

International VIEWPOINT

International Viewpoint—magazine of the Fourth International

IV433 February 2011

ALGERIA

Youth revolt shakes authoritarian order

EGYPT

Whither Egypt?

Climate
Fourth International
Pakistan
Indonesia
Palestine
Puerto Rico
Europe
Algeria

World Social Forum/
Dakar
Egypt/Pakistan
China
Ireland
Egypt
Greece

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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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CLIMATE

Climate chaos and the global ecological crisis

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL ·

Since the World Congress of the Fourth International in February 2010, the consequences of climate chaos have become even more obvious.

The worst floods in history in Pakistan, an intense heat wave and burning forests in Russia, chaos in Australia, floods in Sri Lanka, heavy rains and mud flows in Brazil... the summer of 2010 witnessed a record number of disasters caused by human made climate change or rather by the capitalist mode of production. What is more, the victims of those disasters are mainly the poor, women and indigenous people as in Pakistan, Brazil, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka,... and more largely in the countries of the South.

The enormous oil spill in the Mexican gulf, caused by the greed of BP, new plans for exploiting shale gas in the never stopping race for fossil fuels and profits, clearly show that we are facing a growing ecological crisis. The ongoing struggle by the Ecuadorian people to keep the oil resources in the soil and thus to defend the integrity of the Yasuni territory, protecting its biodiversity, indicates the only way to a real solution.

We are faced with the reappearance of the food crisis which erupted in 2007-2008. This has led to a new increase in food prices and financial speculation on raw materials. This is one of the many causes of the explosion of the revolts and revolutionary process in the Arab world.

We support the struggles of peasant movements and rural communities against agribusiness and GMO's, in defence of local seeds and agro-ecological farming. We also support movements involved in local food production and distribution, including

food production in urban 'food deserts' in the poor districts of cities in rich countries.

In 2009, greenhouse gas emissions amounted to a total of a little more the 48 billion tons. In order to keep global warming beneath the dangerous threshold of a 2°C rise, the peak of emissions must be reached in 2015 and emissions should diminish to 40-44 billion tons before 2020.

The climate plans of the developing countries are in line with the IPCC proposals but this is not the case for the rich developed countries! Japan, Russia, Canada are opposed to any extension of the Kyoto protocol beyond 2012. The USA, which is the largest emitter of greenhouse gases per capita, and whose emissions increased by 30% between 1990 and 2005, have not adopted any plan for reductions. The "energy package" of the European Union is totally insufficient and continues to rely on market mechanisms, the promotion of agrofuels and nuclear energy, and the privatisation of tropical forests.

After the Cancún summit, climate negotiations will resume in Durban (COP17) at the end of 2011, followed by the RIO +20 summit in 2012. The agreement concluded between the USA and the large emerging countries during the Copenhagen summit, (an agreement supported by the European Union) means that global climate negotiations are now conducted jointly by the USA and China. The so called "green fund" promises financial support for the investment in green technologies in the developing countries; this money will be managed by the World Bank and will partly consist of loans.

Against the logic of speculation, privatisation and commodification of food, we must counterpose another logic, namely the defence of food sovereignty, regaining control over agricultural and food poli-

cies, keeping access to natural resources (water, seeds, land) and fighting against the multinationals and the international institutions as well as the governments who are their accomplices.

The mobilisations of Copenhagen, the alternative summit at Cochabamba and the actions during the Cancún conference have shown that radical mobilisations against the capitalist answer to the climate crisis are possible.

The urgency to build worldwide social mobilisations against the ongoing destruction of the climate and against capitalist productivism with its insatiable hunger for fossil fuels, is obvious.

The members of the Fourth International will continue to work towards the building of a unitary mass campaign ,together with the activists and the social movements, in the framework of the Climate and Social Justice campaign. This in the perspective of the organisation of counter summits during the Durban (COP17) negotiations and at the summit of Rio 20+.

Only an ecosocialist and anticapitalist alternative constitute a real answer to this global crisis.

Amsterdam

23rd February 2011

[Available in Portuguese here.](#)

Tunisia, Egypt: a revolutionary process of world scope

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL ·

1. The extraordinary victory of the Egyptian people against Mubarak steps up the historical range of the Tunisian revolution that cut down the Ben Ali regime. In just a few days, the shock wave of these popular victories extended to the entire Arab region and beyond that, influencing the class struggle across the world. Demonstrations, strikes, assemblies, self-defence committees, mobilizations of trade unions, high-school pupils, democratic associations clashed with absolute determination against state apparatuses, most particularly the police. Millions of Tunisians and Egyptians came into activity to bring down the dictators, and continue to mobilize to keep control of their revolutions.

2. This is a process of permanent revolution, which combines social, democratic, national sovereignty dimensions, and is spreading internationally. The effects of the world economic crisis, combined with savage oppression and the shameless corruption of the dictatorships, brought together the most disadvantaged popular layers, the organized working class and the middle classes, young people and old, women and men. The Tunisian and Egyptian masses could no longer accept economic systems that marginalized them. As in many neighbouring countries, integration with capitalist globalization led to economic growth that did not create employment but rather an unprecedented concentration of wealth, an unequal development of the country and a general degradation of living and working conditions.

One of the main reasons for these revolutions has been the explosion of food prices in the last few years. The rapid process of climate change has led to the current world food crisis, particularly in countries like Tunisia. The economic liberalization imposed by the IMF, WTO and the EU has led to increased casualization of workers, drastic cuts in public services and mass unemployment particularly hitting young graduates. With the additional closing of the borders of the European Union to the possibilities of emigration, and the contraction of the labour market in the Gulf States, any prospect of escaping poverty has disappeared.

At the same time there was a drastic smothering of freedoms and democratic rights by police states which imposed generalized social control. The fact that the parliamentary representatives of the "opposition" parties were tolerated by the Tunisian and Egyptian dictatorships only as phantoms while civil associations were reduced to shells or prevented from functioning led to an impossibility of countervailing powers. This created a situation where, between the dictatorships and the populations, there was only the figure of an autocratic leader and a devoted and savage repressive apparatus. And the gangster-style functioning of the clans in power completed their delegitimization.

Lastly, these two regimes were characterized by their collaboration with the Zionist Israeli state, which exasperated their populations, who identify with the sufferings of the Palestinian people, even more.

Faced with all these injustices, strikes and social explosions had multiplied in recent years, allowing an accumulation of experience without however managing to break down the wall of fear for the

majority of the populations. This wall was submerged in a few weeks, and in spite of the very many victims, the Tunisian people, then with their example in mind the Egyptian people, carried out an uninterrupted fight until the departure of the dictators Ben Ali and Mubarak.

3. With these victories, the people of the Arab area show their immense dignity, through their irruption onto the political scene of democracy and class struggle, no longer locked in the deathly alternative (or combination) of autocracies or Islamism in which they had been trapped for thirty years. The popular classes and, in first place, the working class of this region have won the means of asserting all democratic freedoms, women to assert their rights and equality with men. The workers have won the means of fighting back on a much higher level against the neoliberal programmes of overexploitation, and to profoundly destabilize the means by which both American and European imperialist maintain their hold on the region, articulated in the State of Israel. The Israeli regime, and all currents within it, made no mistake when it demanded Western support for the dictators up to the very end.

The revolutions in the Arab region show the potential for social emancipation of all mass struggles against injustice. The active role of women in these mobilizations is an unmistakable sign. It makes it possible to combat the racist and Islamophobic campaigns on the so-called "clash of civilizations" that try to make us believe that the mobilization of Arabic-Muslim peoples paves the way to fundamentalism.

This dynamic will have effects in the whole world. It has already immediately in Jordan, with Yemen, with Bahrain, in Syria, in Libya, in Algeria, with Morocco and in Mauritania, even if one cannot foretell the exact rhythm and in which order the regimes will fall, given that each struggle has its own specificities. Especially in Libya where the regime has attacked the population with military jets and helicopters and already killed more than

500 people there is a rapid escalation of the situation, which demands our full solidarity.

These revolutions create new more favourable conditions for the struggle of the Palestinians, a struggle that the Fourth International encourages and supports. The Egyptian revolution puts concretely onto the agenda an end to that crime against humanity known as the blockade of Gaza. Faced with this, the response of the Zionist state could become harsher and more brutal. Mobilizations to stop this should be stepped up.

The dynamic of these revolutions encourages also the fights against the dictatorships in Iran and as far as China, where the oppositions take as a starting point methods of coordination used in Tunisia and Egypt, like the use of social networks. It will inevitably encourage the mobilizations of migrant communities from the Arab region, who are overexploited and oppressed in the advanced capitalist countries. More than ever we have to stand shoulder to shoulder with these populations.

But these processes could have still more global consequences in the same imperialist countries where the workers and the young people clash more and more massively with austerity plans, without finding the way of success: they show that a revolution from the bottom up is possible in the 21st century, that it can cut down an apparently impregnable political regime and win conquests that appeared inaccessible as recently as yesterday!

4. The gains of these processes are certainly fragile in both Tunisia and Egypt, but essential for what follows. Being based on recent popular experiences, and the longstanding implantation of the radical left in the trade unions, self-organization developed massively when it was necessary for demonstrators and the inhabitants of popular districts to protect themselves from police exactions and the regimes' militias, in Tunisia de Sidi Bouzid to the popular quarters of the big cities and the Kasbah in Tunis; in Egypt from Tahrir Square in Cairo to the popular districts of Suez, Mansourah or Alexandria. Unimaginable scenes a few days before, Muslims

and Copts mutually protected their prayers; blue-collar workers and young Net surfers, women and clerics, writers and taxi drivers stood side by side at the points attacked by the henchmen of Mubarak. The people succeeded in destabilizing the army while systematically trying to fraternize with the soldiers.

The dictators fled, the leaderships of the parties in power were forced out under the pressure of the mobilizations, and the popular mobilizations continue. In Tunisia, the most corrupt leaders are being prosecuted, the funds and the goods of the RCD have been seized, and its buildings have become peoples' houses. Most political prisoners have been released. Though they have not been dismantled, the police apparatuses of the two countries are disorganized. The ministry employees are starting to exert control on their leaders, like those in the Tunisian Ministry for Foreign Affairs who forced the resignation of their minister who had praised the French Foreign Minister Alliot-Marie. Many Tunisian governors, mayors and public officials have had to resign. The Tunisian masses are even demanding the departure of the newly-arrived French ambassador after his antagonistic statement! Many temporary employees in the civil service have been given permanent posts; the capital of the most corrupted enterprise leaders of Tunisia has been nationalized. In Egypt, these processes are also underway. Civil servants have obtained pay rises of 15%; many workers' strikes are developing in spite of the threats of the new regime.

5. Of course, the dominant classes did not remain inert and will be increasingly active faced with the revolutionary processes. In Tunisia, the "neutrality" of the army and the departure of Ben Ali were counterbalanced by the maintenance in power of his Prime Minister Ghannouchi and many leaders of the RCD, which was to be legitimated by the arrival in the government of several opposition parties and major trade union UGTT. The refusal of this and the popular mobilization imposed a second government where only the Prime Minister remains among the executives of the RCD. But the

new regimes is advised by executives of French imperialism, and it is putting all its energy to convincing, alongside the Tunisian capitalists and the army, the workers to resume work "like before". It would be a question of closing a parenthesis... while simply announcing general elections in 6 months.

In Egypt, it is the army that is directly ensuring the "transition", with the menacing Suleiman as Minister of the Interior, a proven torturer, friend of Israel and agent of the CIA of public notoriety. There too, the people are called upon to be reasonable, to allow the continuation of tourism and foreign investments, with the promise of elections in a few months... and threats of a resumption of repression.

The Sarkozy and Berlusconi governments, which did not see what was coming and made matters worse in their support to the bitter end for Ben Ali, are at the forefront of the European Union in now requesting the revival of business and a return to police blockings of migrants. The Obama administration is much more flexible: not having foreseen controlled the movement in Egypt, it pretends to overlap with it. But its close links with the army command weighs as a permanent threat on the Egyptian revolutionary process, and will require keeping the Palestinian border in Gaza closed. Above all the international institutions will demand guarantees concerning the traffic in the Suez canal and respect of the fundamentals of modern capitalism: payment of the national debt, however iniquitous; respect of total opening to foreign capital and products, continuing deregulation.

6. In this process, the whole system has to be eradicated in order to establish all democratic rights and freedoms: right to free speech, right to strike, right to demonstrate, pluralism of associations, trade unions and parties, liquidation of the presidential institution and introduction of a revolutionary provisional government. Today the opening of a process of free elections for a constituent assembly is necessary.

In order for this not to be halted by a new regime of the oligarchies, this process must be based on the organization of the popular committees, coordinations and councils that emerged in the population. In this process, the anticapitalists will defend the key demands of a programme breaking with imperialism and capitalist logic: satisfaction of the vital needs of the popular classes - bread, wages, jobs; reorganization of the economy on the basis of fundamental social needs, free and adequate public services (schools, health), women's rights, broadening social protection for unemployment, health and retirement, radical land reform, socialization of the banks and key sectors of the economy, cancellation of the debt, national and popular sovereignty. This programme of a government that would be at the service of the workers and the population is proposed in Tunisia by the League of the Workers' Left (Ligue de la Gauche Ouvrière). This is a component of the 14th of January Front which brings together the left forces rejecting the Ghannouchi government and fighting for all democratic freedoms, a Constituent Assembly and the satisfaction of fundamental needs. This programme is also defended in Egypt by the regroupment of revolutionaries that is in process.

7. The Tunisian and Egyptian peoples, and all the people of the Arab region still need our solidarity in the fight for democratic freedoms. They need even more our mobilization to loosen the grip of imperialism: non payment of the foreign debts of the former regimes, restitution of the goods and financial assets of the dictators, protection of the national

sovereignty of the people against the pressures of international capitalism; cancelling of the international agreements signed by the former regime in the military, security and migration sectors. Revolutionaries throughout the world also have the essential task of making all possible links with the trade unions, people's organizations and associations and anticapitalist organizations of these countries, to help with the consolidation of the revolutionary processes in progress, and to support the self-organization of the people concerned. The revolution underway in the Arab region is our combat!

We already support the following initiatives:

- the appeal of the Assembly of Social Movement meeting at the World Social Forum in Dakar for a worldwide of solidarity with the revolution in the Arab region on the 20th March of (anniversary of the invasion of Iraq in 2003);
- the conference of revolutionary organizations in the Arab region in Tunis called by the LGO from 25th to 27th March;
- the Mediterranean anti-capitalist conference called by the NPA which will take place in Marseilles on the 7th and 8th of May.

Amsterdam

22nd February 2011

Available in Castilian.

Available in French.

PAKISTAN

Top judges' anti-workers attitude: Now face the music of workers' anger on 1st March

FAROOQ TARIQ ·

Top judges are happy to take individual cases of violation of human rights and we are happy with that, however, whenever there is a collective action by a section for the working class in Pakistan, the attitude seems always to favour of the bosses. It has been shown in declaring the workers' strikes as illegal, rejecting the bail application of the arrested workers during strikes, not taking notices of gross violations of labour laws, no implementation of minimum wages, no remedies for those workers losing jobs in violation of labour laws and so on.

Labour Party Pakistan has decided to organize a day of action for workers' right to protest and against the top judges' discriminatory attitude towards the struggle of the working class. On Tuesday 1st of March, thousands of workers across Pakistan will organize rallies, demonstrations and strikes to assert their rights of organizing peaceful means of struggle.

There will be a complete strike of power looms and textile workers in Faisalabad, Jhang, Gojra, Toba Tek Singh and Kamalia. Hundreds of textile factories and power looms factories will be shut down during this strike. In Faisalabad, thousands of workers will come to Ghanta Ghar, the center of Faisalabad and will organize a sit in. Over 250,000 workers will take part in strikes and rallies on the day in Faisalabad division.

Four leaders of the Faisalabad power loom workers, Fazal Ilahi, Akbar Kamboh, Rana Riaz and Babar Randhawa have been behind bars since 21st July 2010. They were arrested during a power loom

workers' strike for a wage increase and were framed under anti terrorist laws. Despite all the assurances by the police and local administrations during several protest rallies to remove the anti terrorist charges against them, they are still facing the terrorist charges and are behind bars. Their bail application was rejected last week by the reactionary chief justice of Lahore High Court without looking at the file of the case.

We have decided enough is enough; now face the music of Pakistani working class on 1st March across Pakistan.

Over 600 Pakistan Telecommunication (PTCL) workers have been suspended or removed from their jobs by the administration of the privatized PTCL. Their crime: to organize protest for wage increase. Most of the 600 workers of PTCL are the leaders of different unions of PTCL and there is a whole sale attack on the unions in PTCL. The top judges are quite on the issue and no action taken by the courts or even by the PPP government about the fate of these very senior leaders of the trade union movement.

They are now organized in a united front of all the PTCL unions and will start their mass campaign for the reinstatement from 23th February by erecting a protest camp in Islamabad and then from 1st of March will join the national campaign for workers' rights.

Despite the stay order of the National Industrial Relation Commission (NIRC), 17 union leaders have been kicked out of their jobs when they formed a union. Nishat Textile Mills is owned by the richest man in Pakistan, Mian Mansha, thanks to the privatization of MCB Bank under Nawaz government that Mian Mansha has become the richest

man and has become a very anti worker boss. The union in MCB was thrown out and now all the textile factories of Mian Mansha are without any union.

Most of the union members of The Inter Wood furniture factory lost their job after they formed the first ever union in Lahore factory of Inter Wood. It is known to labour department of Punjab that Mian Nawaz Sharif family took special interest in this case to favor the boss who is a close friend of the family. No action was taken by any court of Pakistan for this gross violation of human rights of the labour for their constitutional right of forming associations.

New Khan Metro Bus Service is owned by a leader of Muslim League (the boss changes the Muslim League frequently, now a leader of PMLN and earlier was in PMLQ). The first ever union in the company was suppressed by the boss by terminating the jobs of the union leaders. The case has been in labour courts for over two years and no grievances of the union is been addressed by the courts.

No labour department officer can enter any industrial units in Punjab. This was the order of Pervaiz Ilahi in 2003 (the Punjab chief minister under Musharraf), a complete unity is shown by Mian Shahbaz Sharif on this issue with him, this ban is still intact despite a very clear order of Lahore High Court and courts seem impotent after they have decided in favour of workers to implement their order.

There are at least 14 other cases of top judges' discriminatory attitude towards the workers' effort to

form new trade unions.

There will be demonstrations in at least 50 cities of Pakistan on 1st March 2011, we will issue the list of the cities and place and timing of these demonstrations and rallies.

Our demands

- Release the four textile workers facing terrorist charges immediately;
- Reinstate all PTCL suspended workers with immediate effect;
- The courts must take action against those bosses violating labour laws;
- Lift labour inspection from the factories;
- A guarantee of implementation of Rupees 7000 wages for all unskilled workers according to the notification of the government all over Pakistan and just in Islamabad, (Chief Justice Iftikhar Choudry issued an order of implementing this in Islamabad while taking a sue moto notice of a security guard);
- Respect workers right to strike, organize unions and demand a respectable working condition, environment and wages for all workers;
- Increase the minimum wage to Rupees 15000 monthly for all workers.

We expect all friends and supporters of workers to participate in these rallies. We also call on other political parties and trade unions to endorse this call of action.

INDONESIA

Domestic workers take to the streets

KPRM-PRD ·

Domestic workers (PRT) represent the largest group of working women, which in global terms total more than 100 million around the world, with 4 million in Indonesia and more than 6 million others working overseas. In the special Yogyakarta province of Central Java alone there are more than 36,000 domestic workers. Domestic workers' living and working conditions are still inadequate and they often experience rights violations, being paid extremely low wages, are vulnerable to exploitation and have no labour guarantees.

Domestic workers are still not acknowledged as part of the work force and legal protection, both at the national as well as international level, is still very low. This situation provides more and more room for the violation of domestic workers' rights. The government meanwhile gives the impression of simply waiting for a new case of abuse to occur and only then does it takes steps.

"Because of this we are demanding that immediate wage improvements be made, the immediate enactment of a domestic workers' protection law and the immediate establishment of a legal protection system for domestic workers at the municipal and regency level", said Henny in a speech. [bw]

Domestic workers turn Hotel Indonesia into "giant laundry"

Despite the drizzle, scores of domestic workers (PRT) remained indifferent to the falling rain and continued washing their bosses' clothing. After being washed, it was then dried and ironed. So it was that on February 14 the Hotel Indonesia (HI) traffic circle in Central Jakarta became a giant laundry encircling the entire roundabout.

During the action the protesters also hung up T-shirts with "Bosses prosperous because of domestic workers" and "Recognition, rights and decent work for domestic workers" written on them along with a giant billboard with the message "100 pieces of domestic workers' washing drying so the bosses can wear neat and clean clothes".

The demonstrators, who came from the Domestic Workers Action Committee (KAPRT), also held a theatrical action depicting their demands and symbolising the labour performed by domestic workers.

"When Indonesia commemorates National Domestic Workers Day on February 15, around 2.6 million domestic workers will still lack legal protection", said one of the speakers, Umi (26), at the Hotel Indonesia traffic circle on Jl. MH Thamrin on Monday.

"We are demanding the immediate enactment of the Domestic Workers' Law. This domestic workers' day [falls against] the backdrop of a 14 year-old domestic worker Sunarsih who died after being mistreated by their employer in 2001. The employer repeated this again with four of their domestic workers in 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2005. However they were never punished", asserted Umi.

The action attracted the attention of drivers racing past the Hotel Indonesia traffic circle with several opening their car windows to watch the comical theatrical action. One road user who also has a domestic worker said they were greatly assisted by the presence of a domestic worker in the home.

"In my case, everything is discussed with the domestic worker. If my domestic worker appears tired, okay enough, they're not made to work any more. There's also a washing machine in the house right, a vacuum cleaner and so on. So yes, it's quite light work for the domestic worker", commented

Bayu (46), a resident of Pondok Labu in South Jakarta as they passed through the Hotel Indonesia	traffic circle. (asp/nwk)
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PALESTINE

Palestinians and the ever-widening intifada across the Middle East and North Africa

KEITH DARWIN ·

Ramallah February 5th, 2011

Photo: KD

For Palestinians who are every day humiliated both by Israel and by their own "regime", the reassertion of dignity by the Tunisian, Egyptian and Middle Eastern masses has been a great inspiration.

On the evening of Friday 11 February — coincidentally the anniversary of the overthrow of the hated Shah of Iran in 1979 — as people saw the fall of Mubarak, spontaneous (or mobile phone message-announced) marches began in Salaheddin Street in East Jerusalem, and in Palestinian cities within 1948 Israel.

In the Gaza Strip where 1.6 million people are suffering not only from the tightened Israeli siege, but also from Egypt's complete closure of the Rafah border, celebration marches took place that evening in Gaza and Khan Younis cities, and in the larger refugee camps. The people wanted to congratulate the people of Egypt, so close-by across the border, and some fired guns into the sky as if marking a wedding. The Hamas administration was quick to welcome the downfall of Mubarak, not only because they are historically associated with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, but also they voiced optimism that the border would quickly open, and Egypt would massively aid post-Operation Cast Lead reconstruction. Hamas rarely allows rallies other than its own; previous Egypt solidarity protests had been stopped. Political repression is directed mainly at Fateh, while the flags of the Democratic Front and Popular Front fly in the streets alongside Hamas flags. Hamas' television is more professional and democratic than that of the PA in Ramallah, but people also respect al

Manar from Lebanon, and above all al-Jazeera from Qatar, whose ruling family is the main funder of the Hamas government. When the Egyptian satellite cut Jazeera, viewers were desperate until it was re-routed.

Whether Hamas can still command a strong vote is unknowable. Although their administration is regarded as clean, and their performance in service-delivery, such as in health and schools is markedly better than the PA, the life-line of the tunnel imports is wearing thin, and their strategic limitations are showing: the 40% of Gaza Strip land left by the Israeli settlers is underutilized, even though the population is short of fresh food, and fishing is forbidden by the Israelis. The only construction thus far on the former Israeli settlements has been a prison.

In Nablus, the biggest city of the West Bank, people could only celebrate in mosque, church and home. But in Ramallah, the Palestinian NGOs, after many refusals, had been able to call a demonstration in solidarity with the Egyptian people of 1,000 participants in the Manara centre on 5 February. Protests have been forbidden by the Palestinian National Authority (PA) in recent years, and this rally was only approved at the last minute. Some Fateh and PA leaders had even unsuccessfully tried to call a pro-Mubarak rally in previous days. Trade union activists and people from the progressive political parties took part in this first rally but there were no party or union flags or banners at the demonstration. Participants carried small Egyptian flags, and one USA flag was burned on the lions of the Manara monument. There were no religious chants, and slogans from one group initially focussed on bringing back Nasser, and then the

chants were about solidarity with those in Tahrir square and in Alexandria, such as "the people will not be humiliated", "Mubarak is CIA", "the people want to get rid of the regime", "first to go Mubarak, second is King Abdullah (of Jordan), third is..." (Abbas of the PA?), then later some dared to change the chants: "the PA is CIA" and "the people want to get rid of Oslo". Later, seven of the young men who led chants against Mubarak, America, the PA and Oslo at the march on 5 February were arrested and beaten up by the PA's USA-trained security forces.

On the evening of Friday 11 February, on hearing the victory, people spontaneously came back into the streets of Ramallah. There were more unionists, inspired by the decisive entry of workers into action in Egypt. One chant was that "Ben Ali has called Mubarak to join him and the other thieves in Jeddah (Saudi Arabia). Another was that "after Egypt, the dictators in nearby places will fall". People joked about Israel's oft-repeated claim to be the only democracy in the region, since now so many Israeli and Western leaders are back-tracking rhetoric about democracy in Arab countries.

A further demonstration was able to be called by Palestinian NGOs on 17 February, this with several thousands in Ramallah. Ostensibly this was about calling on Fateh and Hamas to stop conflict and re-forge national unity, but its underlying dynamic was anti-PA. Meanwhile, the authorities in Gaza said that if people attempted such a rally, they would "break their bones".

Palestinians are most conscious of the situation in Jordan, where police allowed a large and unprecedented demonstration in Amman on 29 January in support of Egypt and calling for democracy in Jordan, though not explicitly calling for the ouster of King Abdullah. Scared of events in Egypt, he had gone on hasty tour of Bedouin clan leaders in the south, cut fuel and food prices, raised public service salaries, and dismissed yet another government. A much larger demonstration on 18 February shows the dynamic of struggle is far from over.

With Lebanon still in political crisis, and the overall positive relationship of forces for the Hizbullah bloc, the possibility of a democratic Egypt, and the nightmare potential of a Palestinian-majority democracy in Jordan, the Israeli leaders are quietly panicking. It is rumoured they are planning Bahrain-style or Libyan-style massacres of Palestinian youth if a third intifada, as is likely, breaks out.

The life expectancy of Israel's collaborator Palestinian Administration seems seriously threatened. The PA administers disconnected Palestinian cities and towns on 40% of the West Bank, and exercises limited security control over the cities on 17% of West Bank. The majority of the West Bank land, 80% of the water resources, the economy, and all borders and checkpoints remains under Israeli control.

Fateh and the PLO have atrophied and melded into the PA, representing 20 business families, a small comprador class based in Ramallah, and the interests of Israel and the USA. The CIA-trained security services cannot protect Palestinians, but manage resistance for Israel, in increasingly repressive ways, receiving 32% of the budget from donors.

The electoral mandate of President Abbas and PM Salam Fayyad, to the extent they had any, having been beaten by Hamas, and the Palestinian Legislative Council having never really met, with Israel having arrested a third of the 132 elected representatives, expired in January 2009. Shocked by the downfall of his friend Mubarak, and taking a cue from king Abdullah, Abbas sacked the PA Council of Ministers, retaining the neo-liberal technocrat Fayyad, whose party received on 2.5% of the votes in the 2006 elections. But dismissing the government doesn't build any credibility among Palestinians in the West Bank, it only exacerbates competition between the Fateh gerontocracy. Abbas has no obvious successor. Security chiefs Mohammed Dahlan and Jibril Rajoub are too discredited. Marwan Barghouti from Fateh and Popular Front (PFLP) leader Ahmed Sa'adat are in

Israeli gaols. There is some speculation about Nasser al-Qidwa, but Abbas is hostile to him.

The negotiations leaks publicized by al-Jazeera have removed any doubts Palestinians had in the treachery of the PA, who faced with complete intransigence by the Israeli negotiators and squeezed every day by expanding illegal settlements, begged for some "fig-leaf" or token to distract attention from their surrender of Jerusalem, the refugees, the prisoners, and an independent state on enclaves of land in the West Bank. PLO Negotiator Sa'eb Erekat from Jericho had to resign.

The PA, through its collaboration, through co-optation, and through outright repression, has ensured a depoliticized public life in the West Bank. People are just trying to survive and relying on their families. The great leaders have gone: Arafat as a national symbol seems better in hindsight the longer he is dead; Gaza's respected Dr Haidar Abdel-Shafi, who led the Madrid talks in 1991, but walked out in 1997 when undermined by Arafat, and angered by corruption, died in 2007. George Habash died in 2008 after leaving leadership of PFLP, the second-largest party in the PLO, in 2000; his successor Abu Ali Mustafa was assassinated in 2001 by the Israelis, and in turn his successor, Sa'adat was imprisoned by the PA and then Israel.

The left parties remain marginal, unable to offer an alternative to the PA and lacking any traction with the rural or urban poor or people in the crowded refugee camps. They are compromised by their involvement in the PA and the Oslo process, which has only brought more settlements. In the 2006 elections the Popular Front gained 4% of the vote, the Democratic Front gained one seat, running in an Alternative front, with the Palestine People's Party (formerly the Palestinian Communist Party). The Mubadara, or national initiative, formed in 2002 by left leaders Mustafa Barghouti and Haidar Abdel-Shafi, gained only 2.7%.

The left parties retain their mass service organizations for agriculture, health, youth and women, in both Gaza and the West Bank. The Palestine

General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU), formed in 1994 out of the merger of the previously external Fateh workers' front and Fateh, PFLP, Democratic Front and Communist unions, with thirteen affiliate unions in the Palestinian private sector, is surviving with extensive funding from Norway and other European unions, through the International Trade Union Confederation, which makes support conditional on pretending there can still be some peace rhetoric with Israel's Histadrut which never criticizes its government for the occupation or for bombing or besieging Gaza. Like the PA, PGFTU leader Shaher Sa'ed calls for a boycott of settlement products, but hesitates, in deference to his funders, in calling for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) on Israel. With few workers crossing the Wall into settlements and Israel for day work, very high unemployment rates, and most Palestinians working in family businesses, farming, NGO or informal sectors, PGFTU faces serious constraints. The new Federation of Independent Unions, and the unions of the public sector workers, provide an alternative, one which is generally more able to campaign against the PA and clearly all for BDS against Israel.

The vast scale of the expansion of illegal Israeli settlements, in and around Jerusalem, in the Jordan Valley, and in on the hilltops of the West Bank, and the USA veto in the UN Security Council on a resolution opposing settlements on 18 February, at a time when USA-allied regimes across the region are under popular attack, poses a crisis for the only remaining negotiation strategy of the PA. On news of the veto, a hundred or so youth seized the opportunity of newly re-won freedom to protest in Ramallah, but the demonstrators were soon swamped with Fateh loyalists carrying pictures of President Abbas, and PM Fayyad issued a tweet saying it was not the right time for the UN motion.

As in past years, Abbas has called for municipal and then Legislative Council elections in September, but the conditions for free and fair elections, such as in 2006, no longer exist for the 4 million people in the PA or Hamas administered enclaves, nor in

Israeli-annexed East Jerusalem. Hamas says there can be no new elections without national political unity, and points to the need to reforge an inclusive PLO as a legitimate national leadership, presumably with elections that enfranchise Palestinians inside Israel, in the Occupied Territories, and in the refugee camps in neighbouring countries for a new Palestinian National Council, which hasn't met in anyone's memory.

In as much as the Oslo process and "two-state" solution has reached its natural dead end with a Bantustan led by a discredited Quisling clique in Ramallah, and there is a paradigm-shift towards a global boycott campaign against Israeli Apartheid, and for an egalitarian bi-national state, many see an ideological leadership shift towards Palestinians within the 1948 borders, especially the left secular nationalist Tajamu/Balad, and its now-exiled

leader Azmi Bishara. This shift is underlined by the changing demographics, with 5.8 million Jewish Israelis no longer constituting a majority of people under Israel's control between the Jordan River and the Sea.

In the context of solidarity actions with the pan-Arab or pan-Middle East democratic intifada, international grassroots and trade union efforts for boycott, disinvestment and sanctions against Israel as called for by Palestinian civil society, need to be reinforced. With people-power putting the fear of death into the tyrants from Rabat to Teheran, and the decades-long pax Americana in tatters as long-invested allies fall, Palestine remains the fault-line between the Arab masses and colonialism.

Gaza

February 19th , 2011

PUERTO RICO

The struggle for public education continues in the UPR

GAMELYN ORDUARDO ·

The plan of action approved by about 2000 students in a general assembly not only includes a 48 hour strike that is to shut down the campus beginning today, and a 24 hour work stoppage that is to affect the UPR administration directly. But also a National March Against Tuition Hikes, the 11th of March, that is also the day of International Solidarity with the UPR, in which simultaneous demonstrations in solidarity with the UPR will be held in cities around the world including Amsterdam, Madrid, Barcelona, Manchester, New York, Chicago and Boston, among others. The students also approved cultural activities which include an uninterrupted reading and representation of Gabriel García Márquez's novel, Cien Años de Soledad. After all of this is done, students will evaluate the situation in order to decide about future actions in another assembly.

Last Spring UPR students won a two-month strike against fee hikes, budget cuts and privatization.

They went on strike again on December 14, 2010 against an \$800 tuition increase that has forced thousands of students out of school. University officials tried to stop the strike by calling in riot police to occupy UPR's campuses and by expelling student leaders. This resulted in police brutality and more than two hundred arrests. Demonstrators have been forced off campus and have faced tear gas, police beatings.

Still, the student movement defied these police-state tactics boycotting their classes, organizing roadblocks and massive protests in the streets, in malls and commercial areas. They also mobilized student rallies in nearby barrios armed with music, information and the simple message "Our struggle is your struggle!".

A week ago, amidst massive student demonstrations, along with the support of labor unions, religious, and communitarian groups, the President of the UPR Administration presented his resignation, and the police had to be removed from university grounds.

This has been the second strike in less than a year to defend public education for the working class.

EUROPE

Radicalisation of the financial, economic, social and political crises at the European level

CÉDRIC DURAND ·

Liberalised finance – which is nothing other than the power of capital magnified by its centralization – is unleashed against the peoples of Europe. The rickety institutional arrangements of European construction are cracking, giving credibility to the scenario of a dislocation of Economic and Monetary Union. Among employees, the structural deterioration of the relationship of forces in favour of capital prevents any adequate reaction to the attacks. However, the synchronization and brutality of anti-social measures across the continent open the possibility of a wave of European mobilisation, opening a small window of political opportunity.

Ireland, Portugal, Spain, seemingly dissimilar situations

Ireland was the teacher's pet of the neoliberal school: champion of fiscal dumping, it was far advanced in terms of liberalisation of the labour and investment markets and very rigorous in its public budgets - it had a budgetary surplus in 2007! Following this model, the country's economy experienced a real boom for two decades, bringing it up to second place - behind Luxembourg - in terms of GDP per capita. This performance was obviously misleading: in 2007, the country fell to fifth place in terms of GNI (Gross National Income) i.e. when the profits exported by the multinationals were subtracted and it fell to tenth place in terms of standard of living (median income). Nevertheless, this illusory growth reflected a real economic dynamism. The recipe? Attracting multinational companies – particularly U.S. companies in the IT

sector - by providing a gateway to European markets on extremely favourable terms. Secondly, the rate of household and banking debt favoured the establishment of a housing bubble following a similar logic to that of the subprime mortgages in the United States. With the international financial crisis of 2008, the bubble was brutally deflated. The country was then weighed down by a large private debt leading its banks to bankruptcy. And if Irish public finances were affected at a staggering level - a deficit of 32% of GDP in 2010, as against the threshold of 3% set by the Maastricht Treaty - it was because the State assumed responsibility for the bad debts of its banks in order to guarantee the repayment of their creditors who are mainly large European banks, first and foremost British ones. In short, Irish citizens must pay for undue risks taken by private actors.

The situations of Portugal and Spain are different. These two countries have not yet had recourse to the EU and IMF, but might do so very soon. In the case of Portugal, the country has low growth and trade deficits indicating low competitiveness. The pre-existing public deficits have grown quickly with the crisis without any prospect of being rapidly filled. In Spain as in Ireland, the management of public finances has been very rigorous but private debt has exploded and fed a growth mainly led by a housing bubble. Now that the latter has burst, activity and therefore public finances have plunged into the red while the Spanish banks are undermined.

Beyond these circumstances, the "rescues" which have either taken place (Ireland) - or are predicted (Portugal, Spain) - are part of a broader story: the shockwaves of the global crisis striking against an

incoherent European institutional architecture; while imbalances sharpen, to the point where they crack the edifice, governments - paralyzed by their competing interests - submitting their peoples to a dictatorship of finance whose social violence is unleashed by the losses ahead.

Public finances strangled by the financial markets

The crisis of the public debt inside the Euro zone is of course a replica of the financial explosion that shook the world economy starting from September 2008. By bringing about a rapid contraction of credit, this initially financial crisis stifled economic activity in most countries. With the resultant decline in tax revenues, the fragility of public finances in the European peripheral countries appeared in broad daylight. Likewise, the banks of the countries hardest hit also saw their bad debts explode. In anticipation of the possibility of a default, the markets then demanded to be paid still more to accept lending to these countries. In addition, many investment funds profited by gambling on these defaults, including via the securities insuring these debts, the Credit Default Swaps. The game of speculation thus feeds by itself the increases in interest rates... and thus the risk of payment default.

Since they are forced to finance themselves on the international financial markets - European treaties prohibiting the European Central Bank from financing them directly - countries are required to pay ever higher interest which encumbers still further their public finances. Thus, on November 26 markets demanded a return of 11.89% to purchase Greek securities, 9.37% for Irish securities, 7.317% for Portugal and 5.21% for Spain compared to 2.74% for German public debt securities, considered the safest. Such rates imply that already overindebted governments are in practice unable to finance themselves on the markets. In fact, since the rate of increase in interest rates is higher than the rate of inflation, debt increases mechanically. This is what might be called the snowball effect. From this point of view "rescue" plans are a poor recourse: the aid to Ireland will be at a rate of about

6%, compared with 5.2% for Greece in May. Such a rate is all the more shocking when at the same time the European Central Bank provides liquidity to banks at a rate of approximately 1%!

The generalization of austerity

To please the markets and to attempt to reach less extravagant levels of borrowing, governments first on the periphery and then across the EU adopted policies of austerity during 2010. The recipes are always the same: sharp cuts in public budgets and increases in the most unfair taxes, such as VAT where everyone pays the same rate on consumption regardless of income. In the case of Ireland, the plan announced on Tuesday, November 23 (the third since the beginning of the crisis) provides for a reduction of 10% in family allowances, the abolition of 25,000 civil service posts, a one euro cut in the minimum hourly wage, and increased VAT and income tax. Only taxes on corporate profits remain unchanged at the scandalously low level of 12.5% (compared with 33% in France and 27.5% on average in the EU). It must be said that on the eve of the announcement of austerity measures, the directors of Microsoft, HP, Google, Intel, and Bank of America Merrill Lynch addressed the government to oppose any such possibility, making barely veiled threats of relocation [1]. In Portugal, public sector wages will be reduced by 5% on average, with pensions frozen, while taxes will be increased and social benefits reduced.

The generalisation of austerity across Europe - and not only in the countries of the periphery - marks a sharp reversal of economic policy in 2009 when recovery was the theme. This synchronization is still worse in that each state depresses its own demand when external demand for its products is also undermined by austerity in neighbouring countries. Thus, Ireland, Greece and Spain as well as Latvia and the Lithuania experienced in 2010 a continuation of depression. At the same time unemployment spreads. In September 2010, it stood at 9.6% for the EU as a whole (10.1% for the Euro zone) - but it reached 10.6% in Portugal, 14/1% in Ireland,

12.2% in Greece and 20.8% in Spain - and everything indicates that it will worsen in 2011.

The inconsistency of European institutional architecture

The European governments' untenable bet is that the most fragile countries will succeed in paying their debt. The transitional mechanism designed immediately after the rescue of Greece to reassure the markets – we see with what success! – provided a single solution to potential crises through which European countries would provide emergency funding in connection with the IMF in exchange for a deficit reduction program. On November 28th EU finance ministers outlined a new mechanism which provides that countries in difficulty should renegotiate their debt via a rescheduling or a partial cancellation. Clearly, their creditors should bear a portion of the losses. This new mechanism, however, does not change much in terms of the current crisis because it concerns only debt securities issued from 2013 and therefore repayments which could be renegotiated will not take place before 2016.

Yet the prospect of such an eventuality poured oil on the flames in recent weeks. The markets, which do not intend to concede a penny, have anticipated that if they were to get paid at any time, they might just as well do so earlier. Therefore, they have demanded higher returns. This market reaction also shows that they do not believe in the fables of governments on the ability of vulnerable countries to pay current debts. From a strictly economic standpoint, and without changing the existing institutional framework, things are squalidly simple: without the possibility of devaluing their currency – which would end their participation in the Euro – and without any European tax redistribution mechanism as exists in nation states or federal states, these countries have no opportunity to adjust other than by generalized lower salaries and expenditures; and even in this case, it is not very probable that the gains in competitiveness they could thus achieve will arrive in time to enable them to maintain themselves in the neo-liberal yoke of Economic and Monetary Union. As a fund manager bluntly

put it in relation to Ireland: "the question is knowing how long the people will endure being burnt alive like this" [2].

Synchronization of social and political crises across the continent

The week of November 22-28 probably gives a taste of what 2011 might look like when widespread austerity wreaks its effects on the continent. A general strike in Portugal on Wednesday 24, student demonstrations in Britain and Italy, a huge protest in Dublin on Saturday 26. Mass mobilizations accompanied by spectacular actions such as the occupation of the Conservative Party headquarters in London, an attempt to enter the Italian Senate and the intrusion on the residence of the Prime Minister in Dublin. Barely a few weeks after the great movements of autumn 2010 in France, resistance develops at a European level. Given the magnitude of the attacks of which a detailed inventory should be drawn up country by country, there is nothing surprising about this. But the hardest part is to come: most of the measures adopted in 2010 will make their effects felt only in 2011. In most countries, governments, whether they are right wing or social-liberals (if this is still has a meaning), are politically very weakened, and it does not seem unreasonable to imagine that they will not be able to cope with the broad social shocks that these attacks might cause. It is not certain that they are in a position to reach agreement on the inevitable restructuring of the European Union that any institutional response would require.

In such a context, one can imagine that left or nationalist social forces could come to the fore in peripheral countries and decide to break with the single currency in order to facilitate their adjustment by devaluation. There are however many obstacles and inconveniences to this scenario, not the slightest being that nothing of this kind is provided for in the treaties, and that a gigantic banking mess will ensue. Another scenario, envisioned by a columnist for the "Financial Times", is that Germany renounces the single currency [3]. This could result in

the multiplication of financial crises in the euro area whose outcome could be massive fiscal transfers which are for the moment, politically impossible. Another option, more likely, would be that the new treaty, which is demanded by Germany to stiffen budgetary orthodoxy in each State, is not ratified in all countries. The excuse would be then found to disengage from a Euro zone considered as unmanageable. Staggering as these options appear, it could well be that a status quo of the EU in its present form is no more realistic a scenario.

For the anti-capitalist forces these speculations have no other interest than to grasp the magnitude of the changes that lie ahead. The first issue is of course to promote coordination of resistance and the emergence of an internationalist movement to demand at the continental level the discontinuation

of the austerity plans, suspension of debt repayments and the establishment of an audit under democratic control of the latter, the challenging of the independence of the ECB, the financing by the Central Bank of the states, the socialisation of the banks, control over capital flows, the launching of a massive investment and job creation plan for ecological transition and European public services, a coordination of redistributive tax policies. But do not underestimate the fact that these responses can be borne by the social movements alone. In the absence of political perspectives in each country and at the European level, these movements might collapse and leave room for nationalist forces of the most violent and reactionary kind which are reinforcing themselves already everywhere in Europe. The dislocation of neoliberal Europe could then become a nightmare.

ALGERIA

Youth revolt shakes authoritarian order

CHAWKI SALHI ·

Beginning on January 5 in Algiers (Fouka, Staoueli, Bab el Oued), Oran and Djelfa, the youth revolts extended to hundreds of neighbourhoods in every region of the country. There were neither slogans, nor demands nor structures. We are not talking about massive popular demonstrations which degenerated into looting. More often it was small groups of youths who emerged from peripheral neighbourhoods to take over central arteries that they closed down with burning tyres, looting vehicles and violently confronting the police. Once the square was taken the surrounding shops were looted. Haunted by several decades of riots, the authorities immediately withdrew the numerous police officers spread across the town under the pretext of the anti-terrorist struggle and entrusted the defence of the essential centres to the anti-riot brigades. While awaiting reconquest operations, the street was abandoned to the rioters. Public or private establishments were attacked, town hall, hotels, telephone agencies, schools, professional training centres. Public edifices were besieged, like the commissariat in Bab el Oued, while in the same neighbourhood the showrooms of Renault and Dacia and their inaccessible cars were looted. Public or private banking agencies the post offices were the privileged targets with the manifest intention of taking the money they held. The looters also targeted jewellery shops, sports stores, expensive cars, without sparing ordinary traders and modest passers by who were robbed without consideration. This

disordered violence, which did not spare the poor, led to an end for the initially unanimous popular sympathy. High school students and the less precarious youth sectors lost their sense of solidarity and instead organised the self-defence of their areas against looters.

In explaining the events some analysts evoked struggles within the ruling clans and the military, while others attributed the movement to speculators, importers or wholesalers, accused of having activated their informal networks of distributors to oppose the pressure of the administration that demanded they pay tax. In fact these manipulations, if they exist, are anecdotal. The situation lends itself to explosion, it has exploded. The initial revolts are similar to the sporadic riots that have taken place for years. Their privileged actors are the same precarious youth. Concretely, the events of January 4 and 5 were very localised. The resonance of the private press gave them a national impact. Spokespersons of the resentment of the business world and the international capitalist community against protectionist impulses, the private press generously covered every protest. And it is all the better for our struggles. From the first incidents, at Bab el Oued and Oran, the dailies devoted their front pages to images of urban desolation with headlines like "The riots of the end", "Troubled night in Bab el Oued", "Riots: the conflagration".

The movement has retrospectively been given a simultaneous nature that did not exist. When the movement ended in the neighbourhoods of January 5, it had hardly begun in the towns of the East and the Kabyle Soummam. What existed on the contrary was a general anger of modest people against high prices at the beginning of the year. And these increases were no more than unexpected collateral

damage stemming from the government's attempt to reduce the informal sector of the economy. In Algeria, you can buy a car or even a villa of a million Euros in cash. From the end of March 2011, a ban on cash payments for sums above 500,000 dinars or 5,000 euros (three years of minimum wage) was planned. With a view to this ban, the producers asked their wholesale distributors to produce tax documents so as to draw up invoices. That meant leaving the informal sector, paying taxes, indeed social security contributions! Faced with this intolerable state aggression against freedom of trade and the exploitation of employees, the wholesalers ceased their deliveries of goods. The result was shortages, speculation, and immediate increases in the prices of basic food products

The adolescents and young people in revolt are not concerned by the daily purchases of their parents who reject this intolerable pressure on their wallets. They are, rather, involved in small informal business. They share the generalised popular anger in relation to prices, but what concerns them more directly is the progressive dismantling of the informal markets that occupy the big shopping streets. Like the young Bouazizi who set fire to himself in Sidi Bouzid in Tunisia, they are deprived of decent employment, forced to occupy a street corner to sell cigarettes or various smuggled Chinese products avoiding tax. Like the young Harraguas who flee their country on improvised boats to participate in the wage slavery of Spanish agriculture or minor precarious jobs in France, they express their unhappiness in a blocked society. The lack of housing leads to the cramming of families and perpetuates an anachronistic patriarchy and a strict moral rigor. Without housing or stable income, marriage is late. This sharpens despair in a country that Europe is recolonising, a country whose productive enterprises are being destroyed along with jobs in the name of the logic of the market, a country that is invaded by the triumphant values of the West.

Popular anger

This general revolt is the expected outcome of a popular anger which for some months has been directed against Abdelaziz Bouteflika and his regime, associated with the emergence of insolent wealth which offends an egalitarian populist culture, a regime complicit in affairs of corruption, at astronomical amounts, which have been on the front pages of the big dailies. In the midst of an Algerian-French diplomatic crisis, the construction of a 1,200 km highway, the glory of Bouteflika's programme, was attributed to the Chinese by Mr Pierre Falcon, airplane manufacture and dealer in French weapons, himself responsible for redistributing the commission of 20% on the amount of 11 billion dollars. And so one discovers on this occasion a Franco-African network at the heart of a regime originating from the war of liberation. In a gilded neighbourhood in upper Algiers, where a square metre of land to build on can fetch 5,000 euros, Bouteflika offered 760 ha at a symbolic dinar per square metre to an Emirates group. The privileges accorded to the Gulf magnates are regularly denounced by the press and the elites, who lean rather in the direction of France. These gifts are explained by the President's affinities with his Emirate hosts during his period of exile. The national oil company Sonatrach has been robbed by its managers through overvalued privately negotiated contracts. This had already happened before, to the profit of BRC, a subsidiary linked to former US vice president Dick Cheney. There lies one of the reasons for the firmness of US-Algerian relations.

These press revelations and the subsequent legal cases sometimes lead to derisory sanctions against members of the higher echelons, rather of the second level, whereas the hand of class justice strikes hard against the desperate youth who revolt to obtain a tarmac road, a link to the distribution network for potable water or gas, to protest against a distribution of social housing deemed to be unjust or to demand a job. There are also prison sentences against illegal emigrants, these harraguas who risk their lives on improvised boats. The crackdown on

informal traders and the prosecution of small traders avoiding tax led to popular resentment. The multinationals are exempted from tax by way of encouragement and all the private industrial and commercial enterprises more or less escape tax obligations, which finally only concern declared wage earners and the enterprises of the public sector.

Paradoxically, the rehousing of the inhabitants of the shanty towns is also a source of discontent. Countries that distribute thousands of housing units to poor people are pretty rare. But Algerians are not completely resigned to class society. The emergence of the bourgeoisie is very recent. The right to housing was conquered at independence in the confused occupation of the towns deserted by French settlers. The Bouteflika regime, which is responsible for the most aggressive neoliberal advances, continues in some respects to follow a populist approach based in its history. Thousands of housing units have been distributed, though it is a drop of water in the ocean of needs. The housing offered is not enough to hold a whole family, the new arrivals in the shanty town are not affected and the overpopulated urban neighbourhoods resent an operation which ignores them, because the priority is to absorb the shacks which surround the towns. Corruption is also present. In a situation of penury, what is more predictable than favouritism and corruption?

Retreats of the regime

It was the symbolic struggle around housing at Diar Echems in the heart of Algiers whose violence convinced the regime to renounce its policy of tough action on the streets and the crushing of strikes. The confrontations at Diar Echems, in October 2009, coincided with the revolt of the El Ançar neighbourhood in the western city of Oran against the pollution of a quarry. At the same time, rail workers launched a lightning strike that disorganised the economy and threatened a total paralysis. The regime then decided on a policy of conciliation. The rail workers received a pay increase. The in-

habitants of Diar Echems were promised early rehousing. From battle to battle the government has made concessions. The big dailies denounce the "riot bonus" of the government which promises hundreds of thousands of social housing units instead of letting the market regulate things. Despite severe legislation and legal persecution of the actors of the social movement, the government has always ended up giving way to each strike movement. Thus the big movements of teachers and doctors and their autonomous unions in struggle since 2003 have won various provisional victories with a fairly big increase effective of January 2008 in the context of a general revalorisation of the public service. But the small wage earners, who are the majority, have not much progress. There is a will to re-establish the hierarchy of wages skewed by several decades of uniform increases, to valorise the "middle layers" according to the IMF recommendations to better stabilise society. But these increases, obtained under the blows of strikes and so on are not enough to give to the higher wage earners an income comparable to that of their equivalents in neighbouring countries. The counterpart to these wage concessions is a new status of the civil service which introduces casualisation, the precarity of civil servants in short-term contracts bringing about a massive regression.

The strikes in the economic sector have had a considerable subjective impact. They have allowed an initial small wage catch up, after 15 years of a freeze on wages. Rail workers, after several wildcat strikes, have achieved an increase of more than 50%. Actions in the steel complex at Annaba, on the rail, in the truck factory in Rouiba and the surrounding industrial zone, and in the port of Algiers have mobilised less workers than the big national strikes in the civil service, but their struggles have caught the imagination of all employees and they function as a vanguard. They took place after a decade of demoralisation and rampant dismantling of public enterprises. The new politics of struggle against imports rehabilitates national production and fills order books. We have gone from a situa-

tion punctuated by voluntary redundancies and the compression of the workforce to massive hirings.

The struggles extend beyond the local trade union leaderships and above all the national leadership of the UGTA which since the general strike of 2003 against privatisation has sunk into an ever more indecent servility. But these strikes take place always in the context of a UGTA that is curiously back in the saddle despite an avowed discredit. Of around sixty existing unions, the UGTA federation is the only generalist one. The more representative autonomous unions concern specific corporations in the public service: high school teachers, university lecturers, doctors and so on. Another reason for this survival and hegemony of the UGTA is a relationship of forces that is still unfavourable to the workers. In a public sector officially condemned to disappear, the room for negotiation is non-existent, the capacity for strike blackmail is reduced to nothing. Halt production? That is precisely what the IMF wants. In these disastrous conditions the UGTA, the complacent partner of the authorities, functions as an umbrella union. The prestige of the autonomous unions is immense despite the rapid bureaucratisation of most of them, but the reality of the trade union struggle remains for many the attempt to regain control of the UGTA. It is a question of the relationship of forces.

The private sector super-exploits in disastrous conditions the majority of the country's wage earners. In 2007, the official figures indicated 78% of workers in private enterprises were undeclared. These are legal enterprises that appear to pay their taxes. But the informal enterprises escape any control and statistics whereas they employ a considerable part of the workforce. Labour law no longer exists. One can increase the minimum wage, discuss pensions, review trade union legislation, but that does not concern the overwhelming majority of workers. Thus there is no question of trade union law and the right to strike. The struggles in the private sector are rare and brutal. In a situation of scarcity of jobs, recalcitrant workers can be immediately replaced. Some big strikes have nonetheless taken

place in the private sector, at the Tonic group (packaging), on the sites of the Chinese enterprises building the highway, where the Algerian workers denounce slavery and the Chinese workers demand simply to be paid. And there was of course the symbolic strike at the formerly state owned steel complex sold to Arcelor Mittal in Annaba. The workers succeeded in dislodging the union mafia in the service of the multinational. The new team uncovered various rackets and revealed the derisory performances of the world steel giant which did not equal the production of the complex under public management. But above all they defeated the plans to reduce the workforce and forced a wage increase. What allowed this victory was the massive workers' mobilisation but also the perspective of the renationalisation of the complex in the new economic course of the region.

Limits of authoritarianism and liberties

Teachers on a national general strike have demanded retirement after 25 years at work and a wage increase of 100%, which they are not far from having obtained. The announcement two years ago of the suppression of the optional pension at age 50 led to an immediate revolt of the industrial zone of Rouiba, near Algiers, and a mobilisation of oil workers. It was all the same decided a year ago and still has not been applied. A moratorium is spoken of, for fear of social explosion. Those who riot for rehousing reject the new and free units offered to them. The suppression of free medicine in 2002 was immediately postponed after the riots of Ain Fakroun. It should be applied in the next few months, though the January riots will have deepened the thinking of the authorities about that. University lecturers have demanded and obtain better wages but also their priority right to social housing. Our comrade Daniel Bensaïd, visiting Algeria a few months before his death, compared this situation to that of Mexico which also has social gains inherited from a past revolutionary situation, gains which the neoliberal steamroller is trying to erase.

For others concerns are linked to neoliberal globalisation. The massive unemployment of youth is a consequence of the dismantling of the public sector and the unfettered opening up that delivers the market to the disloyal competition of the products of wage slavery in China or the subsidised exports of the European Union. The Draconian fall in purchasing power stems from the division by twenty of the value of the dinar successively since the structural adjustment plan of 1994. But although wages have been the lowest in the Mediterranean basin, the workforce is not disciplined enough, not submissive. Investors only come for the oil rent or the telephone company profits. Capitalist exploitation is profitable in Algeria, but apparently much less so than in China.

Another aspect to stress is that of the relative liberties that remain under this authoritarian regime whose repression and arbitrariness we regularly denounce. The revolts of October 1988 imposed a democratic opening, political and media pluralism, the freedom to demonstrate, legality of strike actions. From the beginning, successive governments have sought to hinder popular freedoms and tolerate only salon activities and electoral meetings. But popular lassitude, after the bloody decade that appeared as the fruit of the opening, has allowed the regime to take firm control. Bouteflika professes publicly his allergy to pluralism and dreams of a US-style two party system. Associations, unions, parties are refused approval. Activities are rarely authorised except in electoral periods when the parties, prevented from building themselves, appear derisory. Electoral law hardens the conditions. And Bouteflika is comforted by the discredit of the parties, all of them, and by their corruption. But October 1988 is not totally forgotten, far from it. It is not restrictions that limit popular expression so much as popular disenchantment with respect to democracy and the discrediting of politics.

Bouteflika's patriotic turn

Bouteflika's first term, from 1999 to 2003, was one of professions of ultra neoliberal faith but his

promises to his imperialist tutors have not materialised. His projects were hindered by the resistance of the civil and military state bureaucracy, and the irritation of the private employers faced with the preference given to multinationals. Above all the hostility of the trade union apparatus to neoliberalism allowed a significant mobilisation. Popular resistance obliged Bouteflika to reconsider his projects. Oil strikes blocked the hydrocarbons law. The popular movement in Kabylie imposed a return to big state projects to the disgust of the orthodox neoliberals. The revolt of Ain Fekroun in the Aurès postponed the suppression of free medicine, the national strike by UGTA forced back total privatisation, the autonomous unions of teacher, doctors, challenged the wage freeze.

The re-election of Bouteflika in 2004, against Ali Benflis, the candidate of the FLN and the head of the army, gave him the necessary legitimacy to go further. The law on hydrocarbons was voted through. He privileged outrageously foreign companies allowed to benefit from concessions. An indecent programme of total privatisation was adopted. Then Bouteflika fell ill. The regime positioned itself for succession struggles but a physically weakened Bouteflika continued to dominate all areas. In June 2006, a new tone appeared, more concerned to preserve the national interests, the law on hydrocarbons was frozen before being amended to favour the national company. In 2008, the price per barrel collapsed, while imports which had tripled over a few years consumed all the oil income. Privatisation appears at a stalemate. Supplementary finance laws have involved Draconian measures to re-establish balances. Taxes and administrative measures reduce imports, while foreign enterprises are obliged to find a majority Algerian partner. This is the background which explains the change of tone of the Western governments despite the attraction of 150 billion dollars of public investment and juicy contracts. It is this which is at stake in the battle to give a political direction to the popular discontent, the workers' strikes and the youth revolts.

WORLD SOCIAL FORUM/ DAKAR

Final declaration of the Assembly of the Social Movements

ASSEMBLY OF THE SOCIAL MOVEMENTS ·

We affirm our support for and our active solidarity with the people of Tunisia, Egypt and the Arab world who have risen up to demand a true democracy and build the people's power. Their struggles are lighting the path to another world, free from oppression and exploitation.

We strongly affirm our support for the Ivory Coast, African and world peoples in their struggles for sovereign and participatory democracy. We defend the right to self-determination for all peoples.

Through the WSF process, the Social Movements Assembly is the place where we come together through our diversity, in order to forge common struggles and a collective agenda to fight against capitalism, patriarchy, racism and all forms of discrimination.

We are celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Social Forum, which was first held in Porto Alegre in 2001. Since that time, we have built a common history of work which led to some progress, particularly in Latin America, where we have been able to intervene in neoliberal alliances and to create several alternatives for just development that truly honor nature.

In these ten years, we have also witnessed the eruption of a systemic crisis that has expanded into a food crisis, an environmental crisis, and financial and economic crises, and has led to an increase in migrations and forced displacement, exploitation, debt levels and social inequities.

We denounce the part played by the main actors in the system (banks, transnational companies, the mass media, international institutions, ...) who, in their constant quest for maximum profits, continue

with their interventionist politics of war, military occupation, so-called humanitarian missions, new military bases, plundering natural resources, exploitation of entire peoples, and ideological manipulation. We also denounce their attempts to co-opt our movements through their funding of social sectors that serve their interests, and we reject their methods of assistance which generate dependence.

Capitalism's destructive force impacts every aspect of life itself, for all the peoples of the world. Yet each day we see new movements rise, struggling to reverse the ravages of colonialism and to achieve well-being and dignity for all. We declare that we, the people, will no longer bear the costs of their crisis and that, within capitalism, there is no escape from this crisis. This only reaffirms the need for us, as social movements, to come together to forge a common strategy to guide our struggles against capitalism.

We fight against transnational corporations because they support the capitalist system, privatize life, public services and common goods such as water, air, land, seeds and mineral resources. Transnational corporations promote wars through their contracts with private corporations and mercenaries; their extractionist practices endanger life and nature, expropriating our land and developing genetically modified seeds and food, taking away the peoples' right to food and destroying biodiversity.

We demand that all people should enjoy full sovereignty in choosing their way of life. We demand the implementation of policies to protect local production, to give dignity to agricultural work and to protect the ancestral values of life. We denounce

neoliberal free-trade treaties and demand freedom of movement for all the human beings.

We will continue to mobilize to ask for the unconditional abolition of public debt in all the countries in the South. We also denounce, in the countries of the North, the use of public debt to impose to unfair policies that degrade the social welfare state.

When the G8 and G20 hold their meetings, let us mobilize across the world to tell them, No ! We are not commodities! We will not be traded !

We fight for climate justice and food sovereignty. Global climate change is a product of the capitalist system of production, distribution and consumption. Transnational corporations, international financial institutions and governments serving them do not want to reduce greenhouse gases. We denounce "green capitalism" and refuse false solutions to the climate crisis such as biofuels, genetically modified organisms and mechanisms of the carbon market like REDD, which ensnare impoverished peoples with false promises of progress while privatizing and commodifying the forests and territories where these peoples have been living for thousands of years.

We defend the food sovereignty and the agreement reached during the Peoples' Summit against Climate Change, held in Cochabamba, where true alternatives to face the climate crisis were built with the social movements and organisations from worldwide.

Let's mobilize, all of us, especially on the African continent, during the COP 17 in Durban in South Africa and in « Rio +20 » in 2012, to reassert the peoples' and nature's rights and block the illegitimate Cancun Agreement.

We support sustainable peasant agriculture ; it is the true solution to the food and climate crises and includes access to land for all who work on it. Because of this, we call for a mass mobilisation to stop the landgrab and support local peasants struggles. ' We fight against violence against women, often conducted in militarily occupied territories, but also violence affecting women who are criminalized

for taking part in social struggles. We fight against domestic and sexual violence perpetrated on women because they are considered objects or goods, because the sovereignty of their bodies and minds is not acknowledged. We fight against the trade in women, girls and boys. We call on everyone to mobilize together, everywhere in the world, against violence against women. We defend sexual diversity, the right to gender self-determination and we oppose all homophobia and sexist violence. We fight for peace and against war, colonialism, occupations and the militarization of our lands.

The imperialist powers use military bases to trigger conflicts, control and plunder natural resources, and support anti-democratic initiatives, as they did with the coup in Honduras and the military occupation of Haiti. They promote wars and conflicts as in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and many others.

We must intensify the fight against repression and the criminalisation of the people's struggles and strengthen the solidarity and initiatives between peoples, such as the Global Boycott Disinvestment and Sanctions Movement against Israel. Our struggle also aims at NATO and to ban all nuclear weapons.

Each of these struggles implies a battle of ideas in which we cannot progress without democratizing communication. We affirm that it is possible to build another kind of globalization, made from and by the people, and with the essential participation of the youth, the women, the peasants and indigenous peoples.

The Assembly of the Social Movements calls the forces and popular actors from all countries to develop two major mobilisations, coordinated on the international level, to participate in the emancipation and selfdetermination of the people and strengthen the struggle against capitalism.

Inspired by the struggles of the peoples of Tunisia and Egypt, we call for March 20th to be made a day of international solidarity with the uprisings of the Arab and African people, whose every advance sup-

ports the struggles of all peoples: the resistance of the Palestinian and Saharian peoples ; European, Asian and African mobilisations against debt and structural adjustment plans ; and all the processes of change underway in Latin America.

We also call for a Global Day of Action Against Capitalism on October 12th, when we express in

myriad ways our rejection of a system that is destroying everything in its path.

Social movements of the world, let us advance towards a global unity to shatter the capitalist system !

We shall prevail!

EGYPT/PAKISTAN

Two great victories in one night

FAROOQ TARIQ ·

Egypt: A Great Victory.

After 18 days of very brave protests and people's uprising in the streets of Cairo, Alexandria and all over Egypt, Hosni Mubarak, the dictator who oppressed and plundered the people and the country for more than thirty years, was forced to resign. It is a great victory of peoples power. Till last night, the dictator was not ready to go away, however, within 24 hours, the massive pressure of the movement, much greater than drone attacks, bullets and suicidal attacks, he had to go.

We salute the heroic people of Egypt in this hour of their great victory. It is the opening of a new chapter in the history of peoples power.

We congratulate the heroic struggle of the youth who came out in the streets and compelled the dictator to resign. It was them that made the history.

The people of the whole world join hands with the Egyptian people in celebrating this great victory. At the same time we hope the revolutionary people shall carry forward the great struggle so that the military which has taken over will not be allowed to take away this great victory from their hands.

Labour Party Pakistan extends revolutionary greetings and solidarity to the people of Egypt and assures them that we shall be with you in the great struggle for a people's Egypt.

Pakistan: a great victory of PIA workers

The four days of heroic struggle by the PIA workers made the Pakistan Peoples Party government had to accept all the demands of the striking workers. [1] Over 250 flights were cancelled during the four

days strike of PIA workers. It was a struggle by PIA workers to save PIA and their jobs.

The victory came with blood, sweat and tears of many thousands of workers including women workers of PIA. The brutal attack of the police this evening in Karachi with the help of the thugs of PPP Senator Abidy (misnamed as Peoples Unity) on PIA striking workers was one of the last act of desperation to defeat the strike.

The four day of strike of PIA workers was a classical example of unity among the different sections of one institution. It was this great unity of manual workers, engineers, pilots, air hostesses, booking officers, and administrative officers that defeated the PPP government strategy to run the PIA. All the efforts to split the movement by PPP government by creating new "Peoples Unity" were foiled by the sheer pressure of the real unity among the working class.

The Managing Director is gone. He was a professional pilot and his only qualification to become the managing director of PIA was his association with President Zardari. He acted as the hench man of the PPP leadership. If the Turkish deal had not been challenged by the workers, the PIA would have been lost for ever.

And what a hypocrisy of Ahmad Mukhtar, the defense minister while accepting the demands of the workers, he told the journalist that Turkish deal was brought into notice of defense ministry. He was the one who said the floor of the assembly that this is deal that PIA will benefit.

Why does the PPP always take bad decisions and then, under the immense power of the workers, change their mind? The answer is very simple. "If it works, we will take the benefit otherwise we will be

flexible" is the philosophy behind many such anti-workers anti-people decisions.

The PPP government took back the decision of privatization of coal and gas fields in Sindh after massive protests, it reinstated the judges when there was a mass movement that was not ready to back down till the acceptance of the demands.

The example of Karachi Electric Supply Corporation (KESC) 4000 workers was another incident where PPP and MQM leadership were making new lists of their cronies to give them jobs once these 4000 gone. Then the occupation of the offices forced all the parties to change their mind and withdrew their decision of termination.

ON PIA workers strike, no political party apart from Labour Party Pakistan took any practical step to show their solidarity with them. All the religious parties were making hue and cry of their "anti Americanism" while forgetting the real fight of the

workers against the friends of the Americans. When LPP activists went for Gherao of PIA headquarters in Lahore yesterday, a massive police presence was ensured by the local administration to harass the activists. It was the only demonstration in Pakistan by any political party in solidarity with the striking workers.

This victory will set a new mood among the working class in Pakistan. It is another victory of peaceful mass militant struggle. IT is reply to those who argue for bomb blasts, suicidal attacks, drone attacks and other military means to achieve their goals.

The victory of PIA workers will change the course of history in Pakistan as well. It is not an isolated incident. It has won the minds and souls of millions in Pakistan. It will set the trends of future struggle. It will be even more difficult for PPP government to implement on any portion of their neo liberal agenda of privatisation and other aspects.

CHINA

The Chinese equation

GILBERT ACHCAR ·

How should we judge the rise to power of China, positively or negatively?

That depends on the point of view that you start from. The rise to power of China will be judged in a different way according to whether you look at it from the point of view of the United States, of Europe, or the Third World. It will take on a different significance according to the perspective adopted, economic or politico-military. From an anti-imperialist point of view, one can say that the rise to power of China, insofar as it contributes to rebalancing a world that had become unipolar after the fall of the USSR, is unquestionably positive. From an economic standpoint, China, from the considerable weight that it has acquired in the world economy, plays an incontestably positive role. This could be verified again at the time of the last world economic crisis. The big question is to know whether this rise to power of China is likely to exacerbate a cold war dynamic which already exists, but which could be aggravated and lead to strong political and military tensions that would be dangerous for humanity.

Some experts envisage that in 2025 the American and Chinese economic curves will intersect. Is there not a risk of cold war and confrontation?

Some people envisage that it will happen even earlier than that. The Chinese economy once again experienced a very high growth rate in 2010, almost 10 per cent, provoking fresh fears of overheating. If this strong growth lasts, the intersection could thus take place very soon. We can see on this subject, on the Western side, a certain anguish, caused by seeing - for the first time since the emergence of industrial capitalism - a country with a political system that is different from that of the Western democracies becoming the leading economy in the world.

This is something completely new, in a world where this status was held by Great Britain in the nineteenth century and the United States since then, and up until today. Does this rise to power of China automatically imply a risk of cold war? From the point of view in international relations that is known as structuralist, the rise of a new power inevitably creates tension with the power that exists, within the framework of relationships of forces that are conceived of as a "zero sum game". I think however that it is not a question of structural inevitability, but of a political decision. In the last analysis, what is decisive is the attitude adopted by the power of the moment, namely the United States. The attitude of Washington is decisive: it has been up to now, and it is increasingly the case The United States, today as yesterday, tries to thwart this rise of China. They have put in place what is perceived, seen from Beijing, as a strategic encirclement. If they maintain this behaviour, the cold war dynamic, which already exists, will certainly become sharper. I entitled my 1999 book, published just after the war in Kosovo, "The New Cold War". This formula of "new cold war" designated the increasing tensions between Moscow and Beijing on the one hand and Washington on the other. The evolution of the international situation seems me to have confirmed this prognosis on the tendency of politico-military relations between these powers. With what was called the "unipolar moment", the triumphalism of the United States inspired a hegemonic policy not only towards the traditional vassals of Washington, but also towards Moscow and Beijing, and not only under the administration of George W. Bush, but since 1990-91. The conduct of this imperial policy by George W. Bush led to the disastrous balance-sheet that we know, even putting into question the credibility of the United States as a "superpower". The economic crisis has

further reinforced this loss of prestige. Today Washington is proceeding to a re-examination of its policy, with the Obama administration inclined to adopt a more conciliatory attitude with regard to Moscow and Beijing. In the long term, either Washington succeeds, in the interest of the whole world as well as that of the population of the United States, in adapting to an international *modus vivendi* on the basis of collective institutions, of the UN and international law, and the dynamics of cold war could be stopped; or else Washington, in particular after a change of personnel at the top (which is possible in the short term), continues to follow an aggressive policy on the borders of China and Russia, in which case it is obvious that the dynamics of cold war will intensify. For the moment, China is far from parity with the United States on the military level. The latter remains the leading world military power, and by a long chalk, spending in this field the equivalent of the expenditure of the rest of the world. Chinese military expenditure is very modest compared to American military expenditure. It is nevertheless progressing quickly, in parallel with the economic position of China. In this respect, it is the total volume of GDP which is decisive, and not GDP per capita, on which level China will remain for a long time yet far from the United States. US military expenditure amounts to almost 5 per cent of GDP, which is enormous. With China's GDP tending to catch up with, and soon surpass that of the United States, Beijing will be able soon to increase its military expenditure to the equivalent of Washington's, and even beyond. A new planetary arms race would increase considerably the already enormous volume of world military expenditure, to the detriment of the development and the wellbeing of populations, without forgetting that you do not accumulate armaments without that not leading to wars, direct or by proxy, in a climate of confrontation such as that which opposed the United States and the USSR.

Would a Chinese desire for hegemony be realizable, beyond a simple rebalancing with the United States?

The first question which should be posed is to know whether there really exists a Chinese desire for hegemony. Obviously for the hawks of the Western world, this desire is given as a starting postulate. But if we observe China's behaviour in a more neutral, more objective way, we really do not find evidence to support such a characterization. Admittedly the behaviour of China includes an unstoppable logic of economic expansion, in the sense that the dynamism of its economy and its exports provide it with an immense monetary reserve. And it needs fructify this reserve, no longer- or less and less - by acquiring American treasury bills, as it has done on a large scale over the last few years. China has in fact subsidized the deficit of the American budget. It has thus, to some extent, subsidized the armaments and the wars of the United States. The foreign-exchange reserves of Beijing are very close to 3000 billion dollars today, which is gigantic. China is doing today what the capitalist economies at the end of the nineteenth century did, in their "imperialist" mutation. As it has an enormous amount of money to invest, it is no longer satisfied to export goods, but increasingly exports capital, whether towards developing countries or towards Western economies, and even offers to re-inflate countries like Greece and Portugal. It hopes in return for better access to international markets, the development of commercial exchanges, privileged access to raw materials, and the political influence that goes with that. The loans for aid to development lavished by China today exceed those of the World Bank. On the military level however, that has not, or not yet, been expressed in the manner of the imperialism of the end of the nineteenth century, by militarism and gunboat diplomacy aimed at extending politico-military domination. There is not yet anything comparable in the attitude of China. China's priorities in the military sphere are primarily of a defensive nature: China's obsession today is encirclement by America. The United States controls the energy sources of China, in particular the Middle East on which China is much more dependent for its oil than is the United States. It is a striking paradox that China is the principal

customer of the Saudi kingdom, which is an American protectorate on the politico-military level. The United States has its hands on most of the taps which feed oil to China. It controls the maritime routes of China's trade. That obviously worries Beijing. China is surrounded by American military bases, from Central Asia and Afghanistan to Japan. It fears that the United States is seeking to compensate for or slow down its loss of economic supremacy by economic or other forms of obstruction, based on its military supremacy. American blackmail could thus affect energy sources, trade and many other aspects (technology, etc). In the field of naval power, the United States has an enormous force of projection: it has eleven aircraft carriers, whereas China does not have any. America's naval strength is a force of projection of power. That is not the case for China, whose logic is defensive. The Chinese are developing their fleet of submarines, which is the naval arm in which they come closest to parity, at least on the quantitative level, with what the United States has. They are in the course of developing a ground-to-sea ballistic missile against the US aircraft carriers. This is a way for them of avoiding American naval domination. I go back to the starting point of my argument: the ball is in the court of the United States, and the Americans are still able "to fashion the world" as they affirmed in their strategic documents of the 1990s. They still have the initiative; they are the ones who, up until now, set the rules of the game. Either they choose to adopt a new attitude, understanding that the "unipolar moment" was only an

ephemeral "moment", and that it is advisable to build a framework of peaceful international relations on the basis of collective institutions, with the rules of the game applicable to everyone. Or else they continue their foolish attempt to prevent any emergence of a strategic equal. In that case, the dynamics of cold war can only worsen and even degenerate.

Can't Europeans maintain closer relations with China, which could make it possible to loosen the grip of the United States?

This is in any case what Beijing wants. Its intervention to contribute to re-inflating the euro is part of its desire to promote a multipolar world, a desire that Moscow shares. Strategic multipolarity flows from economic multipolarity. China's currency is starting its mutation into an international currency. This economic approach shows that Beijing is well-disposed towards Europe, and that it wants to develop with it a partnership based on mutual interests. It is up to Europe to know how to grasp this outstretched hand. That implies calling into question its alignment behind the United States, which has lasted for decades. Europe could turn the page on this alignment behind Washington, and understand that another policy is essential in order to build a twenty-first century which cannot be a "new American century". It is a question of political choice, because there is no structural automatism. We are all directly concerned.

*Interview conducted by Jacques Le Dauphin,
January 2011*

IRELAND

Vote for the United Left Alliance

SOCIALIST DEMOCRACY ·

Vote for the United Left Alliance

We have been lied to, we have been cheated and we have been treated as fools. We have had our salaries cut, our pension money stolen, our taxes increased and social welfare cut. Our young people are emigrating and hundreds of thousands are unemployed. Social welfare is being slashed and our health and education services are being decimated.

And we are only into the first year of a four year plan to make all these things even worse!

We are being told that we must pay for the economic crisis even though we had nothing to do with creating it. In fact salt is being rubbed into our wounds because all the sacrifices we are being ordered to make are to save those really responsible for the crisis. The money that is taken off us is being handed over to the bankers and developers who created this mess in the first place. The bankers continue to pay themselves bonuses and NAMA hands our money over to property developers to finish their projects.

Why?

It is not only the bankers who created this mess. The Government encouraged the speculation and wants us to pay to save the banks. The Department of Finance and the Regulator failed to prevent the speculation. Every part of the establishment and the Irish State failed the ordinary people of Ireland.

Those who are supposed to defend us failed us. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions was in partnership with this Government every year Fianna Fail was in power. David Begg, the leader of ICTU, sat on the

Board of the Central Bank when it failed to regulate the banks and failed to do anything to prevent the disaster.

The whole elite and their economic system have failed us. Their entire political system is rotten and corrupt and now we are told we must do the bidding of unelected bureaucrats from the European Union and IMF. We don't just need a change of Government. We need an entirely new State and an entirely new social and economic system.

We need a new Republic, a second Republic, a WORKERS REPUBLIC! We need to return to the promise of James Connolly and the fight for our independence in 1916. It promised that the ownership of Ireland would belong to the people of Ireland and that all the children of Ireland would be cherished equally.

This promise has been betrayed. The economic crisis has torn away the veil of lies from all the main parties who want the ordinary people to pay for this crisis. From Fianna Fail to the leadership of ICTU they differ only over how long they want the cuts to be implemented and what precise cuts we will have to endure.

The alternative

There is only one group of candidates who oppose all cuts. One group that opposes us paying for the banks mistakes and who oppose sacrificing our futures and that of our children for the EU and IMF. Only the candidates of the United Left Alliance offer this. As supporters of the ULA:

* We are opposed to all cuts. All the main parties say that there is no money but this is not the real problem. All these parties supported borrowing billions to bail out the banks. We never heard any talk of a lack of money then. If they wanted to raise

money to defend working people they could propose taxing the rich, the big corporations and use the wealth from the Corrib gas field. Instead they want to protect the big corporations and save the richest in our society such as the bankers and property developers.

* We stand for total repudiation of the debt. We cannot pay it and we will not pay it! We did not borrow this money; the bankers did and Fianna Fail did. At this election we will show what we think of both of them. After the election we should not meekly pay their bills.

The next step in the EU/IMF deal is to restructure the banks but these rotten institutions should not be saved with workers' money. We need a new bank that not only is funded by working people but is owned and run by them; a workers co-operative designed not to fund property speculation but to fund real economic and social development.

* We stand for complete rejection of the EU and IMF deal. The EU and IMF are ordering the Irish people to bail out British and German bankers who stupidly lent to the Irish banks.

In every country workers are asked to undercut each other's wages, services and welfare in a race to the bottom from which only the rich can win. We should not compete with other workers. We should unite with them. Our solidarity should be with

those facing the same situation as us - not Irish bankers. For this we need a new Europe. A Europe of the workers not a Europe of the bankers.

We have waited a long time for this election. We all want to punish those who have threatened our future but we will be no further forward if we vote for parties which want to continue the same policies as Fianna Fail. These parties have conspired with Fianna Fail to force the Finance Bill through the Dail and impose crippling cuts. After the election they will soon tell you that the Fianna Fail way is the only way.

This is your chance to vote for an alternative. But your vote will not be enough. Just as we cannot rely on the Dail parties during the election we will have to rely on ourselves after it. We must organise in our unions and our communities to defend our livelihoods and give our children a future.

Only ONE group stands opposed to ALL cuts, to paying the debts of the BANKERS and opposing the bullying of the EU and IMF. Vote for and sign up to the United Left Alliance!

This leaflet has been produced by supporters of the United Left Alliance who are members and supporters of Socialist Democracy. You can contact us at Socialist Democracy and contact the United Left Alliance.

February 2011

EGYPT

Whither Egypt?

FAROOQ SULEHRIA ·

Do you think that Mubarak's pledge on February 1st not to contest the next election represented a victory for the movement, or was it just a trick to calm down the masses as on the very next day demonstrators in Al-Tahrir Square were brutally attacked by pro-Mubarak forces?

The Egyptian popular anti-regime uprising reached a first peak on February 1st, prodding Mubarak to announce concessions in the evening. It was an acknowledgement of the force of the popular protest and a clear retreat on the autocrat's part, coming on top of the announcement of the government's willingness to negotiate with the opposition. These were significant concessions indeed coming from such an authoritarian regime, and a testimony to the importance of the popular mobilisation. Mubarak even pledged to speed up ongoing judicial actions against fraud perpetrated during the previous parliamentary elections.

He made it clear, however, that he was not willing to go beyond that. With the army firmly on his side, he was trying to appease the mass movement, as well as the Western powers that were urging him to reform the political system. Short of resignation, he granted some of the key demands that the Egyptian protest movement had formulated initially, when it launched its campaign on January 25. However, the movement has radicalized since that day to a point where anything short of Mubarak's resignation won't be enough to satisfy it, with many in the movement even demanding that he gets tried in court.

Moreover, all the regime's key institutions are now denounced by the movement as illegitimate—the executive as well as the legislative, i.e. the parliament. As a result, part of the opposition is demand-

ing that the head of the constitutional court be appointed as interim president, to preside over the election of a constituent assembly. Others even want a national committee of opposition forces to supervise the transition. Of course, these demands constitute a radical democratic perspective. In order to impose such a thorough change, the mass movement would need to break or destabilise the regime's backbone, that is the Egyptian army.

Do you mean that the Egyptian army is backing Mubarak?

Egypt—even more than comparable countries such as Pakistan or Turkey—is in essence a military dictatorship with a civilian façade that is itself stuffed with men originating in the military. The problem is that most of the Egyptian opposition, starting with the Muslim Brotherhood, have been sowing illusions about the army and its purported "neutrality," if not "benevolence." They have been depicting the army as an honest broker, while the truth is that the army as an institution is not "neutral" at all. If it has not been used yet to repress the movement, it is only because Mubarak and the general staff did not see it appropriate to resort to such a move, probably because they fear that the soldiers would be reluctant to carry out a repression. That is why the regime resorted instead to orchestrating counter-demonstrations and attacks by thugs on the protest movement. The regime tried to set up a semblance of civil strife, showing Egypt as torn apart between two camps, thus creating a justification for the army's intervention as the "arbiter" of the situation.

If the regime managed to mobilise a significant counter-movement and provoke clashes on a larger scale, the army could step in, saying: "Game over, everybody must go home now," while promising that the pledges made by Mubarak would be imple-

mented. Like many observers, I feared these last two days that this stratagem might succeed in weakening the protest movement, but the huge mobilization of today's "day of departure" is reassuring. The army will need to make further and more significant concessions to the popular uprising.

When you talk of the opposition, what forces does it include? Of course, we hear about the Muslim Brotherhood and El Baradei. Are there are other players too like left wing forces, trade unions, etc?

The Egyptian opposition includes a vast array of forces. There are parties like the Wafd, which are legal parties and constitute what may be called the liberal opposition. Then there is a grey zone occupied by the Muslim Brotherhood. It does not have a legal status but is tolerated by the regime. Its whole structure is visible; it is not an underground force. The Muslim Brotherhood is certainly, and by far, the largest force in the opposition. When Mubarak's regime, under US pressure, granted some space to the opposition in the 2005 parliamentary elections, the Muslim Brotherhood—running as "independents"—managed to get 88 MPs, i.e. 20 percent of the parliamentary seats, despite all obstacles. In the last elections held last November and December, after the Mubarak regime had decided to close down the limited space that it had opened in 2005, the Muslim Brotherhood almost vanished from parliament, losing all its seats but one.

Among the forces on the left, the largest is the Tagammu party, which enjoys a legal status and has 5 MPs. It refers to the Nasserite legacy. Communists have been prominent within its ranks. It is basically a reformist left party, which is not considered a threat to the regime. On the contrary, it has been quite compliant with it on several occasions. There are also leftwing Nasserite and radical left groups in Egypt—small but vibrant, and very much involved in the mass movement.

Then there are "civil society" movements, like Kefaya, a coalition of activists from various opposi-

tion forces initiated in solidarity with the Second Palestinian Intifada in 2000. It opposed the invasion of Iraq later on, and became famous afterwards as a democratic campaign movement against Mubarak's regime. From 2006 to 2009, Egypt saw the unfolding of a wave of industrial actions, including a few impressively massive workers strikes. There are no independent workers unions in Egypt, with one or two very recent exceptions born as a result of the social radicalisation. The bulk of the working class does not have the benefit of autonomous representation and organization. An attempt at convening a general strike on April 6, 2008 in solidarity with the workers led to the creation of the April 6 Youth Movement. Associations like this one and Kefaya are campaign-focused groups, not political parties, and they include people of different political affiliations along with unaffiliated activists.

When Mohamed El Baradei returned to Egypt in 2009 after his third term at the head of the IAEA, his personal prestige enhanced by the 2005 Nobel Peace Prize, a liberal and left coalition gathered around him, with the Muslim Brotherhood adopting a lukewarm reserved position. Many in the opposition saw El Baradei as a powerful candidate enjoying international reputation and connections, and constituting therefore a credible presidential candidate against Mubarak or his son. El Baradei thus became a rallying figure for a large section of the opposition, regrouping political forces as well as personalities. They formed the National Association for Change.

This whole array of forces is very much involved in the present uprising. However, the overwhelming majority of the people on the streets are without any sort of political affiliation. It is a huge mass outpouring of resentment at living under a despotic regime, fed by worsening economic conditions, as prices of basic necessities, like food, fuel, and electricity, have been sharply on the rise amid staggering joblessness. This is the case not only in Egypt but in most of the region as well, and that is why

the fire of revolt that started in Tunisia spread so quickly to many Arab countries.

Is El Baradei genuinely popular, or is he in some way the Mir-Hossein Mousavi of the Egyptian movement, trying to change some faces while preserving the regime?

I would disagree with this characterisation of Mousavi in the first place. To be sure, Mir-Hossein Mousavi did not want to "change the regime" if one mean by that a social revolution. But there was definitely a clash between authoritarian social forces, spearheaded by the Pasdaran and represented by Ahmedinejad, and others coalesced around a liberal reformist perspective represented by Mousavi. It was indeed a clash about the kind of "regime" in the sense of the pattern of political rule.

Mohamed El Baradei is a genuine liberal who wishes his country to move from the present dictatorship to a liberal democratic regime, with free elections and political freedoms. If such a vast array of political forces is willing to cooperate with him, it is because they see in him the most credible liberal alternative to the existing regime, a man who does not command an organised constituency of his own, and is therefore an appropriate figurehead for a democratic change.

Going back to your analogy, you can't compare him with Mousavi who was a member of the Iranian regime, one of the men who led the 1979 Islamic revolution. Mousavi had his own followers in Iran, before he emerged as the leader of the 2009 mass protest movement. In Egypt, El Baradei cannot play, and does not pretend to play a similar role. He is supported by a vast array of forces, but none of them see him as its leader.

The Muslim Brotherhood's initial reserved attitude towards El Baradei is partly related to the fact that he does not have a religious bent and is too secular for their taste. Moreover, the Muslim Brotherhood had cultivated an ambiguous relationship with the regime over the years. Had they fully backed El Baradei, they would have narrowed their margin of negotiation with the Mubarak regime, with which

they have been bargaining for quite a long time. The regime conceded a lot to them in the socio-cultural sphere, increasing Islamic censorship in the cultural field being but one example. That was the easiest thing the regime could do to appease the Brotherhood. As a result, Egypt made huge steps backward from the secularisation that was consolidated under Gamal Abdul-Nasser in the 1950s and 1960s.

The Muslim Brotherhood's goal is to secure a democratic change that would grant them the possibility to take part in free elections, both parliamentary and presidential. The model they aspire to reproduce in Egypt is that of Turkey, where the democratisation process was controlled by the military with the army remaining a key pillar of the political system. This process nonetheless created a space which allowed the AKP, an Islamic conservative party, to win elections. They are not bent on overthrowing the state, hence their courting of the military and their care to avoid any gesture that could antagonize the army. They adhere to a strategy of gradual conquest of power: they are gradualists, not radicals.

The Western media are hinting at the fact that democracy in the Middle East would lead to an Islamic fundamentalist takeover. We have seen the triumphal return of Rached Ghannouchi to Tunisia after long years in exile. The Muslim Brotherhood is likely to win fair elections in Egypt. What is your comment on that?

I would turn the whole question around. I would say that it is the lack of democracy that led religious fundamentalist forces to occupy such a space. Repression and the lack of political freedoms reduced considerably the possibility for left-wing, working-class and feminist movements to develop in an environment of worsening social injustice and economic degradation. In such conditions, the easiest venue for the expression of mass protest turns out to be the one that uses the most readily and openly available channels. That's how the opposi-

tion got dominated by forces adhering to religious ideologies and programmes.

We aspire to a society where such forces are free to defend their views, but in an open and democratic ideological competition between all political currents. In order for Middle Eastern societies to get back on the track of political secularisation, back to the popular critical distrust of the political exploitation of religion that prevailed in the 1950s and 1960s, they need to acquire the kind of political education that can be achieved only through a long-term practise of democracy.

Having said this, the role of religious parties is different in different countries. True, Rached Ghannouchi has been welcomed by a few thousand people on his arrival at Tunis airport. But his Nahda movement has much less influence in Tunisia than the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Of course, this is in part because Al-Nahda suffered from harsh repression since the 1990s. But it is also because the Tunisian society is less prone than the Egyptian to religious fundamentalist ideas, due to its higher degree of Westernisation and education, and the country's history.

But there is no doubt that Islamic parties have become the major forces in the opposition to existing regimes over the whole region. It will take a protracted democratic experience to change the direction of winds from that which has been prevailing for more than three decades. The alternative is the

Algerian scenario where an electoral process was blocked by the army by way of a military coup in 1992, leading to a devastating civil war for which Algeria is still paying the price.

The amazing surge of democratic aspirations among Arab peoples of these last few weeks is very encouraging indeed. Neither in Tunisia, nor in Egypt or anywhere else, were popular protests waged for religious programs, or even led principally by religious forces. These are democratic movements, displaying a strong longing for democracy. Polls have been showing for many years that democracy as a value is rated very highly in Middle Eastern countries, contrary to common "Orientalist" prejudices about the cultural "incompatibility" of Muslim countries with democracy. The ongoing events prove one more time that any population deprived of freedom will eventually stand up for democracy, whatever "cultural sphere" it belongs to.

Whoever runs and wins future free elections in the Middle East will have to face a society where the demand for democracy has become very strong indeed. It will be quite difficult for any party—whatever its programme—to hijack these aspirations. I am not saying that it will be impossible. But one major outcome of the ongoing events is that popular aspirations to democracy have been hugely boosted. They create ideal conditions for the left to rebuild itself as an alternative.

GREECE

Statement of the assembly of migrant hunger strikers

The West that is depriving our countries while having much better living conditions is our only chance to live as humans. We came (either with regular entry or not) in Greece and we are working to support ourselves and our families. We live without dignity, in the darkness of illegality in order to benefit employers and state's services from the harsh exploitation of our labor. We live from our sweat and with the dream, some day, to have equal rights with our Greek fellow workers.

During the last period our life has become even more unbearable. As salaries and pensions are cut and everything is getting more expensive, the migrants are presented as those to blame, as those whose fault is the abjection and harsh exploitation of greek workers and small businessman. The propaganda of fascist and racist parties and groups is nowadays the official state discourse for issues of migration. The far right discourse is reproduced through media when they talk about us. The "proposals" of the far right are announced as governmental policies: wall in Evros, floating detention centers and European army in the Aegean, repression in the cities, massive deportations. They want to convince greek workers that, all in a sudden, we

are a threat to them, that we are to blame for the unprecedented attack from their own governments.

The answer to the lies and the cruelty has to be given now and it will come from us, from migrant men and women. We are going in the front line, with our own lives to stop this injustice. We ask the legalization of all migrant men and women, we ask for equal political and social rights and obligations with greek workers. We ask from our greek fellow workers, from every person suffering from exploitation to stand next to us. We ask them to support our struggle. Not to let the lie, the injustice, the fascism and the autarchy of the political and economic elites to be dominant in their own places too; all these conditions that are dominant in our countries and led us to migrate, us and our children, in order to be able to live with dignity.

We don't have another way to make our voices heard, to make you learn about our rights. Three hundred (300) of us will start a Hunger Strike in Athens and in Thessaloniki, in the 25th of January. We risk our lives, as, one way or another, this is no life for people with dignity. We prefer to die here rather our children to suffer what we have been through.

January 2011

Assembly of migrant hunger strikers

[link](#)