June 22. So as not to reveal our plans before time, we met the press under a false pretext and outside of the factory. Once the workers as a whole, night shift and day shift, or more than 2 000 people, were gathered in one of the workshops we brought the press in little buses and began the meeting. We prepared a statement addressed to the Prime Minister, the Minister of National Security as well as the Public Prosecutor. During the meeting the statement was debated and adopted. We also voted for a motion of no confidence in the president of the factory trade union committee for their passivity.

At this time the factory was *de facto* occupied by the workers. Our main demand was not even the repayment of wages not received. The accent was put on the nationalisation of the factory. All the more in that the name of the owner remained unknown. The word was that the factory was directed by one of the cronies of the President of Kazakhstan through figureheads. The minutes of the meeting were signed by all the 2,200 persons present. At the initiative of the collective, and under the control of the judicial authority, a deep going examination of the management of the factory was carried out. The list of violations brought to light represented 72 pages of the report rendered by the commission set up for this purpose. In spite of all that, the directorate of the company began legal proceedings to have recognised the illegal character of the strike, and it won. I was designated as the main person

guilty for the launch of this illegal strike. On September 2 I was *renvoyé* on various grounds.

We tried to organise an early trade union conference and to re-elect a union committee. However, under the pressure of the Federation of Trade Unions of Kazakhstan and the rail workers' union, the election of a new committee was postponed. At this time, waves of spontaneous protest broke out in the factory. A call for the assassination of the director of the factory as the main person responsible for the events was launched. I succeeded in dissuading the workers in revolt and in saving the life of the director. He was forced to make a statement to the press according to which the factory would not close and would continue to operate for another 15 years.

That means that, in spite of the repression and your dismissal, the situation has improved?

For sure! The strike made the factory directorate understand that they could not go too far at this point. Whatever happened, we have all the same won some victories, although we were not going to succeed in creating an independent union, because the sectoral union of rail workers, which was part of the Federation of Trade Unions of Kazakhstan, was frontally opposed. The local authority and the judicial authority also blocked the process.

How did you get involved in union work in the oil extraction sector?

In 2008, I began to participate in various social movements; I was notably active in the groups of debtors of credit and mortgages. That was where I got to know the young people belonging to the workers' movement. We organised meeting with different trade union organisations. I participated in the work of the Centre for Cooperation of Trade Union Groups. Then in 2009 we created a committee for the formation of an independent trade union throughout the Republic, because the workers began to understand that the official unions did not fulfil their functions: they did not defend the work-

ers and were only concerned with collecting dues from their members.

I was a member of the committee set up. In November 2010, during the founding congress, the trade union "Janartou", which means "Renaissance", emerged. The Socialist Movement of Kazakhstan was among the initiators of the project. It included not only trade unions but also social movements. Some regional official unions also joined "Janartou". In total, the union has 40,000 members across the country. Unhappily, under various pretexts, the Ministry of Justice refused to provide it with its national registration. We began legal proceedings against the ministry but the representatives of this institution refused to appear before the Court on several occasions. However, according to the legislation in force, our work is legal. The founding congress has taken place and we are on the point of receiving our registration.

Can we say that the workers in the oil sector have been those who have most actively struggled for the defence of their rights in Kazakhstan? Why is that so?

Yes, we could say that. In Kazakhstan, the oil workers strike lasts since 2008, with periodic jumps. The enterprises in this sector are spread over four regions: Mangystau, Atyrau, Aktioubé and Kyzylorda. In Atyrau, strikes have taken place since 2008. We have always had links with the strikers and have brought them legal aid. In March 2010, a strike took place in the city of Zhanaozen, in Mangystau. The main demand concerned wage increases. Thanks to this strike, an increase of 30% was won. However, the other conditions stipulated by the agreement made were not respected, which has led to the conflict today. The employer, the company "OzenmunaïGaz" and the secret services were equally guilty of repression. For example, a drug trafficking case was mounted against one of the strike committee leaders, Tagan Kochanov. 5,000 workers at the factory then went on strike for five days to demand his release. Given the losses that represented, the authorities were forced to re-

lease Kochanov. The workers in the oil sector have quite a significant experience of this kind of action.

What is the current situation in the south of Kazakhstan?

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the processing industry was virtually nonexistent in Kazakhstan. The factories which had not been closed were practically destroyed. The conditions for the formation of broad workers' collectives which could self-organise and represent a real force were not then met. The specificities of oil extraction render necessary the creation of big companies, and thus of broad workers' collectives.

The current strike, which has lasted since May 2011, has been unleashed by a more current conflict. The workers demanded the revision of the mode of payment and the introduction of a risk bonus. That was done in accordance with a decree of the Kazakh government. Initially an official union was present in the enterprise, but its president had been bought off by the employer and it took no action. The workers organised a conference. The whole of the committee was re-elected. The representatives of the new independent union attempted to recover the official stamp and documents of the previous one, but access to the union office, situated in the administration buildings, was refused to them. A complaint was filed but the legal authorities, instead of concerning themselves with the problem, began repression against the activists and the lawyers of the union, notably against Natalia Sokolova. Attacks by criminal bands became more and more frequent; numerous activists in the movement were attacked. We are also threatened with armed attack and the houses of some activists were opened fire on. At the request of the deputy director of the company "Karajambas-munaï" the lawyer Natalia Sokolova was arrested. She was held in provisional detention for eight days, then for two months. In the end, she received a sentence of six years imprisonment for having started a social protest, according to article 164 of the criminal code. She was also charged for organisation of an illegal gathering, which was in itself ab-

surd! It was the workers themselves who should decide the time when they gathered. An appeal procedure has been launched but our legal system is totally dependent on the executive power, so it is not very likely that the verdict will change.

Another union leader, Akjanat Aminov has also been placed under arrest for organisation of an illegal gathering. He suffers from diabetes and is dependent on insulin. During his four months of imprisonment, he was not allowed access to his insulin. It was virtually torture... in fact it is torture. Given his state of health, the court authorised his conditional release with a deferment of two years, but he has been deprived of his right to trade union activity. Hundreds of union activists have been subjected to administrative sanctions. Last August 2, the union leader Jaksylyk Tourbaev was murdered at his workplace. The day after there was to be a union meeting where he had a good chance of being elected head of the committee. It should be said that the enterprise has an armed guard unit and that entry is categorically forbidden to outsiders. Then on August 18, Jansole Karabaleva, the daughter of one of the union leaders, aged 18, was kidnapped and murdered. Attacks with firearms or petrol became increasingly common, as did physical assaults. The activist Esteï Karachev as well as journalists from the independent video portal "Stan", Asan Amilov and Orken Bisenov, were also attacked. None of these cases have been considered by the legal authorities.

The number of strikers present on the picket line has been as many as 18,000. At Zhanaozen the strike has been maintained 24 hours on 24. Meetings have been organised every day. The strikers meet regularly on the central square of the town as they meet at work, that is, according to their hours of work, some at day, some at night. Some of the workers are however obliged to work, because in this region nearly all the families have credit obligations. But most of them find some time after work to come to support the strikers at the square. Also, many pay a small part of their income into the strike fund.

In the oil regions of Kazakhstan, the unemployment rate is high, which is significant. To find a job in another sector apart from extraction is very difficult. That is why jobless youth feel a great solidarity with the strikers. In any big Kazakh family you find one or two employees in the oil sector and some unemployed. An unemployed union has been created. It already has a thousand members and it supports the strike.

The administration has attempted to put an end to the strike through the use of strike-breakers. But this action by the directorate of the company has failed in a fairly amusing manner. Safety clothing is not supplied to workers in the oil sector. They are obliged to buy it, that is why they wear it for a very long time. The strike-breakers had received new clothes and were thus immediately detected. It was, then, their ignorance of the real life of the workers which played against them. The members of the union have often recognised police among the strike-breakers detected, it should be said that the solidarity in relation to the movement is great, the directorate and the local authority cannot employ workers from the factory to do this work

This strike launched on the basis of economic demands is in the course of becoming very political. Currently the main demands are the release of the lawyer Natalia Sokolova as well as a halt to the repression and provocations. We also demand the reinstatement of all employees laid off, trade union freedom and freedom to meet. These are the conditions under which the strikers will sit at the negotiations table.

What are, in your view, the perspectives for trade union struggle in Kazakhstan as a whole, and more specifically in the oil extraction sector?

The employees in the oil sector are ready to struggle seriously and they will not give up on their demands. Even if they succeed in suppressing them now, the strike will start again in some time. The booming Chinese expansion has become a factor of irritation, and not the least. The company "Kara-

jambasmounaï" is 50% owned by the Chinese "Citic"; and "Aktobemounaïgaz" is 94% owned by the Chinese "CNPC". In the companies active in the exploitation of the resources of the mountains, the situation is no better, above all for the miners. In the mines of the companies "Arcelor-Mittal" and "Kazakhmys", located respectively in Temistaou and Djezkazgane, there is a pre strike situation.

As for employees in the public sector, they are not ready to go on strike at this time. They are too isolated in their work conditions and viewpoint. That is why the authorities are permanently trying to manipulate them. For example, in certain institutions, it is not rare that the employees are obliged, in the context of elections, to vote for the candidate that has been indicated to them. The authorities are also tempted to get at the oil workers through their relatives employed in the civil service. Thus the main hope of the struggle and solidarity between the workers rests currently on the mine and oil industries of Kazakhstan.

Talk to us a little about your political views what in your opinion; would be the possible social and political alternative for Kazakhstan and more broadly the CIS?

I am a convinced socialist. Twenty years of independence for Kazakhstan has allowed us to decide whether or not it was worth renouncing what we had inherited from the October Revolution, to the benefit of an illusory abundant capitalism. In the 20th century, the Soviet Union represented the sole challenge to world capitalism and a significant factor of humanisation of capitalist relations in the world. Following its collapse in 1991, we saw not

only the privatisations and the installation of a wildcat capitalism in the countries of the CIS, but also a transformation of the social state in the West. The economy has been abandoned to the spontaneity of the markets, and the current crisis is only the price of such a policy. In twenty years, we have all had the opportunity to convince ourselves that the principles of socialism are situated at a much higher level than those of capitalism, and that capitalism is a dead end.

Of course, the principles of socialism were not fully realised in the Soviet Union. Errors were committed, but there were also advances: medical care was free, as was secondary and higher education and there were numerous social advantages. All this was lost during the process of transition to capitalism. We have arrived at a situation of an extreme gap between the poor and rich within society. Naturally, the rich only represent a small part, and all the rest are impoverished. I believe that this situation is untenable. It only benefits the people who currently hold the reins, they use their position in the spheres of power to merge authority and private ownership. Before property belonged to the people, they have made the state itself their property. They have got used to drawing immense profits from it and they will never renounce their policy. In the Socialist Movement of Kazakhstan we have raised this slogan: "Change policy or we will change representatives!" We believe that power in Kazakhstan, but not only there, should belong to the workers.

Interview given on November 16, 2011 in Moscow to Léonid Tereschenkov

ARAB REVOLUTIONS

One year on

GILBERT ACHCAR ·

We are approaching the first anniversary of the outbreak of the "Arab Spring", in Tunisia. The overthrow of Ben Ali opened the way to the mass mobilisations in Egypt and the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak, the overthrow of Gaddafi in Libya, the mobilisations in Yemen and the resignation of President Ali Abdullah Saleh, the mobilisations in the Gulf States and in Syria in favour of democracy. How can we characterise these movements?

These are effectively movements which have as their common point the demand for democracy: they take place in countries with despotic regimes and they demand a change of regime, a change in the form of government and the democratisation of political life. This dimension is common to the movements cited, and it also gives them their strength because the democratic demand allows unification of a broad mass of people of different views, when it combines with a potential for social revolt that is very strong in the region. It should not be forgotten that in Tunisia the movement began with a social explosion. Young Mohamed Bouazizi, who set fire to himself, protested against his conditions of existence and did not advance political demands. His case highlighted the problem of endemic unemployment in the countries of the region, notably youth unemployment, the economic crisis, the absence of social perspectives. These are the basic ingredients. But when they combine with the opposition to a despotic regime, it takes on considerable proportions, as we can see in the countries mentioned. In contrast, in the countries where the despotic question has not been posed with the same acuteness, or the regime is more liberal and more tolerant of political diversity — Morocco for example — we find a movement built on social questions,

but which has not yet acquired the breadth rapidly attained in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain and Syria.

How do you see the evolution of US policy and that of the European countries in the region? Do the elections in Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt, or the military intervention in Libya, constitute a recovery of the initiative on the part of imperialism or the comprador national bourgeoisies?

In your question, there are two actors: the bourgeoisies and imperialism. These are not exactly the same thing. Moreover, this is a part of the world where those who now work in concert with the Western powers, with the US in particular, are not all governments that one could characterise as bourgeois — I am talking about the Gulf oil monarchies, which have a pre-capitalist dimension, which are rentier castes, exploiting the oil rent. In these countries, it is not the local bourgeoisie — whether comprador or not — which is in command. One should make the necessary distinctions.

As for the United States — the main imperialist force in the region — one could say that they have restored the balance a little after the very difficult situation in which the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings had put them, but to speak of a "recovery of the initiative" seems exaggerated to me. They have been able to regain a little credit by intervening in Libya, at relatively little cost for them, and by presenting themselves as being "on the side of the uprisings". They combine this with a general discourse on democracy and — contrary to what some claim — this hypocritical discourse extends also to the Gulf monarchies, although they do not in their case combine it with any action. The US is trying to present itself as the repository of the values of liberty which they brandished as an ideological

weapon for several decades, notably during the Cold War. In Syria, they do this with a certain ease, because it is a regime allied to Iran, for which they have no particular affection, any more than they had for the Libyan regime. But to say that they have recovered their hegemonic position in the region would be extremely exaggerated. In fact the events underway signal a significant decline in US hegemony. We see this in particular in the cases of Syria and of Libya.

In Libya the Western intervention was essentially an intervention from a distance, without troops on the ground. The influence that the US can have on the process underway is very limited. In fact, nobody controls the situation in this country where there are increasingly developments which are not at all to the taste of the United States, including a growing protest against the Transitional National Council and against its attempts — very timid, incidentally — to undertake a reconstruction of the state.

In Egypt, we see that Washington's military allies still have a grip on the situation, but their rule is very much contested by the street, by a popular movement which continues — notably at the social level, where it is reflected by tough ongoing struggles. The emergence in force at the electoral level of the Islamic currents attests to a new regional factor: even if these currents do not represent a threat to US imperialism, they are not an instrument or ally as docile as the military for it. There are tensions in the alliance, in the cooperation, between the army and the Muslim Brotherhood. This is not comparable to what the Mubarak regime was for the US.

This also explains why the US has had very extensively to redefine their policy in the region since their traditional allies have very little popular legitimacy — something on which they did not have too many illusions as the Wikileaks revelations show. Now that the affirmation of popular sovereignty is in the street, the US must find allies with a real social base. That is why they are turning to the Muslim Brotherhood, who, after having been de-

monised in recent years, are now presented as "moderate Muslims" in contrast to the Salafists. The Muslim Brotherhood is present in the whole region. The US needs them, as in the good old days of the alliance with them against Nasser, against Arab nationalism, against the Soviet Union and its influence in the region from the 1950s to 1980s.

The Gulf monarchies — in particular two among them who play a very significant role in the Arab world today, the Saudi kingdom and the emirate of Qatar — are also trying to retake the initiative. These two monarchies do not necessarily have the same policy, they have a tradition of rivalry with sometimes even tensions between them, but they have made common cause alongside the US in the effort to orient the events in a direction which does not threaten their own interests and which allows them to stabilise the region in the short term. Qatar, in particular has seen its influence increase considerably with the uprisings, unlike the Saudi kingdom which like the US is experiencing a decline and ebbing of its influence. The emirate of Qatar has betted for several years on its relations with the Muslim Brotherhood, becoming its main financial backer, creating the satellite television channel Al-Jazeera — a political tool of considerable power, which is at the same time at the disposal of the Muslim Brotherhood, who have a significant presence among its staff. Qatar has played these cards for a long time now and the events have turned them into strategic advantages. The emirate has thus become a very valuable and significant ally for the US, with whom it has had very close relations for a long time, sheltering on its soil the main US military base in the region. But it has also for a time cultivated relations with Iran, with the Lebanese Hezbollah, and so on, to "spread the risks" — this is the mentality of the rentier consolidating their investment portfolio. Today, Qatar can fully play upon its regional influence in the eyes of the US.

All this combines also with Turkey's regional role. There, we can speak truly of the bourgeoisie being in power, of a country where the government is cer-

tainly the expression of local capitalism above all. The Turkish government is the ally of the US — Turkey is a member of NATO — but it also intervenes with the perspective of the specific interests of Turkish capitalism, whose trade and investment offensive in the region has in the course of the years taken on a growing importance.

There are some of the big players at the state level in the region. But the biggest player today is the mass movement. Even in the countries where semi-victories have been achieved, like Tunisia or Egypt, the mass movement continues.

How do you analyse the electoral success of the Islamist parties in Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt? Can these successes be interpreted as a repetition of the bringing to heel of the Iranian revolution of 1979-1981 or do they amount to another phenomenon?

It's different according to the country. In Morocco it isn't the same thing as in Egypt or in Tunisia. In Morocco, the success of the Islamic party is very relative, first because the elections were massively boycotted. According to the official figures, participation was less than the half of registered voters, the number of which had, moreover, curiously fallen since the previous election. This happened on the background of an energetic campaign in favour of the boycott from the forces of the real opposition grouped in the February 20th Movement. I should say, to correct the impression, that these opposition forces also include a significant Islamic component, radically opposed to the regime. The success of the Islamic party of the "loyal opposition" in Morocco is then very relative. It has probably been much welcomed, if not supported, by the monarchy with the aim of giving the impression that Morocco has thus experienced, under peaceful and constitutional forms, the same process as elsewhere. The party in question has links with the Muslim Brotherhood.

In Tunisia and in Egypt, the electoral victories of the Islamic parties are more impressive, but there is nothing surprising about them. In the case of Egypt — here again we should highlight the differ-

ences between countries — these elections came after decades during which the Muslim Brotherhood were the sole mass opposition that existed, whereas the Salafists enjoyed a freedom of manœuvre because Mubarak considered them as useful to his regime, since they preached apoliticism. These two components of the Islamic movement were able to develop themselves over the years, despite the repression that the Muslim Brotherhood has had to suffer. Although they did not initiate the mass movement (they rallied to it en route), when this movement succeeded in imposing a relative democratisation of the institutions, these forces were better placed than anyone to benefit from it. It should not be forgotten that Mubarak only resigned last February, and that there were only a few months to prepare for the elections. This is not a lot of time to build an alternative force of credible opposition capable of triumphing at the electoral level. The mass movement broke the party of the regime — which was the main electoral machine in the country — but this was a broadly decentralised uprising in its form of organisation, multiple networks rather than a "leading party". The Muslim Brotherhood was then the only organised force with material resources in the movement.

The case of Tunisia is different, because Ennahda — the Islamic party — was persecuted and banned under Ben Ali. But the repressive regime of Ben Ali also prevented the emergence of left or even democratic forces. These forces did not have the breadth that Ennahda acquired in the early 1990s before its repression, and which has allowed it to appear in the course of the years as the strongest and most radical force of opposition to Ben Ali, with the aid of Al-Jazeera notably. Ennahda again did not initiate the uprising in its country, but given the short period for the preparation of the elections, it was in a much better position than the other political forces.

The Islamic parties in Egypt and Tunisia had money, which is essential for an electoral campaign. If in the past left forces in the Arab world could benefit from the material support of the Soviet Union or

of this or that nationalist regime, all that ended a long time ago. On the contrary, for the Islamic parties, we even observe a competition between their backers: Qatar, Iran, and the Saudi kingdom. The role of Qatar is very important in this respect. Rached Ghannouchi, Ennahda's leader, went to Qatar before returning to Tunisia. The new Ennahda headquarter in Tunis, several stories high, is not within the normal means of an organisation emerging from decades of repression. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood has not stopped opening new offices in every corner of the country, with a profusion of resources, since last February when they were legalised. We have seen the considerable funds that they have deployed during the electoral campaign. The money factor then operates fully, it adds to their symbolic capital as main force of opposition, and, in the case of Egypt, to their implantation as a religious political force which knew how to draw together a significant network by carrying out social and charity works. It is not surprising that these forces emerged as the principal winners of the elections.

In the longer term, could the Islamic parties be replaced by other forces which will build themselves?

The main problem for the moment is the absence of a credible alternative. There it is not only time which matters, but also the capacity, the existence of a credible political and organisational project. The sole force which, in my view, could counterbalance the Islamic parties in the region, is not the liberals of all stripes who have by their nature a limited social base, but the workers' movement. In countries like Tunisia and Egypt it represents a considerable force — a force which has popular roots, unlike the liberals. The workers' movement is the sole force capable of building an alternative to the religious fundamentalists in the countries concerned. Indeed the crucial problem is the absence of political representation of the workers' movement.

A strong workers' movement exists both in Tunisia and Egypt: the UGTT in Tunisia, which has been a

decisive factor in the overthrow of Ben Ali, and the new Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions in Egypt. The latter is not a marginal force; it already claims a million and a half members. The EFITU was set up after the overthrow of Mubarak on the basis of the strike movement which preceded it and followed it. This strike movement played a decisive role in the overthrow of Mubarak. In a sense the EFITU resembles the opposition trade unions created against the dictatorships in Korea, Poland or Brazil.

The problem is that there is no political representation of the workers' movement in Tunisia and Egypt, and unhappily I must say also that the radical left in the countries concerned has not given priority to such an orientation. It thinks that by self proclamation and building itself politically it can play a major role in the events, whereas their rhythm demands a politics oriented much more directly to the promotion of the social movement itself. One can give priority to the construction of political organisations during slow periods, in the periods of crossing the desert, but when one is in situation of upheaval self-construction is not enough — I do not say that it is not necessary, but it is not sufficient. We need initiatives seeking to create a broad movement. In my opinion, in countries like Tunisia and Egypt, the classic idea of the mass workers' party based on the trade union movement should be central, but it is unfortunately not prominent in the political thinking of the radical left in these countries.

Why do the monarchies (Morocco, Jordan, and the Arabian Peninsula) seem to be "holding"? For Morocco, you mentioned the elements of "tolerance" of the current regime, but this is not really the case for the monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula.

Here again we need to make distinctions. I should say first that Jordan is more like Morocco than certain Gulf monarchies. It also presents a façade of "liberal despotism", "liberal absolutism". These are absolute monarchies where there is no popular sovereignty, but they have granted constitutions and a

certain measure of political liberalism, with a political pluralism which is not illusory. There is also a social base for the monarchy, a retrograde base, rural or of rural origin that the monarchies cultivate. This is combined of course with a selective repression.

But the current social situation differs between Morocco and Jordan. In Morocco, there is a strong social movement. The February 20th Movement has succeeded in organising significant mobilisations and until now, it has shown a remarkable perseverance. This movement made a mistake, in my view, in starting on the constitutional question, on the democratic question which, in Morocco, has no great acuity, whereas the social question is very much sharper. But there has been an evolution over the months and today the social is emphasised much more. Nonetheless, in the present conditions, there could be a popular uprising in Morocco of the type of those in Tunisia or Egypt only on social questions, and not on the democratic question, because the regime is intelligent enough not to show its teeth on the latter. There has been very little repression in Morocco compared with other countries of the uprising, Ben Ali's Tunisia or Mubarak's Egypt, not to speak of Libya or Syria.

There are common elements between Morocco and Jordan, where the regime allows a controlled freedom, it opens the safety valve and lets the steam out. At the same time it plays on the ethnic factor. In Jordan too, there are mobilisations which are not negligible and which continue. Thus in these two countries — Morocco and Jordan — there is a real movement, even if it does not have the impressive scope of what we have seen in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen, Libya, or Syria. But the highly artificial ethnic cleavage in Jordan between "native Jordanians" and Palestinians (that is people originating from the exodus from the other bank of the river Jordan) is exploited by the regime. Knowing that the Palestinians originating from the West Bank are in the majority in the country, the Jordanian monarchy cultivates a fear of "native

Jordanians", of being in the minority. It's the classic "divide and rule" recipe.

If we turn to the Gulf monarchies, the situation is different. There have also been popular movements where it is possible. In Oman, there has been a social movement, we now see the development of a political movement in Kuwait, there have been protest movements and riots — harshly repressed — in the Saudi kingdom. And there is of course Bahrain, the only Gulf monarchy to have been confronted with an uprising of great breadth.

The exceptions have been the eminently artificial micro-states — Qatar and the United Arab Emirates — where 80 to 90% of the inhabitants are "foreigners", that is have no rights and can be deported at any time. These then are states that do not fear too much the social movements and that benefit from the direct protection of Western powers — the US, Britain or France (which has important link with the UAE in particular, notably at the military level). Everywhere else, there have been movements — even in Kuwait, where the native population is a little more significant, although here again limited.

And above all there has been the uprising in Bahrain, which the local monarchy and the Saudis have tried to present as a strictly sectarian Shiite movement — the Shiites constitute the great majority of the island's population — against the Sunni monarchy. The sectarian dimension exists, certainly, and it is strong in the region: the Shiites are persecuted in Bahrain as well as in the Saudi kingdom (where they are a minority). The regimes in power use the most abject sectarianism to prevent the coming together of a mass movement, and cultivate in their own social base hostility against the Shiites. Of course, they also use their financial resources to buy off those who they can. In Bahrain, we have seen a considerable democratic movement, given the relationship of forces. Without external intervention, this movement would have been able to — and could still — overthrow the monarchy. The external intervention took the form of troops from the Gulf countries, above all Saudi, hurried to the island to supplement the local forces so that they

could devote themselves to the repression of the movement. But the movement continues in Bahrain, and it is not ready to collapse.

Finally there is Yemen, which is not among the Gulf monarchies, but belongs to the same region. It is — with Sudan and Mauritania — one of the poorest Arab countries. Two thirds of the population there live below the poverty threshold. Yemen has experienced an absolutely extraordinary mobilisation for months. There it is the tribal factor which is exploited fully by the regime, as well as the regional factor, in such a way that the events have taken on aspects of what we could call "cold civil war" between two fractions of the population with imposing mobilisations on both sides. It is the only one of the countries concerned where the regime has succeeded in organising considerable authentic mobilisations, contrary to those which Gaddafi organised in Tripoli or which Assad organises in Syria, which are partly artificial. Yemen is a country whose situation directly affects the Saudi kingdom, and this explains why the Saudis are so directly involved there: they support Saleh, they are behind his "resignation" — which is a masquerade which fools nobody, above all not the radical opposition which continues the struggle.

The Algerian regime has not up to now been shaken by popular mobilisations, how do you explain this?

We can say the same of Iraq or Sudan, as well as Lebanon. These are countries which have known prolonged phases of civil war. In such conditions, it is understandable and natural that the people are not very inclined to destabilise the situation. There is a fear of the unknown, a fear of the resurgence of the most extremist fundamentalist forces, a fear of renewal, including by manipulation of the regime, of the dirty war that Algeria has known and for which the people have paid the price. This background is very important. It should not be forgotten that Algeria is a country which has already experienced a popular uprising in 1988, which certainly did not have the same breadth, or the same forms of organisation as what we have seen this year, but

which nonetheless led to political liberalisation. The electoral rise of the Front islamique du salut (FIS - Islamic Salvation Front), which followed, was ended by the coup d'état as we know, and the civil war. It is natural and normal that the people do not wish a repetition of this scenario. This is a stumbling block in Algeria, in the absence of forces capable of organising a horizontal social convergence on a class basis, which could be the base of a new uprising. There have been attempts at mobilisation in Algeria, but they have had little resonance. The perspectives seem rather blocked for the moment. That could change if the regional movement, which began in December 2010 in Tunisia, continues to broaden. We should also take account of the fact that neighbouring Tunisia and Libya are experiencing democratisations which benefit in both cases Islamic forces resembling the former FIS, repressed in Algeria. Ultimately that can have direct consequences on the Algerian situation and that worries the ruling military.

Do you think the revolutionaries can win in Syria? And who are these revolutionaries?

The mass uprising in Syria is above all an uprising of the popular base, of which the youth are the spearhead. It is the expression of exasperation faced with a family dictatorship which has ruled for 41 years. Hafez el-Assad took power in 1970 and died in 2000, after thirty years in power and since then, for eleven years, his son Bashar, promoted to this post when he was only 34, has ruled. There is then a very understandable exasperation, all the more in that the social dimension, ever-present in the background and as part of the infrastructure of the uprisings, is very present in Syria. It is a country which has been subjected for decades to economic liberalization reforms, which have accelerated in recent years and which are reflected in a dizzying rise in the cost of living, a very difficult social situation and considerable poverty (with 30% of the population living below the poverty level). This combines with the minority, confessional character of the regime, the ruling clique belonging mainly to the Alawite minority. All this explains

why, when the inspiration came from the Tunisian example, then Egypt and finally Libya — including the international intervention in the latter country, which encouraged the Syrians to enter into action, hoping that it would dissuade their regime from repressing violently — we have seen the explosion of this movement that no political force can claim to control and still less to have initiated. Youth networks in particular — as we have seen everywhere from Morocco to Syria, using the new technologies of communication (like Facebook, of which much has been said) — have initiated and organised these uprisings under the form of "local coordination committees" now federated, which continue to propel the movement. They have no political affiliation.

But there are also political forces which are coalescing so as to "represent" the movement. We have seen two forces emerge, two competing groupings. One basically includes left forces, some of whom were not in the radical opposition to the regime and have ambiguous attitudes with respect to it, after having called for dialogue with it, believing they could act as mediators between the popular uprising and the regime and convince the latter to make reforms. They have quickly seen that this would not work and since then most have rallied around the objective of overthrowing the regime.

The other includes parties which are more radical in their opposition to the regime, a variety of forces going from the Muslim Brotherhood (who, here also, play a central role) to the Democratic Peoples' Party (originating from a split in the Syrian Communist Party), which has evolved ideologically in an "Italian" manner, but remains a left opposition to the regime, as well as the Kurdish parties. These forces have formed the Syrian National Council, which has been accepted by a good part of the rank and file of the Syrian popular movement as their representative, although this doesn't mean that the movement is controlled by political networks. It is then a peculiar situation which is reflected in the fact that they have chosen to entrust the presidency of the SNC to Burhan Ghalioun, an

independent who is rather to the left. We see him now participate increasingly in a diplomatic game led by the Muslim Brotherhood in agreement with Turkey and the USA. This is a dangerous dynamic.

Finally, there are the army dissidents. After several months of repression, what should have happened did happen. Even in the absence of an organisation capable of organising the passage of soldiers to the side of the popular revolt, the discontent of the soldiers has led to defections, initially completely unorganised. Since August they have set up a Free Syrian Army, against a backdrop of the beginnings of a civil war, with confrontations between army dissidents and the Praetorian guard of the regime.

There is then in Syria a spectrum of forces. Because the country has not known any political life for decades — although the regime here is less totalitarian than was the case in Libya — it is impossible to know what the relative weight is of one or the other. We need to await the overthrow of the regime, if it happens, and free elections to see the relative force of the organised political currents.

To return to Libya, does the fall of Gaddafi mean the end of the civil war or could we see the re-emergence of armed confrontations and if so, who are the protagonists?

First, it should be stressed that in Libya, more than forty years of totalitarian regime had suppressed any form of political life. Libya appears then an uncharted land in political terms, and nobody knows what political landscape will emerge there, or what will emerge from the elections in this country, if they take place.

If by civil war, you mean the war which culminated in the arrest and liquidation of Gaddafi, then the arrest of his son, this is essentially over for the moment. What there is currently is rather a chaotic situation, a little like Lebanon in the first years of the civil war after 1975, or, to take an extreme case, as in Somalia. There is a government, but there is no state. If we define the state first and foremost by its armed spinal column, there is no longer an army in Libya (even if there are attempts to reconstitute

one): there is a plurality of militias, structured on various bases, regional, tribal, political-ideological and so on. The regional factor, in the narrowest sense — Misrata or Zintan, for example — is determinant. Each region has its own armed militias.

That testifies to the popular character of the war that brought the regime down. What we have seen in Libya is without a shadow of a doubt a popular insurrection and even a popular war, in the most classic form: civilians of all professions metamorphosed into combatants, who threw themselves into the battle against the regime.

Those who believed that the NATO intervention meant the end of the popular character of the rebellion and transformed the rebels into NATO puppets made a serious error. Besides, most of those who said this sought to justify their support for Gaddafi's regime against the Libyan revolution. We have seen attitudes of every kind and an indescribable confusion in the international left. To believe that NATO would have control over the situation in Libya after the overthrow of Gaddafi was to entertain great illusions. The US has not succeeded in controlling Iraq with a massive deployment of troops in this country, so how could anyone believe that they can control Libya without even having troops on the ground.

The potential of popular protest liberated by the uprising against Gaddafi is still present in Libya. Witness for example the demonstrations which took place on December 12th in Benghazi against the Transitional National Council and against the fact that it seeks to co-opt personalities linked to the old regime. NATO has not ceased to advise the TNC to integrate members of the Gaddafi regime, saying that these are the lessons learned from the Iraqi fiasco. Well, that is rejected by the people; there are popular movements which oppose it. Witness also the organisation of women — for the first time in Libya, an autonomous movement of women has emerged and is mobilising whether it is on the question of rape or around the issue of political representation. There are also protests by civilians who wish to get rid of the militias. Libya is a

country where the situation is exploding in all directions, where the potential awakened by the uprising is being strongly expressed.

To be sure, the perspectives there are handicapped by the absence of a left, given what the regime has been and what it has done to any form of political opposition. But there has been some small progress nonetheless — for example, the constitution of a Federation of Independent Trade Unions which has established links with its Egyptian equivalent. We shall see what will happen.

For the moment in any case, from the very fact of the uprising and the armed overthrow of the regime, and in spite of the imperialist intervention in the conflict, Libya is, of all the countries in the region, the one that has experienced the most radical change up until now. The Gaddafi regime has been radically destroyed, even if there are remnants of it which provoke popular mobilisations. But the fundamental structures of the regime have fallen — which is very different from Tunisia, Egypt, not to mention Yemen. In Egypt, still more than in Tunisia, the basic structures of the regime are still in place, and a military junta is even in power in Cairo.

Of all Arab countries, Tunisia is the one where the organisations of the workers' movement — trades unionism — have the longest tradition and strongest organisation. But the workers' movement was marginalised in the electoral process for the Constituent Assembly. Do you think that we are witnessing the beginning of a stabilisation, or simply an electoral interlude?

Tunisia is a country where there is a real bourgeoisie, which tolerated or profited from the regime of Ben Ali. This bourgeoisie has had recourse to the remnants of the Bourguiba regime — that is, the regime which preceded Ben Ali's seizure of power — represented by Béji Caïd Essebsi, who was prime minister until the elections. Today, the Tunisian bourgeoisie tries to co-opt the new majority — the Ennahda party, the Congress for the Republic led

by the new president Moncef Marzouki and so on. These forces are assimilable by the bourgeoisie because they do not have an anti-capitalist social or economic programme. On the contrary, they are either more or less progressive liberal democrats, like Marzouki, or an Islamic current of fundamentalist origin, Ennahda, to which the new prime minister, Hamadi Jabali, belongs, and which claims to have transcended its fundamentalist character and to have become a Tunisian equivalent of the ruling AKP party in Turkey. Just as Turkish big capital has perfectly well accommodated to the AKP party, led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who has today even become its best representative, the Tunisian bourgeoisie seeks to co-opt Ennahda.

At the same time, the movement continues at the grassroots level. Hardly were the elections over than we saw an uprising in the Gafsa mining basin — whose struggles, in 2008 in particular, preceded the revolution which broke out in December 2010. The protest this time, as in 2008, concerned the social question, the demand for the right to work and for jobs. And this will continue, because the movement in Tunisia began around the social question and the coalition now in power has no response to this question.

So in Tunisia there is a favourable terrain for the construction of a political force based on the workers' movement, provided that the left forces take the initiative in this direction.

How are the mobilisations in Yemen developing after the resignation of President Ali Abdullah Saleh?

The movement continues in Yemen also. A significant part of the opposition understands perfectly that the resignation of Saleh is only an attempt to change the façade, without modifying the base.

Separatist demands are also gathering momentum in South Yemen, faced with this unconvincing compromise. It should not be forgotten that Yemen was only unified in 1994, after a long division into two states. The southern state had the only regime identifying with Marxism in the region, with a so-

cial experience which is little known, but remarkable. After a bureaucratic degeneration that was facilitated by its dependency on the Soviet Union, the regime collapsed in the wake of the collapse of its tutelary power. But we are now seeing once again a separatist movement in the South which sees itself as socially more advanced than the North where pre-capitalist, tribal and other structures are more decisive.

There is also in Yemen a sectarian war with a minority that has been the subject of attacks from the Saleh regime, and there is also Al-Qaida — Yemen is today the Arab country where the Al-Qaida network is the strongest at the military level. Yemen then is a considerable powder keg.

What do you think of the difficulty in Europe in leading solidarity campaigns with the revolutions in the Arab region?

Contrary to the implication of the question, I believe that there has been a very strong sympathy, even in the USA, with the uprising in Tunisia and still more with the uprising in Egypt.

The fact that it did not lead to mobilisations, it seems to me, is because people have not seen a particular reason to mobilise. I am not going to engage in counterfactual history, but I think that if there had been any attempt at a repressive intervention by Western governments against the revolution in Tunisia or in Egypt, a significant solidarity movement would have emerged. In the case of Libya, the Western governments intervened on the right side, in appearance at least, in the eyes of public opinion. In the Libyan case, it is generally the opposite question that is posed: why was there no mobilisation against this Western military intervention? In the case of Syria, people hear contradictory assessments, and they see that the attitude of their governments is "cautious", a fact that does not incite them to mobilise.

I see things otherwise. The echo of the Arab uprisings is very strong among the peoples of the world. We have already seen the mobilisations of February 2011 in Wisconsin, in the US, which took Egypt as a

reference point, and we have seen the big trade union demonstration in March in London, where many placards referred to Egypt, or again the movements of the indignant in Spain and Greece, then more recently the Occupy movement which has spread through the US and elsewhere. Everywhere we find references to what happened in the Arab world, and in particular to the Egyptian uprising — because there was much more significant media focus on the events in Egypt than on all the rest. People say "We will do the same as them", "They dared to do it, we will do it"! Of course, there should be no exaggeration in the other direction. In saying that, I am perfectly aware of the limits of all this, even where the movements have taken on a considerable breadth, as in Spain. In no European country is there currently a situation similar to that in the Arab world; that is, a combination of sharp social crisis and of illegitimate despotic government. In Europe, with bourgeois democratic regimes, things do not have this sharpness, and recurrent resort to the ballot box helps dampen the level of explosiveness.

It is not so much about organising solidarity, in my view, since for the moment there is no Western intervention against the uprisings in the region — if that should take place, it would of course be necessary to mobilise against it. But for now, what is more important is to take inspiration from the regional example, which shows that a mass movement can bring about radical changes in the situation of a country. This is the lesson that is snowballing today, and what seems to me the most important

Don't you think that in the historic, traditional left, which is quite decayed now, there is a loss of bearings which holds back mobilisations? You mentioned the movement of the indignant, but it is also a movement which says "no party, no union represents us", which means that it does not feel itself linked to this traditional left, or at least not in the same way as in the past...

I believe, more fundamentally, that we have for some years been confronted with a historic transformation of the political forms of the left, the forms of the workers' movement, the forms of class struggle. It seems to me that this transformation is very unevenly understood in what remains of the left. There are still too many people who continue to think within the frame of thought inherited from the 20th century. And yet the experience of the 20th century left, which has tragically ended in bankruptcy, is today completely obsolete. It is necessary to renew with conceptions of class struggle which are much more horizontal, much less vertical and centralised than the model that imposed itself within the left since the Bolshevik victory in 1917. Today the technological revolution allows much more democratic forms of organisation, more horizontal, in networks... This is what young people are doing; it is what we see at work in the movements underway in the Arab world. Without entertaining illusions though: to believe that Facebook will be the equivalent for the 21st century of the Leninist party would be to entertain big illusions. But between the two, there is room for an inventive combination of much more democratic political organisation, using these technologies, capable of linking to social and citizen networks, capable of appealing to the new generations. The new generations are practically born in these technologies, we see how they use them, how they insert them into their lives. That sketches a future, which necessitates a political, ideological, organisational rearmament of the left at the world scale. That is the challenge which is posed, as shown also by what is happening in the Arab world. This challenge had already been illustrated by the Zapatista revolt, which was a strong attempt at reinventing the forms of expression of the radical left; then with the movement for global justice and in the thinking of components of this movement; and today between the uprisings in the Arab world, the indignant, Occupy, and so on, we see an explosion of mobilisations, in particular of the youth, but not only them, who use these methods of action. The radical left needs to recharge its batteries; it is essential to try to com-

bine the radical left's programmatic and theoretical legacy, the Marxist legacy, with these modern forms, this radical renewal of the forms of organi-

sation and expression, in order to build a revolutionary left of the 21st century.

PAKISTAN

Salmaan Taseer: The political context of a "religious" assassination

BEENA SARWAR ·

This sensational murder that rocked the nation and reverberated around the world was not a spontaneous enraged act but a well-thought out, cold-blooded plan. One man executed this plan – but was he acting alone and was it an act motivated only by 'religious fervour' as has been depicted or is there more to the issue than meets the eye? And even if the action was purely altruistic, should the law of the land not be applied to punish the guilty?

The Governor was already a target of those whom he termed as 'hate-filled organisations' well before they saw an opportunity to (mis)use the 'blasphemy law' and the Aasia Bibi case to unite their own until then divided ranks.

To do this, they needed a target. They found it first in Aasia Bibi, the Christian woman whom a trial court sentenced to death on Nov 8, 2010, for 'blasphemy', and then in a much bigger and more prominent figure, Salmaan Taseer, who publicly championed her cause.

Let's rewind further back to put this situation in context. In Feb 2008, a democratically elected government came into power, replacing Gen. Musharraf's military regime. Policy changes began to be visible. It was no longer a one-man rule. There was a Parliament through which policy matters had to be routed. The new government began completing Gen. Musharraf's half-hearted 'u-turn' against the Taliban, opposed by the security establishment that still sticks to the outdated paradigm of 'strategic' depth - a continued influence in Afghanistan because of a perceived threat from India.

Pakistan was the last country to end diplomatic ties with the Taliban regime in Afghanistan (it was one of only three countries to recognise that regime in the first place, along with UAE and Saudi Arabia). Gen. Musharraf's policy of running with the hares and hunting with the hounds essentially meant that while Pakistan officially withdrew support from the Taliban after 9/11, it continued to turn a blind eye (and covertly support) the 'home grown jihadis' that it saw as useful to keep the fire smouldering in Indian administered Kashmir.

What does all this have to do with Salmaan Taseer and the politics behind his assassination?

Everything. This mindset and political ideology disguised in the rhetoric of religion, is furthered and jealously guarded by a security establishment that sees its duty as being to guard not just Pakistan's physical frontiers but also the so-called 'ideology of Pakistan', fashioned along conservative religious lines particularly since the 1965 war with India.

The third military ruler, Gen. Ziaul Haq (r 1977-88) firmed up this 'ideology' in cahoots with his American masters. Together they converted a national war of liberation in Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion, into a 'jihad' or 'holy war', promoting the concept of 'jihad international' in modern times, as Dr Eqbal Ahmad pointed out in his talk on 'Terrorism, theirs and ours' (1998).

Pakistan's home-grown 'religious' organisations, which had flourished and gained immeasurable strength, pumped up with Saudi and American dollars, arms and training during the Zia years continued to flourish and function freely during the military-dominated decade of musical chairs democracy (1988-1999) in which no democratically elected government was allowed to complete its tenure.

Their powers and privileges continued unabated during the Musharraf years (1999-2008) although the General's u-turn following pressure from Washington after the events of September 11, 2001, meant that their activities had to be less visible.

Their rage at being demoted from blue-eyed boys to pariahs began spilling over after an elected government replaced the Musharraf regime and even covert government support for them ended. The genie released during the Zia years that had grown so big during Musharraf's time was not going to go tamely back into the bottle. It had turned into a multi-headed monster with no central command. Thousands of these trained, armed, ideologically indoctrinated men, easily incited and ready to kill for their cause, were, and are, on Pakistan's soil.

Governor Taseer was already in their sights for his outspoken and rational views on religion, human rights and justice (as opposed to the emotional ones of the 'Taliban ideology'). In May 2010, after armed men opened fire on worshippers in an Ahmedi mosque in Lahore, killing over 80 people and injuring scores of others, Governor Salmaan Taseer went to give his condolences to them.

The elected parliament under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1974 had declared that Ahmedis to be non-Muslim (a shameful capitulation to the mullah lobby). A decade later, in 1984, more amendments under Gen. Zia's military regime criminalised their status, making them liable to be prosecuted for matters like using Muslim greetings or Islamic terms, in short, 'pretending' to be Muslim, which has come to mean 'blasphemous'. The Taliban ideology takes this thread forward, seeing Ahmedis as heretics (kafir) and liable to be killed.

The adherents of this ideology have conflated these issues with so much success that many people actually think that these views are in accordance with Islam. Few people dare to publicly argue with the rhetoric that is whipped up on these grounds – and those who do, risk becoming targets as well. Even Islamic scholars who provide a rational counterpoint based on the Quran are targeted. Several have

been killed, and others have had to lie low or go into self-exile.

Yet, during his condolence visit, in front of dozens of television cameras, Salmaan Taseer clearly and boldly countered this warped view – a video of the visit is available here. He stated that in his view and in his party's view, Ahmedis are 'noble, patriotic' Pakistanis. He not only agreed that there was a need to correct past wrongs but he openly named "these hate-filled organisations – Sipah-e-Sahaba, (Lashkar-e-) Jhangvi," that, he said, "all have same ideology – Taliban, Al Qaeda... They should be prosecuted in the courts; don't let them off. There should be zero tolerance towards them."

He also took a dig at the provincial Punjab government, hinting at their hobnobbing with these groups – "No political alliance is possible with these organisations, you can't go around having them at your political meetings, the Punjab government should prosecute them".

It was barely months later that the religious parties started raising the 'blasphemy' issue, conflating it with the issue of the 'honour of the Prophet, peace be upon Him'. Walk chalkings proclaimed: 'hurmat-e-Rasool par jaan bhi qurbaan hai' (for the honour of the Prophet lives can be sacrificed).

The Aasia Bibi case exploded in November 2010 – over a year after she had been arrested and the case registered, three days after the alleged incident took place in which during an argument with some fellow villagers, she uttered 'blasphemous' words. A decade or so ago, a 'low caste' woman (as most Christians in the Punjab are considered to be, being descendent of converts from a low caste during the British Raj), would not have argued back as Aasia reportedly did. The fact that the case, like most blasphemy cases, was registered days after the alleged incident also indicates a political motivation. As in other such cases, elements from the religio-political parties appear to have used the opportunity to 'work' on the other women, to invoke religious fervour and convince them to register a case.

This was the first 'blasphemy' case in many years in which a court handed down a death sentence to an accused – and the first time such a sentence was awarded to a woman. Protests against the sentence by human rights and Christian organisations led to counter protests by 'Islamic' groups that used the issue to build up their political strength.

The situation was reminiscent of the early 1990s when several 'blasphemy' cases were registered, and the first 'blasphemy murder' was committed. Since then, although the lower courts have occasionally handed down death sentences, country's higher courts have acquitted the accused. Pakistan has never carried out a 'blasphemy execution' although several men have been extra-judicially killed after being accused of 'blasphemy'.

The frenzied propaganda built up against Salmaan Taseer was amplified umpteen times in 2010 because of the reach of the electronic media by now. Many in the 24/7 news media, keen for a sensational story to boost their ratings, jumped into the fray. Taseer was projected in the public domain as a blasphemer.

In one particularly vitriolic television talk show, the anchor, known for her high-pitched approach, put him in the dock, taking him aback – not an easy thing to do. "Bibi, you are acting as I have committed some blasphemy," he reprimanded her, but she continued her tirade. (watch the programme [here](#) and [here](#))

Meanwhile, Sunni Tehrik and other extremist organisations were holding rallies and demonstrations calling for the blood of blasphemers. Mumtaz Qadri was a known figure at such rallies where emotions were being whipped into frenzy. He even recited 'naat' [poetic rendition in praise of Prophet Muhammad] at some of them – like at this one, just three days before he killed the man he was supposed to be protecting.

The question arises how, especially in such an atmosphere, a man who was attending such gatherings, who was already known for his extremist views – and had been earlier removed from police's

Special Branch because he was perceived as a security threat – was inducted into the Elite Force in the first place? Secondly, how was such a man assigned guard duty to a high profile target like the Governor Punjab? And thirdly, "why did the other guards not open fire, as per standard operating procedures in VIP guard duty? (In Qadri's confession after his arrest, he said that he had told his colleagues what he was going to do and asked them not to open fire, as he would surrender.)"

Citizens for Democracy (CFD), an umbrella group of several professional and activist organisations formed on Dec 19, 2010 in Karachi, raised these and other questions in its statement of January 7, 2011, that "indicate the involvement of retrogressive forces in Pakistan that have over the past couple of decades made inroads into all sections of society and institutions of the state, including those institutions upon which Pakistani citizens rely for their security."

Salmaan Taseer's murder was followed barely a couple of months later by the murder of the Minister for Minority Affairs Shahbaz Bhatti, a Christian by faith, who had also been speaking out about the blasphemy issue. No one has been arrested for that murder, and trial court judge who sentenced Mumtaz Qadri to death has had to leave the country for his own safety.

The question many are asking (but not too loudly) is that if Qadri is willing to die for his faith and he believes he has done right, why are his supporters calling for the death sentence to be commuted?

On Jan 4, 2012, at a gathering to 'celebrate' the anniversary of Governor Taseer's assassination, the Sunni Ittehad Council, a religious umbrella organisation, was ready to pay Rs100 million [over a million US dollars] for the "holy gun" that Qadri had used for the murder.

"Presumably that the gun is currently held in an evidence bag. Why not petition for the police to complete whatever ballistic tests are needed and for the court to hand the gun back to the government, who own it," suggests one analyst asking not to be

named. "The government can then sell it to the Sunni Council for Rs 100 million. The money will then not be in the pocket of the Sunni Council, and can be spent on things like rehabilitation of victims of extremist violence. And if they do not pay up, they will have been exposed as hypocrites, again."

So there are two urgent needs in Pakistan now, aside from the perennial ones of clean drinking water, healthcare, education, shelter and so on. These urgent needs are: to enforce the rule of law (charge, try and prosecute the guilty without fear or favour), and to expose the hypocrisy of the Taliban mentality.

GREECE

The Greek left and the question of the European Union

KOSTAS KOUSIANTAS ·

This is a very important discussion. Membership of the EU and the Eurozone constitutes a strategic choice of the Greek capitalists. It is the concrete way that Greek capitalism is integrated in the global imperialist chain. It is the concrete process through which the Greek capitalism is taking part in the international capitalist competition and the global sharing of the surplus values and the profits. Therefore, it cannot exist a contemporary revolutionary program and an actual revolutionary perspective without analyzing this particular way of participation and function of the Greek capitalism in the international capitalist division of labour and without including the demand of overthrowing this participation. Because it is exactly on these strategic choices of the ruling class that the political and social blocks of power who take over the governmental offices are forged and it is exactly on these choices –the so-called "national objectives"– that they try to gain the allegiance and the consensus of the working class.

Without any doubt, participation in the EU and the Eurozone is the new "Great Idea" of the Greek capitalism; in the name of which they call –especially now, during the crisis– the subordinate classes to suffer terrible sacrifices, which are imposed through the Memorandums and the Programs of Stability.

This involvement with the EU empowered Greek capitalism to play the role of a peripheral force –a local imperialism– in the Balkan and Eastern

Mediterranean region. Participation in the EU made Greek capital the necessary partner of the big European imperialist forces alongside with the US to their interventions in the Balkans and in Eastern Europe (an example is the fact that the expansion of Coca-Cola in the above regions through the Greek company 3E). Even today, in the period of the crisis, China has selected Greece to be its entrance in the European markets. The introduction of the Euro enriched the Greek ruling class with the necessary hard currency and the needed low interests rates in order for them to obtain the appropriate capital funds and be able to take part in the theft of public property of the countries of Eastern Europe, thus making Greece an exporter of capital all the last decade.

Without its participation in the EU and in the Eurozone, Greece could not play this role in the region. The difficulties that Turkish capitalism is facing in playing such a role –because of its exclusion from the EU– make very clear the reasons why the Greek ruling class insists on maintaining their status as a hard-core country of the Eurozone at any price. If Greece is forced to leave euro, the results will be destructive for the Greek ruling class. They will lose their strategic geopolitical role, they will lose their access to important funds, and they will lose some important advantages in their conflict with Turkish capitalism.

Furthermore, they will lose their most important available weapon in their endeavour to subordinate the proletariat. The institutions of the EU are the main organizers of the neoliberal attack all over the European continent and put the combined weight of all the European ruling classes in the service of each one. The example of the privatization of

Olympic Airways –where the Greek state and the Greek capitalism systematically used the pressure from the Commission and of the European Court in order for them to implement their policy– illustrates the role of these institutions. The very same Euro is an instrument for the subordination of the working class and the dissolution of the trade unions through their exposure in the competition of the "free market" of the unified currency. The fights which have marked the class struggle in Greece from 2001 (the fight against the neoliberal reform of the pension system) up to now have the same feature: the attempt of the ruling class to transfer the cost of the hard currency – that is the Euro – to the backs of the working class. Probably, the best example of this is the permanent demand of SEV (the association of the Greek industrialists) that the increase of the wages in the SSE (the annual contract between the trade unions and the capitalists that defines the wages) be ruled by the average inflation rate of the Eurozone and not by the much bigger inflation rate of Greece. This demand was finally fulfilled with the shameful reconciliation of GSEE (the Greek Confederation of the Trade Unions in the private sector) in 2010.

However, the worst and most terrifying thing for the Greek ruling class is that a possible exit of Greece from the EU could mean also the beginning of the dissolution of the very same Union. Under these circumstances an exit of Greece from EU could provoke a series of instability events, tendencies for the exit from Euro and, very possibly, the kickoff of a collapse. The result would be that Greek capital would be without the support of the international imperialism in all of their offensive endeavours in the region; starting from their intimidation of the neighbouring Republic of Macedonia on the question of the name and going to the new alliance with the Israeli state in Eastern Mediterranean region and the new conflict with the Turkish capitalism over the control of the oil resources in the same region.

This is why for the time being the bourgeois think tanks have not produced an alternative strategy on

how to control the crisis; a strategy that could include the exit from the Euro and the return to the national currency of the drachmas, in order for the Greek capitalism to obtain some instruments for implementing a currency policy. Such a strategy would deprive from the Greek capitalists all the above advantages. The bourgeois think tanks would be forced –although reluctantly– to think about a mandatory return to drachmas only in the case of a possible total collapse of the Euro or of the possibility that Greek capitalism would lose control over the banking system.

However, if Greek capitalism is forced leave the Euro and the EU, this will have as a result an enormous systematic crisis and an inevitable crisis of governance.

This exit from EU would mean gains for the working class only under the condition that it was the result of the actions of a working class movement fighting for a total transitional overturn; for demands that challenge the capitalist property and the capitalist management of the economy. On this basis the balance of the forces would change decisively in favour of the working class through the making of a political crisis. The workers' consciousness would make some steps forward towards the case of emancipation, since it would break with one of the most fundamental arguments of the bourgeois ideological domination; that is the argument of the "European paradise". The European working class movements would get rid of the burden of the "European one way", since the Greek case would have been an inspiring example.

The "Europeanists" of the Greek Left

Very often various currents of the Left make a series of false objections on the need that a demand for the exit from Euro and EU should be incorporated in a contemporary transitional program.

A) The first and main objection is related to the concept that the EU, as a supranational institution, plays objectively a progressive role, since it is somehow an overcoming of the bourgeois national state.

A preliminary remark is that the concept that the supranational bourgeois institutions could be the counterweight to the national state is bourgeois cosmopolitanism and not proletarian internationalism. Proletarian internationalism has been condensed in slogans like "Proletarian of all countries, unite!", "National unity is a trap, the proletarians do not have a country", "The enemy is at home", "The defeat of "our" government in a war is the lesser evil"; these are slogans that break with the bourgeois national consensus and promote the internationalist workers' solidarity. Internationalism has nothing to do with the defence of the UN, the Hague International Court and other European bourgeois institutions.

The response to this false approach on the nature of the EU is given by an important document from the 14th Congress of the Fourth International. According to this statement:

"Far from responding to the social and international aspirations of workers, women, youth and oppressed nationalities, the EU reflects on a regional level the globalization of the world economy. It is an instrument of the strongest sectors of big capital for inter-imperialist competition and for an all-out struggle against the European working class and the Third World. [1]

This analysis is based on Lenin's theses on the significance and the role of a possible union of Europe (at his time). Lenin wrote in 1915 about the slogan of the "United European States":

"From the standpoint of the economic conditions of imperialism—i.e., the export of capital and the division of the world by the "advanced" and "civilized" colonial powers—a United States of Europe, under capitalism, is either impossible or reactionary.

(...)

"Of course, temporary agreements are possible between capitalists and between states. In this sense a United States of Europe is possible as an agreement between the European capitalists... but to what

end? Only for the purpose of jointly suppressing socialism in Europe, of jointly protecting colonial booty against Japan and America, who have been badly done out of their share by the present partition of colonies, and the increase of whose might during the last fifty years has been immeasurably more rapid than that of backward and monarchist Europe, now turning senile. Compared with the United States of America, Europe as a whole denotes economic stagnation. On the present economic basis, i.e., under capitalism, a United States of Europe would signify an organization of reaction to retard America's more rapid development. The times when the cause of democracy and socialism was associated only with Europe alone have gone forever." [2]

Just to cast a glance at the function of the very same EU in order to confirm that EU is not by any means an overcoming of the national state. In fact it remains a loose union of independent states, where the basic tools for the implementation of bourgeois policies (courts, army, police, state bureaucracy, and budget) are still in the hands of the national state. It is not even a union with a common economic cycle, since the productivity, the competition and the various levels of escalation of the crisis are still uneven. And of course there is still not a European capitalist class that is above the national states.

What is true is the fact that EU constitutes the coordinator of the national capitalist classes' actions against their working classes, against their international competitors and against the people of other countries. Common actions which feed and are fed by a parallel process of subversion even of elementary bourgeois parliamentary democracy at the level of the national states, since the important decisions for the actions of each of the bourgeois state separately are taken in the EU Council meetings, while at the same time the EU institutions are used as an obstacle to workers' claims. In that sense participation in the EU and in the Euro is a national strategy for the capitalists, and not a supranational

tional one, that is supposed to be in conflict with the national-level solutions.

EU is not an objectively progressive development, but a reactionary development that needs to be overthrown; that is to be dissolved.

And because of the fact that the class struggle is carried out mainly at the national level –for the reason that we have already described– and therefore in an uneven way among the various movements and various countries, the dissolution of EU cannot be a simultaneous process in the entire Union. It will pass through overturns at national level and through the exit from EU of those countries where the struggle of the working class could overturn the policies of the ruling classes, undermine the foundations of the function of the national bourgeois state and cause a crisis in the apparatus of the EU.

B) There is another objection; that the demand for exit from the EU is not a transitional one, since it can be adopted by bourgeois political forces as well.

In theory this position expresses the wrong concept that transitional demands are those that can never be adopted by a bourgeois government. This is not true. A transitional program includes in a unified and combined way several types of demands. Demands that aim at the real transfer of the wealth from the capitalist class to the labour; demands that could be integrated into capitalism in a general view, but in the actual context are in conflict with the strategic choices of the bourgeois class and provoke some important cracks and destabilization in the system; demands that challenge directly capitalist property and the entire management of the economy; demands that undermine the fundamentals of the bourgeois state. The combined promotion of these demands from the working class movement creates an anticapitalist dynamics that leads the two main classes of the society in conflict and open the debate of power.

There are demands that in a general overview can be integrated in capitalism, but in the actual context they are against the main choices of the bour-

geois class and provoke important cracks and destabilization of the system. The demand to leave from the EU is the crucial transitional demand for the period we speak about; of course only under the condition that it is incorporated in a greater anti-capitalist program –this is why we speak about an anticapitalist disengagement from the EU.

The fact that the same demand is presented also by left patriotic forces in a reformist way does not mean that it should not be raised by the internationalists as well. In the very same way the exit from NATO for the internationalists has an internationalist-anti-imperialist dimension –while for the Communist Party of Greece and for Synaspismos/SYRIZA it is mainly a demand for a more effective defence of Greece against Turkey.

And of course the exit from NATO could be also an option for the Greek ruling class as well. Let's remember that K. Karamanlis pulled Greek capitalism out of the military wing of NATO in 1974, eight years before De Gaulle did the same with the French capitalism. Today Le Pen supports the exit of France from EU and NATO as well. But this fact did not prevent the revolutionary left in France supporting the "No" to the European Constitution (which was the position of the far right as well) or leaving NATO.

C) In the same logic it is also the objection that the demand for the exit from the EU and Euro is a kind of subordination of the revolutionary strategy to the reformist theory of interim bourgeois stages in the discourse for socialism.

As we have highlighted above, a transitional program can include elements that could be integrated into capitalism; that is to include elements that could be present in a left reformist programme of stages.

The difference is that the transitional programme struggles for these demands in a combined way with the demands that undermine the fundamentals of the capitalist property and the capitalist state and, above all, together with the slogan for the workers' control.

No demand –even the demand for unilaterally stopping payment and cancellation of the debt; with which of course OKDE is in accordance– is alone in favour of the interests of the working class people, if it is not accompanied by the workers' control and if it is not clear who will have the control of the imposed measures (the proletariat) and who will suffer the prices of such an option (the capitalists).

With exactly the same logic we are dealing with the exit from the EU. We can conceive it only as the result of a movement that is fighting for and is imposing an anticapitalist programme of action on "their" capitalist class. Thus, we conceive it as an "anticapitalist break", which is the result of a more general anticapitalist struggle, and not as a "necessary stage" that it should be implemented in order for the working class movement to struggle under better conditions or an "objectively better" situation for working class people.

For example, because exactly the exit from the EU must be the consequence of an anticapitalist struggle, we would never give our support to a government because they would lead Greece out of the EU but at the same time they would carry out neoliberal policies and transfer the cost of this choice to the backs of the working class.

On the contrary, the patriotic left –for whom the exit from the EU is a necessary strategic stage– would really be in a dilemma in supporting such a government. A good example is the support that the patriotic left gave to the government of Tassos Papadopoulos in Southern Cyprus only because he opposed the Anan Draft in the Referendum that was organized in 2004. Bound to the theory that Greek capitalism is subordinated to the imperialist countries and has lost national sovereignty, the patriotic left see Greece's membership of the EU as a kind of dependency of the Greek capitalist class, and not as a tool for the Greek capitalists in order for them to carry out an offensive policy in the region. The patriotic left consider the exit from the EU as a precondition for a successful outcome of the working class struggles and not as the result of

these struggles. So, from this standpoint the exit from the EU means actually a reformist proposal which aims at creating some better conditions for policies with a more pro-working class profile.

However, things are different. We cannot advance in our struggle for the socialization of the banks without compensation and under workers' control and at the same time stay within the EU. It is not possible to advance in the workers' control over the monetary-credit system and at the same time the flow of the currency, the exchange rate policy and the interest rates are defined by the European Central Bank. There cannot be workers' control over the currency and at the same time staying in the Eurozone. There is no chance for a government of workers' parties that implements an anticapitalist programme or for a revolutionary government of the workers' councils to stay in the Stability Programme, in the Maastricht and Lisbon frameworks. And of course this rupture with the basic Treaties of the EU means also an exit from this Union.

From all the above it is clear that a programme of expropriations against the capitalist class and a programme of workers' control are not possible in the frame of the EU and the Eurozone. Any advance of such a programme will create the conditions for the exit from these institutions. For this reason a contemporary anticapitalist programme should include in a clear way the exit from the Eurozone as a demand that will be linked with the workers' control over the economy.

D) Those who still keep their objections say that in that case it would be better for the very same EU to expel the country instead of us promoting the slogan for the exit.

But why should a government of the workers' parties who implement an anticapitalist programme or a revolutionary government of the workers' councils tolerate the humiliation of elimination by the imperialists?

Only on one occasion: if the exit from the EU on its own initiative would expose this government before

the working classes of the rest of the Europe.

But this is not the case. The EU is in a process of a rapid delegitimization in the eyes of European workers. Support for the Euro and EU is steadily declining and the struggles against the measures that are commanded by the European Treatments are steadily increased.

Under these circumstances, if a workers' government concedes the right of expulsion to the capitalists by not asking for exit on its own initiative means that it legitimates the EU as an institution (in fact asking the EU keep it in the Union, even when the capitalists want to drive this government out) and this would be an irreparable blow against the European workers' movement.

Our aim: Dissolution of the EU

The aim of the European and Greek workers' movement should be the dissolution of the EU. The deep structural crisis of capitalism brings at the surface the incompetence of capitalism to unify the people of Europe and smash the reformist illusions that the European capitalisms could overcome their competition and unify peacefully the European continent. It confirms the positions of revolutionary Marxism that the unification of Europe can be occurred only through the socialist revolution that could smash the EU and dismantle the bourgeois state.

The strategic slogan for Europe should be "NO to Europe of capital, war, racism and repression – YES to Europe of working class and the social movements"; it is the slogan of the "United Socialist States of Europe".

The materialization of this slogan could not go through the reform of the EU, but only through its dissolution and the building of a new union, based on the institutions of direct democracy which could

emerge in the struggle against the neoliberal programs that EU and Eurozone promote.

We state decisively the strategic need for developing close and organic links between the workers and social movements in Europe, since no overturn of neoliberalism can survive –even in countries outside the EU– without the expansion of this overturn in the rest of Europe. We are aware of the fact that no revolution could last for long without the expansion in the rest of the continent.

But in any case we need to specify the steps that lead to the dissolution of the EU.

Since the main weapon of the capitalists for the implementation of the attacks against the working class is the national state and the class struggle is being developed unevenly and mainly in a national level, an anticapitalist program should specify the demands that trigger this dissolution in a national level.

And since the EU is not a single state but a union of states, the way that the EU can be dissolved is through the exit of its members.

The demands for disobedience and rupture with the EU, the anticapitalist disengagement and the simultaneous call to the European movements for a common action aiming at the dissolution of the EU are the specification in the current political context of Greece.

Nevertheless, it's time for the Greek left to locate this political question in the right place. Not as a necessary stage for the Greek people to get rid of their "dependence", not as a vehicle for the development of a new capitalist production that will lead to better conditions for the working class movement, but as the logical sequence of the struggle for the anticapitalist overthrow and the workers' control over economy and society.

RUSSIA

A balance sheet of the December movement

RUSSIAN SOCIALIST MOVEMENT (RSD) ·

According to various estimates, there were between 40,000 and 60,000 people in Balotnaya Square in Moscow. In St. Petersburg there were nearly 10,000 demonstrators, and in some regions (Ekaterinburg, Novosibirsk, Rostov and others), between 3,000 and 5,000. The spontaneous character of the mobilizations constitutes one of the elements which most differentiates these events from, for example, the "Orange revolution" of 2004 in Ukraine. The opposition was absolutely not ready for a sudden politicization of society, nor did it expect people to take to the streets. The movement did not have a clearly defined leadership and the majority of the participants in the meeting on December 10 did not indicate support for one or the other of the known political personalities who were occupying the stage. Two weeks later, on December 24, a new meeting brought together more than 100,000 people in Moscow. That makes it the most massive mobilization in the entire history of post-Soviet Russia.

The political forces

The parties represented in Parliament, which form an integral part of the system of "guided democracy" and which won seats in the new Duma, - the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), the centre-left party Fair Russia and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) of Vladimir Zhirinovksy, a populist formation surfing on a wave of nationalism) - expressed their disagreement with the result of the elections but accepted it de facto. They did not support the de-

mands for the annulment of the December 4 elections and the organization of a new poll, just as they refused to support the incipient movement. Although representatives of the CPRF and Fair Russia spoke at the meetings on December 10, the vast majority does not regard these parties as forces capable of leading the movement. So there were about 1,000 people at the meeting organized by the CPRF on December 18.

It is in fact the political forces which have been excluded for many years from the Putin system and which can count on their experience of public activity and of organizing street demonstrations that are playing a major political role in the movement: the liberals (especially the "Solidarnost" movement of Boris Nemtsov), the far Right ("Russian" movements, "against illegal immigration", etc.) and the far Left (Left Front, Russian Socialist Movement (RSD), anarchists). Moreover, citizens' organizations such as the movement of independent observers, defenders of human rights and the "white ribbon" movement "are also very active.

Although for the moment the liberals occupy centre stage, both the far Right and the far Left are trying to affirm their presence, take part in the organizing committee and propose speakers. The "battle for the stage" is accompanied by conflicts. So the Right whistles and shouts during the interventions of the liberals and the Left, and the Left does the same during the interventions of the Right.

The leaders

Among the leaders who have made their name known and won popularity in the framework of the mobilizations we find Alexeï Navalnyi, a young activist coming from civil society and from the struggle against corruption, who is not a member of any party. He advocates a synthesis between the "mod-

erate" liberals and nationalists, maintaining openly many contacts with the far Right, which he regards as "an important part of the movement which is representative of the population". We also find the liberal leaders Boris Nemtsov and Vladimir Ryzhkov, who began their careers in the 1990s in the "Yeltsin camp". They have the support of the liberal media but their past largely discredits them in the eyes of the majority of the participants. We must also mention Sergueï Udaltsov, leader of the Left Front, a young social and political activist with a post-Stalinist past. It seems that the authorities regard Udaltsov as the most dangerous of the leaders of the movement. He was taken into custody and has been held by the police for nearly a month by means of charges that have been fabricated, linking him to petty crime. His release was one of the demands of the meetings on December 10 and 24. His video intervention on December 24 received massive support. Ilya Ponomarev, a member of Parliament for Fair Russia who is close to the Left Front also plays a very active role. In addition, among the participants in the meetings are figures known as "apolitical" - journalists, writers and actors holding mainly liberal views - who enjoy the greatest popularity.

The masses

We can safely say that the absolute majority of the participants in the mobilizations do not support any political force. On December 10 and 24, many people present did not listen to the speakers on the stage but showed great interest in the political exchanges and discussions inside the meeting. According to interesting sociological data collected by the Levada centre, at the meeting on December 24 in Moscow 60 per cent of the participants were men, 62 per cent had higher education qualifications, 31 per cent were between 25 and 39 years old, nearly 25 per cent were less than 25 and 23 per cent were between 40 and 55. The majority of people described themselves as "specialists" (46 per cent) or "students" (12 per cent). In reply to the question concerning political convictions, the ma-

jority answered "democratic" (31 per cent), "social-democrat" (10 per cent) or communist/left (13 per cent). We can also affirm that many representatives of the "middle-class", employees in the public sector and pensioners were present at the meetings.

The tactics of the Left

From the start, the Left – the Left Front, the RSD, anarchists and others – has played a big role in the course of events. In Saint-Petersburg members of the RSD spoke during the meetings and were part of the organizing committee. In Moscow a representative of the RSD would have spoken on December 24, but finally he did not because of manoeuvres by the liberals. In several regions (Irkutsk, Perm, Novosibirsk, Kaluga, Yaroslavl) the RSD was among the organizers and our representatives spoke during the meetings.

From the beginning, we in the RSD spoke in favour of the closest possible cooperation between all the representatives of the radical Left during the mobilizations, for a common tactic, for the formation of what we describe as a "left pole" during the mass meetings.

Since December 5 we have taken an active part in the permanent meetings of the left groups, where we discuss the situation and the coordination of our actions. The Left Front, the anarchists, the "Communists of Russia" (a faction of the CPRF), the Communist Workers' Party and others also take part in them.

The principal common orientation consists of creating alternative spaces within the meetings and drawing passers-by into discussion. On the 24th, in Moscow, the RSD had a stand where it laid out its literature and it organized a workshop for making placards in which anyone who wanted to could take part. A "live microphone" was put at the disposal of everyone. There was also a thematic stand against the privatization of education in which the teachers' union and groups of students took part. The anarchists had their own "open microphone".

The future

It is obvious that after the 24th we must expect a temporary drop in activity, due to winter and the end of year festivities. However, everyone understands that the presidential elections on March 4 will be decisive and that they are close. Putin will try to stay in power by winning in the first round, to do which he must get 50 per cent of the votes. With his popularity in freefall, it seems obvious that this is only possible through massive vote-rigging. The next big gathering is planned for February 1, the date of the launching of the presidential campaign.

We intend to continue the work of strengthening of the RSD (which can count on a stream of new members) as well as the negotiations for the formation of a united front of the left organizations, in particular with the Left Front and others. Our angles of attack for the presidential elections are: not one vote for Putin, for popular control over the elections, for a social programme (against privatizations and austerity measures, control over big corporations and natural resources), for the development of massive mobilizations as the principal condition for a change of system.

ECOLOGY

Consuming seriously damages your health... and that of the planet

ESTHER VIVAS ·

With that in mind, we could suggest that the large shopping centres, especially during sales, place prominent warning signs, parodying the Health Authorities' -"Consuming seriously harms your health". Moreover... irrational, superfluous and unnecessary consumerism, as promoted by the capitalist system, not only can affect our health, in such an unexpected and direct manner as a "pepper-spray assault", but above all, affects the "health" of the planet.

Just to give an example, if everyone consumed like the average American we would need five planet earths to feed such voracity, but alas we only have one and it's not big enough. We have become too used to living mindless of the fact that the world we inhabit is finite and capitalism has taken good care of that. Progress is accredited to the consumer society but progress towards what, is the question we must ask ourselves, and for whom, and at what cost and who pays.

The latest songs of the Sirens insist that buying will make us happier, despite such happiness never showing, no matter what we spend. "Splash out and drown your sorrows" seems to be capitalism's slogan these days, but our dissatisfaction never stays satisfied. Happiness does not come instantly, bagged with a receipt

We are told to buy sunglasses by Chanel, a Tous teddy bear or Mango jeans as the only means to feel like Claudia Schiffer, Jennifer Lopez or Gerard Piqué. The days of selling just a product has passed into history. Now, as all good schools of marketing

teach, they sell us the celebrity and package with the promise of "health, money and love". And we pay, pleased as Punch, the price of our dream.

They sell us the incidental as indispensable and the trivial as life or death, and create for us a whole range of spurious needs. Change of clothes every season, a mobile of the latest generation, a plasma TV and so on, and so on ... With a consequent pile, of technological, electronical, and sartorial waste...that vanishes once out the door, going to swell the scrap heaps of the Global South, polluting water and land, and threatening community health.

Or else, the system's counter offence of programmed obsolescence... planning expiry dates for all that we buy, so that after the determinate amount of time, it fails and you have to buy another. What good is an everlasting light bulb, stockings that resist ladders or a computer that does not work? All bad business. Here, he who sells is the only winner.

Perhaps the time is ripe to instil the idea that we could "live better with less" and to examine the complicity desired of us, with a system imposed upon us that benefits only the same as always. We are told that there is a consumer society because we love to consume, but - aside from our own individual responsibility - no one, to my knowledge, chose this society in which we happen to live or at least I myself was never asked. It's just that, from diapers until dentures we are bombarded with "buy... buy... buy" and their message continues today, we will leave this crisis 'consuming'. I ask myself, "consuming" or "being consumed"?

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Part I: Looking back on the movements that preceded the Arab Spring, the Indignados, and Occupy Wall Street

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT ·

In the countries in which it has not been massive, active minorities have attempted to give it wider legitimacy with varying results. [1] In the Southern hemisphere, only Chile has experienced a movement that can be compared to that of the Indignados in 2011. [2]

If we try to sum up what has been achieved by the alterglobalist movement over the past two decades, we can distinguish between different phases related to the overall developments in the world.

From 1999 to 2005, in response to a heightening of the neoliberal offensive in Northern countries, large-scale mobilizations occurred against the WTO (Seattle in November 1999), the World Bank, the IMF, and the G8 (Washington in April 2000, Prague in September 2000, Genoa in July 2001). The World Social Forum emerged in that context in Porto Alegre in January 2001. Over the following years the movement spread to several continents (Latin America, Europe, Africa, South Asia, and North America). New international networks were created: Jubilee South (on the issue of debt), ATTAC (against the dictatorship of financial markets), the World March of Women, Our World Is Not for Sale, and others. Older networks (dating back to the first half of the 1990s) such as Via Campesina, CADTM (North/South network that focuses on the debt, the WB and the IMF) were strengthened. The antiglobalization movement developed in these years, mainly within the context of the WSF.

The mobilizations that occurred in 1999-2000 were prepared for by other actions, such as

- the mobilization against the G7 in Paris in July 1989 on the occasion of the bicentenary of the French Revolution, which led to the Appel de la Bastille (Bastille Call) for canceling third world debt (the CADTM's founding text);
- the (neo)Zapatista uprising that irrupted on 1 January 1994 and had a major international impact for several years, particularly during an international meeting in the Chiapas in 1996 with the Surrealist name 'Intergalactic meeting in defense of humankind' (in which many international movements participated including the CADTM).

The 50th anniversary of the World Bank and IMF was commemorated by a huge protest in Madrid in 1994. This demonstration inspired the French when they founded 'Les autres voix de la planète' (the other voices of the planet) collectives during the mobilization against the G7 in Lyon in 1996. The Spanish initiative brought together NGOs, the CADTM Belgium and movements such as the 0.7 % platform in which young people struggled to convince their country to devote 0.7 % of the GDP to public aid to development, and also trade unions, feminist and environmental movements (Ecologistas en Accion). Already at the counter-summit in Spain an alliance of movements emerged that would later converge on Seattle in 1999, then on Porto Alegre in 2001, and so on. In 1997, European Marches against unemployment, job insecurity, and social exclusion played a decisive role in Amsterdam, during an EU counter-summit.

Key dates in the creation of the alterglobalist movement

See CADTM Les manifestes du possible (Manifestoes of what is possible), Syllepse-CADTM, 2004.

After 20 years of neoliberal domination in South America, massive uprisings in several countries proved to be successful: the water war in Bolivia in 2000, the Indian uprising in Ecuador that overthrown the neoliberal president (2000), the rebellion that overruled Argentine's neoliberal president (end of 2001) and opened onto a prerevolutionary crisis in December 2001 and on into 2002, the popular uprising in Venezuela in April 2002 to bring Hugo Chavez back to the presidency after a coup (11-13 April 2002), the gas war in Bolivia in 2003 with the pro-Washington neoliberal president being overruled, and similarly the overruling of the pro-US neoliberal president in Ecuador in 2005... In the wake of such mobilizations, governments that at least partly broke off with neoliberalism and opposed the US domination, launched political reforms and partly restored public control over natural resources (Venezuela from 1999, Bolivia in 2006, Ecuador in 2007). [3] Yielding to popular pressure, the Argentine government, which was not particularly left-wing, implemented heterodox measures that contrasted with those taken by the PT government in Brazil and by the Uruguayan Broad Front, which paradoxically carried on with the same policies of their neoliberal predecessors while adding a significant amount of 'assistencialism' that improved the condition of the poorer classes and thus consolidated their voter base. The free trade area of the Americas that Washington wanted to set up was abandoned in 2005 thanks to the opposition of a majority of South American governments and social mobilization.

Meanwhile 9/11 2001 led to a new US war offensive in Afghanistan and Iraq that reeked of oil grabbing and military positioning. The offensive was accompanied by a restriction of democratic liberties, especially in the US and the UK: war on terror was the perfect excuse. Faced with such hard-line imperialism, the alterglobalization movement managed

to bring out 12 to 13 million people to march against war all over the world in February 2003, but was unable to prevent the invasion of Iraq one month later. The decline of the WSF started in 2005. One of the reasons was the International Council's refusal to allow the forum to develop from a forum where activists could meet and exchange ideas to an open and democratic instrument for political action. We should add the institutionalization of the process, dominated as it was by NGOs and leaders of social movements that were all too closely aligned with social liberal governments, such as the Lula government in Brazil and Prodi's in Italy.

After 2004 there were no more large-scale international mobilizations against the IMF, the WB, the G8, NATO, the WTO, or imperialist wars. The alterglobalization movement was obviously losing momentum though WSFs may have been quite successful, as in Belém (Brazil) in 2009, and to a lesser extent in Dakar in February 2011.

In 2005, when they adopted the EU constitutional treaty against the will of the people, the European ruling classes and governments reinforced the neoliberal capitalist orientation of an integrated Europe within the context of the EU and the euro zone that gradually extended to 17 countries. Industrialized capitalist countries as well as China and commodity exporting countries still seemed quite healthy. The ruling classes led their offensive by imposing more precarious working conditions and greater imbalance in the distribution of wealth, but consumption sustained through credit and the real estate bubble produced a misleading sense of abundance and well-being in countries such as the US, the UK, Spain, Ireland, Greece, and several central European countries that were new EU members. On the other hand, the perceptible effects of climate change triggered a growing awareness of the deleterious consequences of productivist capitalism.

Translated by Christine Pagnouille in collaboration with Charles La Via

FEATURES

In-depth analysis from International Viewpoint's Features section



MEXICO

Mexican Labor Year in Review: 2011

DAN LA BOTZ · 24 January 2012

At the same time, despite the ferocious attacks on the electrical workers and miners, workers continue to fight for their unions, for their jobs and their contracts. Throughout the country activists protest against the drug war and army and police human rights violations. A new social movement, the Movement for Peace, Justice, and Dignity led by the poet Javier Sicilia, has challenged Calderón's drug policy, condemned the state's violence, and demanded justice for the indigenous and freedom for the country's political prisoners. The populist leftwing presidential candidate, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, has spent the last six years building a grassroots organization throughout the country and speaking out against the neoliberal policies of the Calderón administration, hoping to win the coming presidential election. We will learn this coming summer whether López Obrador's organization can defeat the PRI and turn Mexico in a new direction. We look here in greater detail at these developments.

1. Calderón's Failed War on the Drug Cartels

Calderón's war on drug dealers has taken 50,000 lives, while an estimated 10,000 people have disappeared, and thousands of others have been displaced. Although the administration argues that the strategy has put leaders of the cartels in prison and resulted in the seizure of large quantities of drugs, many Mexicans believe the price is too high. The toll this past year in the drug wars has been almost 12,000 killed or 33 per day. On the northern border, Ciudad Juárez had 3,000 killings in 2011, or

more than 8 per day (providing the title of the new documentary "8 Murders a Day.") The killings include 174 government officials, 83 of them police officers. [1] The Calderón administration has dispatched 50,000 troops as well as Federal police to states along the border and most recently to Veracruz on the Gulf Coast, leading to a militarization of much of the nation.

Everywhere the troops have gone there have been charges of human rights violations from ordinary people and from a variety of human rights organizations in Mexico and abroad. For example, in 2011 Human Rights Watch issued a report on human rights violations by the government in its war on drug traffickers. The report details the government authorities' routine use of torture, disappearances, and extrajudicial executions. [2]

U.S. State Department reports on Mexican human rights over many years had documented these same issues even before the drug wars. The wars between the drug cartels and between the cartels and the Mexican government—a real war involving military mobilization, campaigns and attacks, high power fire arms, torture, disappearances, rapes, murders, beheadings, and massacres—has made the country a living hell for those affected and a nightmare of anxiety and fear for those so far untouched by the brutality of the conflict.

When human rights organizations and activists have spoken out about these flagrant violations, they have themselves become the target of attacks leading to their kidnapping and murder. Similarly with journalists, many of whom have been assassinated while covering the drug wars. [3]

The Role of the US in Mexico' Drug Wars

Many Mexicans from a variety of social classes and political positions have also been shocked and ap-

palled by the way that the war on the cartels has facilitated an expansion of the role of the United States in Mexico's internal affairs. U.S. President Barack Obama has continued his predecessor's policy of assisting the Mexican government's war on drug traffickers, despite the notorious human rights violations and the widespread corruption in the government, the military and police agencies. The United States has earmarked US\$1.8 billion for military equipment for the drug wars through the Merida Initiative, of which US\$750 Mexico has so far been delivered. In pursuing its drug wars, Mexico has become increasingly dependent on not only on American money and weapons, but also, trainers, advisors and most important political direction.

U.S. government leaders, top military officials, police organizations, and border and customs agencies have all become more deeply involved with the Mexican state while at the same time their activities in Mexico have increased and intensified. Mexicans were shocked to learn that the U.S. government had sent drones to conduct surveillance over Mexico and that U.S. agents were operating in their country. Some Mexicans believe that the growing net of American intelligence, police and military operations in their countries represents more than a violation of their sovereignty, constituting a kind of cryptic conquest of their country. All of this might be more acceptable if the government's military approach to the drug dealers had proven successful. But, in fact, it has failed.

Drug Wars Impact on Workers, Society and Politics

President's Calderón's campaign has not only failed to defeat the drug lords, but it has also lost the confidence of the Mexican people. The drug war has affected people of all walks of life, from the wealthy who have been kidnapped to the poor who have been caught in the crossfire and killed, but it has had a particular impact on all sorts of working people from farmers and factory workers, to migrant workers and teachers, to doctors, and reporters. Drug dealers, for example, shake down school

teachers, demanding a part of their wages, and threatening to kill the teachers if they do not pay. The government's military occupation of the border states and other areas, has had a chilling effect on labor organizations and social movements, some of whom have become victims of repression. Yet despite the atrocities, politicians in the United States will not seriously discuss the legalization of drugs—which would bring about the collapse of the cartels and an end to the drug violence just as the end of Prohibition brought an end to gangster violence in the United States—because rightwing and religious parties object.

Interestingly, this is a more widely accepted alternative in Mexico, endorsed in 2010 by former President Fox.

Irrespective of their parties or politics, Mexicans from the elite to the middle classes, from the working people to the poor believe that the government's military approach is failing. The perceived failure of what has been the major project of Calderón's administration, together with the tremendous cost in terms of human life, is largely responsible for the decline of the National Action Party (PAN). The eclipse of Calderón, whose party will surely be defeated in the coming election, will put an end to the twelve years of the PAN in power since the election of Vicente Fox in 2000. The century that opened with a bang as the PRI's "perfect dictatorship" ended, has now fizzled out. The failure of the drug war will mean the end not only of Calderón, who under law must step down after one six-year term, but will also close a short, sinister and sad chapter of Mexican history.

Doubts about the Mexican State

The drug wars over the last five years have raised serious doubts about the Mexican state, which, if not necessarily a failed state, is a state with serious and critical structural strains. The Mexican government under Calderón has been forced to disband various police forces, terminating thousands of officers, as it did recently in Veracruz State on the Gulf, because state and municipal police have proven to

be so corrupt and so controlled by the drug cartels. Where state and municipal government and police officials were not corrupt, they have shown themselves to be vulnerable to the superior organization, intelligence, and firepower of the cartels who have assassinated them by the dozens. These issues led the Calderón administration to substitute the army for the police along the border states and in other areas, but that also proved to be problematic as the army engaged in a strategy of confrontation and violent tactics that led not only to tens of thousands of deaths but also to widespread human rights violations.

The cartels have responded by engaging in the kidnapping and murder of high level Federal government, army and police personnel, including in the nation's capital, Mexico City. The head of Mexico's Federal Police, Edgar Millán Gómez, was shot outside of his home in Mexico City in May of 2008. A Federal prosecutor, the eighth, was murdered in Tlaxiaco, Mexico in November of last year. A recently retired Mexican Army General, Jorge Juárez Loera who was a central figure in the war on the drug lords, was murdered in Tlanepantla in Central Mexico in May of last year. Not only local and state governments, but the Federal government as well, are vulnerable to attack by the kings of contraband.

The killings of such important figures in the government's war on drug dealers, has raised suspicions about the death of Mexico's Secretary of the Interior, Francisco Blake Mora who perished in a helicopter crash near Mexico City on November 9. He was the second Interior Secretary in this administration to die in such a crash. Juan Camilo Mouriño died in a similar crash on November 5, 2008. Both accidents have so far been declared to be accidental. The Secretary of the Interior of Mexico is historically the country's number two leader after the president himself, heading up the country's security agencies and handling most high level political questions. As Secretary of the Interior, Blake Mora was the top official responsible for the country's war on the drug cartels and his

death raises suspicions that he was a victim of assassination, despite the government's claim that the death was accidental. The lingering questions—despite the authorities' assurances—indicate the persistence and deeper doubts about the state and its solidity.

II. Economic Crisis Continues; Unemployment, Poverty Grow

While his war on the drug dealers has been a catastrophe, Calderón has also failed, despite a year or two of some modest growth, to get Mexico out of its economic stagnation. The worldwide economic crisis that began in 2008 continues to affect Mexican workers. Mexico, which sells 80 percent of its products to the United States, will continue to experience low economic growth rates as long as U.S. problems continue.

During the last decade, all of it under the conservative National Action Party (PAN), the Mexican economy grew at a rate of just 2 percent. While the Mexican economy grew at a rate of almost 4 percent last year, it is projected to slow to 3.2 percent next year. The Bank of Mexico estimates that it will only add 620,000 formal jobs in 2012, about what it created last year. Mexico needs to create more than one million jobs per year to keep up with the growth in its population, but creates only a little more than half that many, and most of those jobs are in the informal sector where workers do not enjoy the health benefits of the Mexican Institute of Social Security (IMSS).

Precarious Employment and Unemployment

As his six-year term as president comes to an end, Calderón can point to no significant improvements in the economy benefiting Mexico's working people. Mexico's total population is over 112 million, while the total work force of Mexico, called the economically active population, which includes both private sector and government, agricultural, industrial and service workers, is 46.8 million. The Mexican Institute of Statistics (INEGI) reported in

Nov. 2011 that, among non-government workers, the informal sector was growing more rapidly than the formal sector, so that today some 13.4 million Mexicans work in the informal sector while only 13.2 million work in the formal sector. Of those working in the formal sector, 61 percent earn less than \$14 per day. Mexico's unemployment rate rose during the last decade from 2.5 percent in 2000 to 5.6 percent in 2010 and is now hovering around 5.5 percent.

The Mexican government's persistent problem, the inability to provide jobs for its population represents the most serious issue in the society. Traditionally it has been solved by encouraging the mass migration of millions of Mexicans to the United States. The plan of Calderón, the PAN, and the business class to provide jobs through an expanding economy has proven unworkable in the light of the 2008 economic crisis and the subsequent low growth in the United States; nor are jobs available in the United States, another factor severely slowing migration.

Low Wages and Poverty

Mexico is among Latin America's five low-wage nations, together with Guatemala, Honduras, Panama and the Dominican Republic, according to a report of the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA/CEPAL). The ECLA report indicates that 20 percent of Mexico's working people receive a wage below the poverty line. Workers in Mexico, said the same report, lack contracts that guarantee them benefits.

Wages are so low in Mexico in part because of the low minimum wage which sets the standard for employers and for labor union contracts. A recent study by the Wage Observatory of the Iberoamerican University of Puebla reported that since 1976 the minimum wage had fallen to one-quarter of its former purchasing power. The minimum wage would have to be raised from its current 1,700 pesos to 6,500 pesos to recoup the loss over the last three and half decades. Thirteen percent of

all Mexican workers are paid the minimum wage and 22 percent earn two minimum wages.

Poverty in Mexico has grown constantly since the economic crisis, with no significant attempt by President Calderón to resist the trend. Between 2006 and 2010, the number of Mexicans living on 2,100 pesos (US\$150) a month or less jumped from 45.5 million to nearly 58 million, according to CONEVAL, the government agency that measures the impact of development policy. The government changed its definition of poverty in 2008, removing millions from the official count. Still, even using the government's new method, the number of poor rose by more than 3 million to 52 million between 2008 and 2010. That is, about half of all Mexicans now live in poverty.

Economic Inequality

Mexico, historically always one of the most economically and socially unequal societies in Latin America, has become more unequal since 2008, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) of which Mexico is a member. After Chile, it is the most unequal nation in Latin America. While Mexico was more unequal in the 1990s and improved somewhat in the 2000s, since 2008 the country has again moved in the direction of increasing inequality.

While on the one hand its narrowly focused, means-tested poverty programs—Opportunities, Progress and Popular Insurance—have improved the situation of some of the very poor, the continued growth of the informal economy with its precarious and low wage jobs has led to increasing poverty and inequality. Mexico's wealthiest tenth earns 27 times what the bottom 10 percent makes on average, the OECD found. By comparison, in the United States, which also suffers from growing inequalities, the top 10 percent are 14 times better off than the bottom bracket.

Closing the Emigration Safety Valve

Mexico has historically used the exportation of many of its workers to the United States as a way of reducing unemployment and thereby the danger of social upheaval at home. More strict enforcement of U.S. immigration law combined with stepped up immigration authority activity has led to a large increase in deportations under President Barack Obama. While there have been fewer deportations at the border, there have been many more than before from immigrant communities and workplaces in the U.S. In the fiscal year which ended in Sept. 2011, the United States deported 393,000 people, half of whom were considered by the government to be criminals. Deportations have averaged about 400,000 a year since Obama took office. This is roughly 30 percent more than the number of deportations under President George W. Bush. Some 97 percent of deportees were Latino and 73 percent Mexican. Nevertheless, hundreds of thousands of Mexicans attempt to enter the United States without documents each year despite the increasing number of deportations and decreasing number of jobs in U.S.

The United States has, under Obama, closed part way the escape valve that for years has allowed Mexico's economic and political system to survive despite devastating depressions by exporting the unemployed. The rise in the deportation of Mexican immigrants from the United States to their homeland will no doubt contribute to rising social tensions in Mexico where it will be difficult for returnees to find jobs. The further impact in Mexico remains to be seen. Will the anger and desperation of the deported immigrants contribute to a rise in radicalism in Mexico? Or will they come to work for the drug cartels as one of the few paths open to them to earn a living?

Mexico's Capitalist Class

While most Mexicans suffer the effects of the economic crisis, the wealthiest in Mexico have during the Calderón and crisis years taken advantage of the situation to enrich themselves and to expand their power and influence. This includes capitalists, both foreign and domestic, corporations that play

an enormous role in Mexico's economic and political life, as well as in its society.

Foreign capital, despite the drug war violence, continues to invest in Mexico. Foreign direct investment (FDI) plays an enormous role in the Mexican economy, with the United States the biggest investor. Mexico received about US\$16 billion in FDI per year during the last decade, about half of it from the U.S. More than 18,000 U.S. companies have operations in Mexico, including most of the Fortune 500, and the U.S. accounts for nearly \$100 billion of foreign direct investment in Mexico.

U.S. corporations and their role has been growing, and today they are involved in all aspects of Mexico's economy, from banking, to manufacturing, to retail. Citigroup Inc., for example, owns the second largest bank in Mexico, formed out of the purchase of Banamex-Accival in 2001 for US\$12.5 billion. Delphi, the auto parts manufacturer, to take an example from industry, has over 50 plants in Mexico employing approximately 70,000 employees. In retail, Walmart is the leading retail store in Mexico, with 2,000 retail stores and over 100,000 employees. In 2011 it opened almost 450 new stores and 365 warehouses and other facilities.

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has provided the fundamental architecture for American capitalism's domination of North America for the past 17 years. While the NAFTA agreement and the structure it provided continues to function, the rise of China, India and other low wage producers threatens to undermine the agreement and to weaken the North American economic alliance.

Critical of the impact of the agreement on the American economy, labor unions and the general public continue to press for withdrawal from NAFTA. [4]

While the U.S. is the largest foreign investor in Mexico, providing annually about 50 percent of foreign direct investment, European countries' corporations particularly those from Spain and the Netherlands are also big investors, as are Canadian

corporations. [5] Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese and other Asian countries also have significant investments in Mexico, particularly in the maquiladoras. Although foreign capital plays a tremendous role in Mexico, there is also a powerful domestic capitalist class.

Domestic Capital

While Mexico is highly integrated into the U.S. economy and has strong ties with U.S. corporations, there is also a national capitalist class of great wealth and power. The last several decades have seen the concentration of wealth in the hands of an economic oligarchy sometimes referred to as the "100 families." These families at the pinnacle of the economic pyramid own and control the Grupos or holding companies and conglomerates that dominate the nation's economy, or at least that part not controlled by foreign capital.

They are the major powers in banking, mining, commerce, and the media. At the very top stands Carlos Slim, the world's richest man with assets worth \$74 billion, richer than Bill Gates, Warren Buffet or Sam Walton.

MEXICO'S TEN RICHEST MEN, FAMILIES – 2011

Source: <http://www.rich-bastards.com/Countr...>

These wealthy families and their industrial groups dominate the conservative National Action Party (PAN), in part through the Mexican Employers Association (COPARMEX) and other employer organizations, but also through their direct ties to the political class of which some of them are also members. The PAN may be the favored representative of business interests, but those business groups also exert enormous influence over the Institutional Revolution Party (PRI), the former ruling party of Mexico, which since the 1980s has also supported their corporate agenda while making some concessions to the nation's working class and poor people. Their control of the nation's media makes it possible for these families and economic groups to play a central and even decisive role in the nation's elections.

The Petroleum Industry

The largest industry in Mexico is oil. Since the 1910s Mexico produced oil principally for export to the United States. Direct payments and taxes on Mexico's oil income makes up 32 percent of government revenues, keeping taxes on banking, manufacturing, services, retail and agriculture lower than they would be otherwise. Since Standard Oil, Royal Dutch Shell and other privately owned oil companies were nationalized by President Lázaro Cárdenas on March 18, 1938, it has been the pride of the Mexican people and the coveted prize of private capitalists, foreign and domestic.

Over the decades the oil industry has had ups and downs as one oil field was exhausted and another discovered. One of the big ups of the late twentieth century was the discovery of the Cantarell Oil Fields in the Gulf of Campeche in 1976, field which soon produced 2.1 million barrels a day before falling to 600,000 barrels by the mid-2000s. The development more recently of the Ku Maloob Zaap (KMZ), also in the Gulf of Campeche, has made up the difference, now producing 800,000 barrels per day and expected to rise to 1 million by 2015, according to *The Economist*.

According to a recent report by a U.S. think-tank, the James A. Baker III Institute, asserts that Mexican oil production peaked in 2004 at 3.9 million barrels a day, but since 2005 production has declined by 25%. At the same time, domestic use has increased from 500,000 b/d in 1971 to 2.15 b/d in 2010. In 2010 there was still a net export at 842,000 b/d. So, argues the report, within a decade Mexico must become a net importer unless it spend billions to develop new technology. [6]

U.S. oil companies and Mexican politicians in the PAN, and some in the PRI, have used analyses such as that of the Baker Institute to argue for the privatization of the Mexican Petroleum Company (PEMEX) which still dominates the national oil industry. Other sections of the PRI and the PRD, as well as the National Front Against Privatization, led by the Mexican Electrical Workers Union, have argued

against privatization, arguing that Mexico would soon lose control of one of its most valuable natural resources.

If the PAN or the PRI wins the presidential election this year, there will be a continued push from business for the privatization of PEMEX, and even if the PRD should win, the pressures will continue to be enormous. Mexican nationalists argue that defending the national oil company is central to Mexico's sovereignty to keep foreign corporations from taking control, while conservatives like President Calderón argue what they call "energy security," that is that the widening schism between domestic production and domestic consumption will make Mexico dependent upon foreigners for its oil if the industry is not modernized.

The privatization of oil will not come easily, however, because the industry, its income, its unions and workers are so intertwined with the Mexican state, the dominant parties, and the most conservative elements of labor union bureaucracy. Politicians will be loath to give up the income which provides a third of the national budget. The corrupt leadership of the 140,000 member Mexican Petroleum Workers Union (STPRM), headed by Carlos Romero Deschamps, will resist because PEMEX pays the union at least US\$600 million per year under the union contract and millions more in illegal payoffs, with both the legal and illegal payments lining the pockets and serving the interests of the union's officers.

III. The Labor Movement

Mexico's labor movement is still dominated by federations and national unions which comply with the dictates of the Mexican government, particularly those unions in the Congress of Labor and the Confederation of Mexico workers. At the same time, the Mexican government continues to work to prevent the organization of independent labor unions which do not follow the dictates of the state. The government has even gone so far as to attempt to prevent Mexican migrant agricultural workers

who are working in Canada from organizing unions. [7]

The Mexican government's labor authorities continue to permit ghost unions unknown to the workers to negotiate so-called "protection contracts" which protect employers from legitimate unions and from their employees demands for better wages, benefits and conditions. [8] As Mexican attorneys who defend workers' rights have noted, these ghost unions and protection contracts form part of an enormous web of corrupt dealings between government officials, lawyers, and gangster union officials. [9] The government's historic practices of denying workers their rights through government control of union recognition, the labor courts, and political subservience of the unions to the parties was augmented during the Calderón administration by more direct attacks on unions and contracts.

The War On Labor

While Calderón's war on the drug lords has been an abysmal failure, his war on the labor movement has been largely successful. While unions have fought back, their power has been weakened. In one industry after another, the Calderón government has supported corporations and opposed or neglected labor union and worker interests. At the same time, the breakup of the official labor unions, which began in the 1990s, has accelerated under the PAN presidents, breaking up into rival factions at times allied various employer and government interests but with some of them becoming independent.

While the independent National Union of Workers, the militant teachers National Coordinating Committee, and the Authentic Labor Front continue to survive, the state of the independent labor movement in Mexico is more tenuous as we enter 2012 than it was in 2006. Labor unions, human rights organizations, and labor attorneys groups have filed charges with the International Labor Organization over these practices during the Calderón administration. [10]

Grupo Mexico and the Mineros

Throughout his presidency, Calderón has aided Grupo Mexico in attacking the Mineros. After the Mexican Miners and Metal Workers Union (SNT-MMRM) struck Grupo Mexico's Cananea mine in June of 2007, Calderón's government used the courts, the attorney general's office, and the police in an attempt to jail general secretary Napoleón Gómez Urrutia, to destroy the union, and to break the strike. Gómez Urrutia fled to Vancouver, British Columbia to escape prosecution in Mexico, and has been successful in obtaining dismissal of charges filed against him in various venues. Although also successful so far in defeating efforts to deny him recognition, the corporation, backed up by the Mexican government, succeeded in breaking the union at Cananea.

The three-year strike eventually cost Grupo Mexico \$3.5 billion in revenues, but now the mine, renamed Buena Vista del Cobre, is back in operation without the independent and militant miners union. Still, under Gómez Urrutia's leadership, the Mineros have been able to keep their grip on other mines and mills, winning higher wages and increased benefits for their members. They have also collaborated with NGO's in several successful campaigns to expand the union's membership in other areas.

Light and Power and SME

A similar but more devastating attack was launched by Calderón against the Mexican Electrical Workers Union (SME). The independent SME played a crucial role at the center of an alliance of unions fighting privatization and opposed to Calderón's party and its policies. In October 2009, he sent police and soldiers to occupy the facilities of the Light and Power Company of Central Mexico, driving out the electrical workers. At the same time, he liquidated the company and turned over its operations to the Federal Electrical Commission (CFE) whose workers are represented by a different electrical workers union (SUTERM) loyal to the government.

Most of the 45,000 workers who lost their jobs accepted their severance pay and went off to search for other jobs, but some 16,599 remained committed to defending their union and fighting for their jobs. For two years the SME has conducted a multifaceted struggle involving direct action, parliamentary proposals, and appeals to the courts. The Calderón administration has proposed on several occasions that it was prepared to resolve the problem by providing jobs to the fired workers through the establishment of small businesses that would operate as sub-contractors, but such a solution has been soundly rejected by the union and its members. While the SME fights on with incredible tenacity and militancy, it remains to be seen whether the election year will bring with it a resolution.

Mexicana Airlines

The bankruptcy of Mexicana Airlines in the summer of 2010, resulting in the layoff of the entire workforce of more than 6,000 workers, represents another casualty of the PAN's labor policies. When wealth investors decided to reorganize the airlines without taking workers into consideration, the government simply permitted them to do so. In its own way, this constitutes another attack on the Mexican labor movement comparable to the attack on the Mineros of Cananea and the closing of the Light and Power Company of Central Mexico.

While Mexicana workers have received less publicity, the Mexican ground workers, pilots and flight attendants have continued to fight for their jobs, though the Calderón government ignores them. International labor organizations continue to show solidarity, but the situation is grim. Since Volaris Airlines, operating in conjunction with Southwest Airlines, has taken up many of its routes, the re-opening of Mexicana and the rehiring of these workers does not at this time appear to be likely. Unless some investor comes forward before February 10 to save Mexicana, a judge will declare the company bankrupt and dissolve it.

The Telephone Workers

Workers at Atento faced violence and fraud at an election in July, 2010. After winning the right to a new election, the Labor Board in Mexico City scheduled an election for October 31, 2011. The election was suspended shortly after its scheduled start time. At 2pm on November 7th, the parties were informed that the vote would be held again on November 9th, 2011 at 4:00 pm. A team of 13 national and international observers representing 6 organizations placed monitors inside and outside the Labor Board in Mexico City and at Atento Services in Dinamarca, Puebla and Sevilla. They subsequently issued a report concluding that once again workers were deprived of a fair election. Nonetheless, in November the labor authorities found that the election was legal and the Telephone Workers Union (STRM) has appealed. The union also filed a complaint with the ILO in December, 2011.

Maquiladora Workers

The Mexican maquiladora sector, plants that mostly assemble parts for export in a variety of industries such as auto parts, electronics, hospital equipment and supplies and others, employed 1.3 million workers working the legal 48 hours per week or more, many at the minimum wage of US\$3.50, though some more skilled workers may receive two, three or four times that amount per day. [11] Most maquiladoras are owned by U.S., Asian and European corporations whose maquiladoras produce for production chains that stretch across the world.

Foreign corporations have established maquiladoras in Mexico both to take advantage of low wages and proximity to the U.S. market. Wages are kept low because of tacit understandings between to the Mexican government, foreign governments, and the corporations that genuine labor unions will not be permitted to organize and establish themselves in the maquiladora sector, a secret promise which has been kept since the zone was established in 1964.

Under President Calderón, the Mexican government and the corporations have continued to en-

force the understanding that the maquiladoras will remain union free through the time honored methods of intimidating and coercing workers.

In Puebla, the attack on women organizers has been a particularly egregious. In addition to the death threats against Blanca Velasquez and attack on the office of the CAT, members of the Colectivo Obreras Insumisas (Defiant Women Workers Collective) who advised workers at a jeans plant in Puebla about their rights, were threatened with death if they continued their work.

While from time to time there are small successes, such as that of workers at a Levi Strauss supplier in Aguascalientes who succeeded in getting access to the collective bargaining agreement for workers, there are still virtually no independent unions in the hundreds of maquiladora plants along the border or in other parts of Mexico. [12]

The Independent Union Movement

Throughout Mexico, from time to time independent unions appear which attempt to organize and win legal recognition, despite the many obstacles placed in their paths by the Mexican government. For example, some 30,000 technical and professional employees of PEMEX, have struggled for several years to organize and obtain recognition for their independent union. Their third attempt was successful, and on December 19, 2009 a federal court forced the government to recognize the union and its officers.

PEMEX has continued to resist real negotiations, deferring to the official union, STPRM. (This despite the fact that a decision by the Mexican Supreme Court several years ago held that more than one union could represent workers in the same bargaining unit, putting an end, at least in theory, to the stranglehold of the official unions over public sector workers. [13].)

During the past year, Francisco Ríos Piñeyro, Secretary of Organization was moved from his workplace to a part of the country where there is a high level of violence and where he is forced to

work in isolation; Moisés Flores Salmerón was fired within days of his election as General Secretary of Local 1 in Veracruz; and Silvia Ramos Luna, who was reinstated as the result of lengthy legal proceedings was fired a second time on March 28, 2011.

However, the membership of UNTyPP is growing despite PEMEX' failure to recognize and deal with the union, turn over dues, and its threats to discharge workers who affiliate with the union.

Frente Auténtico del Trabajo (FAT)

Over the past year the FAT has continued its active participation and to contribute leadership within various coalitions, including the new Trinational Solidarity Alliance, the Union Nacional de Trabajadores (UNT) and the broader coalition, the Frente Sindical Campesino Indígena Popular y Social.

It was also successful in obtaining recognition from the auto-parts manufacturer, DMI where it had won an election the previous October. Another significant struggle last year involves another transnational SANDAK, where some 100 workers continue to fight against the violation of their contract and closure of their plant. With the assistance of the FAT, they won an important legal victory rejecting the employer's claim that they could not engage in a legal strike where the employer had previously shut the plant, as the closure had violated the union's collective bargaining agreement. Although the employer has challenged the ruling, the workers remain on strike, determined to keep their jobs.

The FAT also continues to maintain close relationship with various unions on an international level and during the past year the General Secretary of its most important private sector local spent three months in New Bedford in a collaborative project between the Northeast Region of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE), UEREF, the New Bedford Community Economic Development Corporation (CEDC) of Southeastern Mass (CEDC), and the Frente Auténtico del Trabajo (FAT).

The Teachers Union

Elba Esther Gordillo, the leader since the mid-1980s of the Mexican Teachers Union (el SNTE), the largest union in the country, and one of the top leaders of the PRI, left that party in the mid-2000s to support Felipe Calderón's administration. She negotiated an agreement, the Alliance for Quality Education (ACE), with the President and his Secretary of Education. This accord introduced many U.S.-style reforms in the union, including the testing of teachers. Throughout Calderón's administration, because of its loyalty to the government, the Teachers Union survived and its bureaucracy prospered. Gordillo, who had also formed an independent political party, PANAL, based on the Teachers Union, has now broken with Calderón and established an alliance with her former party, the PRI.

Throughout her tenure as head of the Teachers Union and throughout the tenure of Calderón, the National Coordinating Committee of the Mexican Teachers Union (la CNTE) and other opposition groups in the union, have battled against Gordillo, Calderón and the ACE program.

The dissident teachers, as they have since the mid-1970s, have organized massive demonstrations, strikes, and militant protests such as highway blockades and the seizure of government buildings principally in the southeastern, central and western states of Mexico, including Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Michoacán. The continued militancy of the independent teachers movement represents one of the great bastions of workers' power in Mexico, still unbroken in spirit.

IV. Labor and Politics

The Mexican Employers Association (COPARMEX) has been pushing since the 1980s for a labor law reform bill that would benefit employers and weaken Mexico's unions. On March 18 2010, the PAN began a new chapter in this long controversy by introducing a proposal. The following March, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) presented a

similar proposal and sought to have approved through a "Fast Track" process. Both pieces of legislation would have limited freedom of association, collective bargaining and the right to strike, eliminated the present strong protections on job security by permitting sub-contracting and temporary employment, replaced wages and benefits base on seniority with a merit-based system and undercut various other labor protections, and place a limit of six months on back pay in cases of improper dismissal, despite the fact that legal proceedings often take far more time.

In addition, a new national security proposal would have given both the president and a new security council composed of the Secretaries of Defense, Marines, Public Security, Gobernación (the interior), the PGR (chief prosecutor for the republic), and CISN (secret police) the power to order the intervention of the armed forces in situations that, in their judgment, could endanger the internal security of the country. Although the government attempts to justify this legislation as necessary to deal with drug trafficking, it explicitly covers actions by the labor movement or civil society.

In April, tens of thousands of Mexican workers demonstrated for weeks against this attempt to destroy union rights. The Mexican Congress bowed to the marches and rallies, the educational campaigns and lobbying, the support from coalitions such as a human rights network and a pro-democracy lawyers' group, as well as from the Tri-National Solidarity Alliance, and announced it would hold public hearings on the "reform," effectively postponing any action until the fall.

Although no further attempts were made to introduce legislation, in November the labor board in Mexico City issued new regulations that would have accomplished many of the same objectives. Again, major mobilizations ensued and the new regulations were enjoined, at least temporarily, through an injunction proceeding. Meanwhile, as we go to press, the possibility that labor law reform will again be introduced in the Mexican Congress' House of Deputies is once again in the news.

International Labor Solidarity

As Mexico's unions came under intense attack from the Calderón administration there has been an increased level of international support, particularly from Canada and the United States, but also from international labor organizations.

The Tri-National Solidarity Alliance (TNSA) provided a mechanism for communication and solidarity throughout the year. In its most ambitious effort, it responded to the call for a week of action issued by four Global Union Federations. In February, more than 50,000 trade unionists and their community allies around the world took action for change in Mexico during the Global Days of Action.

In the US there were demonstrations or delegations in at least 13 cities (Austin, Boston, Chicago, Denver, Detroit, Kansas City, New Orleans, New York, Portland, Raleigh, San Francisco, Tucson, Washington DC), in four cities in Canada (Toronto, Ottawa, Vancouver and Montreal), and in Mexico there were 27 different actions following the massive demonstration on January 31st. In all, workers and their community allies in 40 countries on five continents strongly denounced the attack on independent trade unions in Mexico.

As part of the tri-national effort to raise awareness, TNSA unions organized several tours of prominent national leaders of Mexican unions. In late March, Carlos Esquer traveled to New York where he participated in the Left Forum, at a program hosted by LCLAA at SEIU, and spoke at two law schools. He continued on to New Orleans where he spoke at the UALE conference.

In April, Pipino Cuevas Velázquez, a national leader of SME, joined unions and their allies in Pittsburgh for events related to the April 4 "We are One" national day of action. In addition to providing a greeting during the demonstration, he spoke at an event at the USW headquarters and an evening event at the University of Pittsburgh where he was joined by local leaders of public sector unions from around the US and union leaders and students

from Pittsburgh who are fighting against cuts and the attack on fundamental labor rights. In late April, speakers for TNSA led off the testimony before the International Tribunal on Freedom of Association in Mexico City.

In a more recent example of the growing international labor solidarity in North America organized by TNSA unions, a complaint was filed in Ottawa on October 27 of last year by more than eighty organizations in the U.S. and Canada on behalf of the Mexican Electrical Workers Union (SME). The complaint submitted to the Canadian government charged Mexico with violating the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). It focused on the firing of 44,000 electrical workers in 2009 and the subsequent harassment and intimidation of union members who continued to fight for their rights. A similar complaint was filed with the U.S. government by 96 organizations, making it the first labor NAFTA labor complaint submitted under the Obama Administration. The USW spearheaded the filing in Canada and the AFL-CIO led the effort in the US with support from a legal clinic at Yale University. In both cases, union leaders from Mexico participated in the filings and unions in the US and Canada arranged various meetings and speaking engagements.

Also this year, the AFL-CIO awarded Napoleón Gómez Urrutia, General Secretary of the Mineros the 2011 George Meany-Lane Kirkland Human Rights Award during a ceremony Wednesday, November 16, at the AFL-CIO headquarters in Washington, DC. AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka was joined by President Leo Gerard of the United Steel Workers in recognizing Gómez's efforts to fight against repression and support democracy and equality in Mexico. Both the AFL-CIO and the USW have supported Gómez Urrutia since before he fled to Canada in 2006 to avoid dubious charges against him brought by the Mexican government.

The United Electrical Workers Union (UE), a pioneer in international solidarity with Mexican unions, has continued to build upon its fifteen-year

old strategic partnership with the Authentic Labor Front (FAT), an independent labor federation in Mexico.

The International Metalworkers Federation (IMF) has also played an increasingly large role in labor solidarity with Mexico as it provided critical leadership and support to the days of action in February, supported organizing work, carried out investigations, issued reports and filed protests against the Mexican government for its labor policies.

International support sometimes involves financial assistance, but more frequently means organizational collaboration in bringing cases before the National Administrative Office (NAO) of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), before the International Labor Organization (ILO), and before other international bodies such as the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

Social Movements

Throughout Calderón's administration there has been a growing wave of protests against the drug war policy and against the human rights violations of the military. Despite death threats and actual murders, human rights activists have created many local organizations both in the states and cities along the border where the violence and killing has been greatest, but also in the interior of the country. Women's organizations have continued to speak out against femicide, murder of large numbers of women, particularly in Ciudad Juárez but also in other cities. But those who speak out often face repression. For example, Norma Esther Andrade, a human rights defender in Chihuahua State on the U.S.-Mexico border, was shot and wounded on Dec. 2.

Mexico, inspired by the Egyptians in Tahrir Square, the Indignados, in Spain and Occupy in the United States had a number of small occupations in cities from Tijuana on the northern border to Mexico City, though the movement did not catch on as in the United States.

Edur Velasco Arregui, the passionate, romantic and militant professor of economics and former head of the Independent Union of Workers of the Autonomous Metropolitan University (SITUAM), carried out a 42-day hunger strike for higher education on November 21. Velasco had begun the strike on October 11 to demand an increase in the budget for the university and higher salaries for university professors. Velasco's hunger strike received support not only from hundreds of students at the university, about a hundred of whom occupied the rector's office on November 9 for several hours, but also from other unions in Mexico and other academics' unions in Latin America. SITUAM called the strike "a great victory" because of its impact on the legislature which raised the budget for the public universities and salaries for professors, though, said the union, "there is still a long way to go."

The most important new movement in Mexico is the Movement for Peace, Justice, and Dignity led by the poet Javier Sicilia whose son was killed by drug dealers. Over the last year Sicilia has criticized and challenged the Calderón administration. Traveling throughout the country, he has spoken out against the government's drug war policy and the rights violations, but he has also spoken out more generally against injustice in Mexico. After meeting with the Zapatistas, the group that led the Chiapas Rebellion of 1994, Sicilia expressed his support for their movement. Sicilia has become the national spokesperson for morality and decency in Mexico with broad support across the political spectrum.

Political Parties and the Coming Election

The national presidential, congressional and state elections to be held in Mexico in the summer of 2012 will provide an opportunity for the Mexican people to decide whether to continue to support governments which encourage the neoliberal economic model with its corporate domination and ruthless capitalism, or whether to turn in the direction of a more social democratic or Keynesian economic model that would regulate the economy,

provide economic stimulus through infrastructure construction and social welfare programs, and seek to narrow the divide between the country's rich and poor. Based on their programs and their practice one could characterize three positions in the coming election:

- The National Action Party (PAN), the current ruling party (2000-2012), offers the prospect of a continued neoliberal economic program serving foreign and domestic capital.
- The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the former ruling party (1929-2000), will be at the center of the Commitment to Mexico coalition made up of the PRI, the Mexican Green Party (PVEM), and the New Alliance Party (PANAL). The PRI's coalition also offers the prospect of a fundamentally pro-business program, but tempered by social programs which serve to strengthen its patronage machine.
- The Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) stands at the center of the Progressive Movement, made up of the parties of the left—the PRD, the Workers Party (PT), the Citizens Movement (MC, formerly Convergence), and the Movement for National Renovation (Morena). The Progressive Movement's social democratic and populist program calls for restraining the corporations while improving the situation of the working class majority.

Interestingly, both the PRI and the PRD are members of the Socialist International which brings together the worlds labor, socialist and social democratic parties. These are parties, mostly based in Europe, which have over the last three decades adopted the neoliberal program and seek to administer capitalism rather than to change it. Not all socialist parties subscribe to such a conservative economic and political program. Neither the PRI nor the PRD call for making Mexico a socialist country.

The Parties, Coalitions, and Candidates

The Mexican Constitution does not permit Calderón, as the sitting president, to run for the

presidency again. The National Action Party (PAN) of President Felipe Calderón has not yet chosen its candidate from among three leading contenders. Some polls put former Secretary of Education Josefina Vásquez Mota in the lead for the nomination. If she were to win, she would be the PAN's first woman candidate. Other parties have nominated women, although no woman has ever served as Mexico's president.

The other two contenders for the PAN nomination are Santiago Creel, former Secretary of the Interior, and Ernesto Cordero, former Treasury Secretary. All are archly conservative. Vásquez Mota recently raised the idea of putting PEMEX on the stock exchange; that she raised this in her campaign is surprising since the idea of privatizing PEMEX has been a third rail of Mexican politics.

The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) which ruled Mexico for 70 years until its defeat in 2000, has nominated Enrique Peña Nieto. He will be the standard-bearer of the Commitment to Mexico (Compromiso por Mexico) coalition formed by the PRI, the Mexican Green Party (PVEM), and the New Alliance Party (PANAL). PANAL was created by the Mexican Teachers Union led by Elba Esther Gordillo, who, as we have mentioned, was formerly allied with the conservative National Action Party (PAN) and before that a top leader of the PRI.

The candidate of the left parties will be Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the former Mayor of Mexico City who, many believe, actually won the 2006 election but that it was stolen through fraud. Calderón claimed victory by a margin of 0.58% of the votes cast. López Obrador became the candidate as a result of a survey of potential left voters that found that he would be a better candidate than Marcelo Ebrard, the current mayor of Mexico City, who was also a strong contender. Ebrard accepted the results of the poll and lined up behind López Obrador.

López Obrador spent the last six years building his own organization outside the political parties, and it emerged this year as the National Movement of

Renovation (MORENA). He oversaw the founding of his new party, Morena, on October 2. Some 10,000 Morena supporters filled the National Auditorium to join in the establishment of the new left political association. Under Mexican law a political organization is not quite a party, but no one doubted that this was in fact the new political party of López Obrador, the charismatic populist whose followers number in the millions.

López Obrador's Program

In his most recent political proclamation delivered on December 11, 2011, López Obrador, referring to the indigenous communities of Oaxaca and to the workers of the Russian Christian communitarian Leo Tolstoy, called upon the Mexican people to reestablish the nation as a "loving republic." The candidate wrote, "When we speak of a loving republic, with a social dimension and spiritual grandeur, we are proposing to regenerate the public life of Mexico through a new way of doing politics, applying a prudent harmony between three central ideas: honesty, justice and love. Honesty and justice to improve living conditions and achieve social peace and love to promote the good and achieve happiness." [14]

López Obrador's call for a "loving republic" allows him to capitalize on the moral campaigns against corruption, violence and exploitation being carried out by Javier Sicilia and the Mexican indignados, while avoid a specific program of social reform. At the same time that he calls for this moral crusade, López Obrador has made at least a gesture toward the right, reaching out to the Mexican business class, for example, inviting a Monterrey businessman to be a major speaker at the Morena founding convention.

The three rival parties each have their own political strengths. The PAN will benefit from the support of Mexico corporate media, TV Azteca and Televisa which generally lean toward the conservatives. While it will also benefit from the corporate media, the PRI's strength is in its state and municipal political organizations with their long history of rule

by patronage and the use of the tactic of fear and favors. The left's strength is the strength of its charismatic candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador and populist appeal, his ability to mobilize enormous mass meetings and marches. In the last election the corporate media lambasted him as a dangerous figure who would bring social conflict and violence to Mexico.

As noted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies in late October, López Obrador has taken more moderate positions in recent months. CSIS noted "an apparent change in AMLO's tone in public statements. In recent speeches he has adopted a more conciliatory line to investors and the rich, as well as using the language of social harmony rather than conflict." This is part of an attempt by López Obrador to both neutralize the hostility of Mexico's business class and the corporate media and to make it possible for the U.S. State Department to accept his victory should he win. [15]

The Far Left and the Elections

The far left and labor left gathered in August of 2011 to hold the founding convention of the Political Organization of the People and the Workers (OPT). The announcement of the plan to create the party came some weeks before at a gathering of 50,000 who had come out some weeks before to support the Mexican Electrical Workers Union (SME) which had been so violently attacked by Calderón. Some 1,100 people, 300 from the electrical workers union participated in the convention. They came from labor unions, peasant and community organizations, and small political parties of the revolutionary left. The OPT has decided to support the campaign of López Obrador and Morena, but as an independent organization with its own political program.

While López Obrador's coalition, nationalist and populist in tone and social democratic in content, calls for a regulated economy, the OPT goes further. The OPT program declares: "The principal objective of our political organization is to fight for

national liberation and socialism, i.e., social and human emancipation. We struggle to regain control of the productive forces of the country and the historic character of its people, to lay the foundations of a society without exploitation where the means of production which are now in the hands of the bourgeoisie will be transformed into social property. This is an objective which begins to become a reality in the struggle to build a new society based on justice, democracy, freedom and full economic and political independence." [16]

The Zapatistas

The Zapatistas who led the January 1, 1994 uprising in Chiapas remain a force in their redoubt in the mountains and jungles of Mexico's southernmost state bordering Guatemala. During the last presidential election in 2006 the Zapatistas heaped criticism on all three major parties (PAN, PRI, and PRD) and on their candidates, and especially on the PRD's candidate López Obrador.

They chose, rather than participating in the electoral process which they view as utterly fraudulent and corrupting, to launch what they called the "Other Campaign," a national tour by Subcomandante Marcos and other Zapatista leaders speaking out against capitalism and call for a revolution to overturn the existing system.

While the Zapatistas' other campaign got a hearing from thousands of Mexicans in mostly modest-sized meetings around the country, it was overshadowed by the national election and the actual candidates on the ballot. When at the end of the campaign, López Obrador and his supporters called for demonstrations against what they and many other Mexicans saw as the illegal and fraudulent character of the elections, the Zapatistas themselves refused to join in those protests against election fraud. Participants in the Other Campaign, however, joined the demonstrations. The Other Campaign broke apart and the Zapatistas were widely criticized on the left for what was seen as their sectarian behavior. So far, the Zapatistas have made no proposal for the elections this year.

Conclusion

The year 2012 will bring the end of Felipe Calderón's six-year term, a period of violence and social disintegration. The government's war against the drug cartels has failed to suppress their trade or to definitively break up their organizations. The government's attacks on labor unions have weakened the labor movement, although they continue to fight back. Unions won some important victories, blocking both new labor law reform proposals and new regulations from the Mexico City labor board. They have also gained new allies in the form of new social movements against the government's failed drug war policy. The work of the Tri-National Solidarity Alliance this year also represents a welcome expansion and deepening of international relationships, with its impressive demonstration of support for independent unions and freedom of association during the Days of Action last February and its continuing pressure on the Mexican government through cases in international fora.

The government and its institutions have, in the last six years, been largely discredited as it became clear that the political parties, the army and the police have all been corrupted by drug money. The Mexican state has been largely delegitimized, yet so far no other force has emerged that has the overwhelming confidence of the majority of the popula-

tion. It appears, at the moment, that the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) will be the strongest force going into the election, opposed on the right by the weakened PAN and on the left by a reviving alliance of the PRD, PT, Citizens Movement, and Morena. Andrés Manuel López Obrador, speaking now in rhapsodic language about the "loving republic" will attempt to hold his leftist coalition together, while gathering support from the middle and fending off attacks from the corporate media. The U.S. government will lend its support to whoever it feels can do the best of defending its long term economic interests in North America, most likely the PRI's Peña Nieto.

Whether or not the election opens up a path to a new future for Mexico depends principally upon its working people and whether or not they are prepared to not only turn their back on the PAN—which most of them have already done—but also to resist the temptation to turn back to the past and the PRI. However, even if they support López Obrador and the left coalition, it will only prove to be an advance if they do so for their own reasons and with a willingness to use their own power to make Mexico a more democratic and just society.

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