

International VIEWPOINT

International Viewpoint—magazine of the Fourth International

IV436 May 2011

LUXEMBOURG

Class struggle in a "haven of peace and social progress"

CANADA

The federal NDP's electoral breakthrough in Quebec: A challenge to progressives in Canada

DOSSIER

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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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SPANISH STATE

Camp Barcelona: V for victory

ESTHER VIVAS ·

An overwhelming police presence closed access to the square, hemming some three hundred people inside, to allow the municipal cleaning teams to begin to dismantle the camp. More than a thousand people turned out in solidarity with the camp, managing to "reconquer" the square and forcing the withdrawal of the police. There is no doubt about the brutality shown by the police during the attempted eviction. Despite the lies of the Minister of Interior of the Catalan Government, Felip Puig, the images speak for themselves. So does the result: more than 100 wounded, one person very seriously.

Police provocation? Error of calculation? Whatever the case, the movement has achieved a major political victory. The image of a nervous Felip Puig responding to journalists at his appearance before the press was a clear sign of the political and policing fiasco of the Catalan Government. More than the formal "reconquest" of the square, the triumph in the face of this first repressive attempt has given even more strength and energy to the activists and has only increased the sympathy they enjoy from the majority of the population. After a loss of media centrality last week, once the municipal and regional elections were over, the police attack on the camp in Barcelona has again given an important visibility to the movement of "los indignados".

More than 12,000 people, according to media figures, went to the plaza Catalunya on Friday evening. Before, at 5 pm, several thousand took part in a march against public health cuts, convened by the platform of "indignant," health workers, departing from the monument to Columbus and culminating with a triumphal entry into the plaza Catalunya. Without a doubt, the assembly

held at the end of the day was the biggest since the movement began. The most prominent slogans conveyed a very clear political message: "We won't move from Plaza Catalunya!", "Felip Puig resignation", "Here begins the revolution!". The concentrations in the camps in the rest of the Spanish state have been also more numerous over the past few days. Anti-repressive solidarity has given new impetus to the movement, after a week in which tiredness had accumulated.

It is impossible to know how long the camps and assemblies in the squares will last, but this is not a temporary or isolated movement. It is the tip of the iceberg of an accumulated social unrest that is beginning to become a mobilization. The camps and occupations of the squares should not be analyzed as ends in themselves. They act now simultaneously as symbolic reference points and base of operations, a lever to propel future mobilizations and a loudspeaker to amplify ongoing struggles. Throughout the week, several sectors in struggle have participated in the activities of our particular "Tahrir square" in Barcelona, including: collectives in favour of the right to decent housing and families under threat of eviction, workers from Telefónica in the fight of the announcement by the company of 6,000 lay-offs and students and university workers in protest against cuts in higher education, whose mobilisation on Thursday May 26 mobilization was more than impressive taking into account that we are at the end of courses and on the eve of exams.

Almost two weeks after 15M and the beginning of the camps the movement of our small "May 2011" faces several challenges. The first, to continue territorializing, building the assemblies in the neighbourhoods and cities and encouraging popular self-organisation. The second, to increase efforts to seek

ties with the working class, workplaces in struggle and combative trades unionism and thus keeping the pressure on major unions, baffled by a movement that they did not expect and which radically challenges their orientation towards social dialogue. The third, completing the momentum of the camps with a unifying date of powerful mobilization in the Spanish state as a whole and, as far as

possible, at the international level. Hence the need to start working on June 19 as the date for global mobilization launched by the Barcelona camp.

Today has been decisive for breathing energy, raise new solidarities and redoubling the motives of indignation. It is important now to think strategically and collectively about the next step.

28th of May, 2011

JAPAN

May Day - fighting for denuclearisation

TERRY CONWAY ·

In Onahama on May Day 350 workers participated in the demonstration in the rehabilitation struggle from the damage of the earthquake and tsunami. Onahama is the southeastern industrialized port area of Iwaki city, which is located at the southeastern coastal part of Fukushima prefecture, and Onahama area is 50km south of the Fukushima No.1 nuclear plant.

The rally of the "2nd Onahama Mayday in the Rehabilitation Struggle" was held under the sponsorship of the Onahama branch of Zenkouwan (All Japan Harbor Workers Union: AJHWU) and unions of the Onahama Area Council of Unions at the Onahama Yokomachi Park on May 1, and 350 workers, including stevedores and transport workers of the port, gathered at the rally.

At the ad hoc Mayday committee, there was a proposal to refrain from the rally, demonstration and barbecue event voluntarily due to the earthquake/tsunami and the nuke disaster, but the committee agreed to go ahead with the rally and demonstration, affirming the absolute necessity of workers' struggle for their own and popular causes in dealing with the earthquake/tsunami disasters, nuke crisis and radiation threat, and unemployment problems.

Mayday rally paid a silent tribute to all the victims of the disasters at its outset.

Mr. Niizuma, president of the Onahama branch of Zenkouwan (AJHWU), gave a speech to the rally in the name of the Mayday committee, and he asserted: "Let's press the firms and administrative bodies. And the first step is nothing other than the unity and solidarity of workers."

Mr. Matsumoto, general secretary of the AJHWU, took the podium as an invited participant, and he said: "Rengo (Japanese Trade Union Confederation: JTUC) can do nothing. It is dominated by the unions of nuke-related businesses, and it has just adopted a pro-nuke resolution. But the Onahama Mayday rally here is held under the banner of denuclearization. Major construction firms are said to have begun their collusions to grab the rehabilitation concessions. Rehabilitation of workers' ordinary lives is the real rehabilitation: there will not be the real rehabilitation without workers' active interventions."

Mr. Yutaka Suzuki, president of the Onahama Area Council of Unions, presented his relative's serious state of damages, and said: "my cousin of fisherman is still missing. These are our actual situation, from which we have to start our rehabilitation efforts."

Mr. Ryou'ichi Hattori, lower-house deputy of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), took the podium and stated: "We stand for no-Nuke energy policy. We will work for denuclearization together with you."

After the solidarity messages of the SDP and JCP representatives, a representative of a Zenkoku-Ippan (National Union of General Workers: NUGW) union presented various resolutions to the rally, and he reported that his union set up its labor-counselling desk immediately after the earthquake/tsunami, that a lot of workers visited the desk for its counselling, which showed that there were numerous cases of labor-standard violations and wrongful dismissals under the pretext of the disasters. He also reported on a nuke-plant worker's case: the worker was asked to go to the workplace, although he himself was much reluctant to do so. Finally, he concluded his speech, asserting

that the worst disasters were job losses and radiation-exposed labor.

At the rally, Ox-Tiger Brigade, a disaster-relief group of the metropolitan area, gave its ardent solidarity message, and a member of the group sang a song for rehabilitation efforts.

Finally, the rally adopted the proposed resolutions, and the participants marched through the streets of Onahama.

Japan: Let's defend our lives and employment through the unity and solidarity among workers !Let's steer for a denuclearized society!

NUGW Iwaki Freedom Union of Workers

Having survived the two natural disasters of earthquake and tsunami, lost family members, dwellings and household goods, we are now confronted with the two human disasters of radiation exposure and unemployment.

The radiation is wrecking local communities and depriving workers of their means of living.

The tsunami devastated the whole coastal area, and the Onahama port got crushing damages, too.

Immediately after the earthquake/tsunami, dismissal begun to spread at the port, and Iwaki Tuh'un, a transport company which has many subcontracting firms, forced all its subcontractors to dismiss their workers even without severance pays.

Dismissed workers came to our labor counselling desk, and our union and fellow unions waged their protest/resistance campaigns against the dismissals. In the end, we have been successful in realizing the continuation of employment at all the subcontracting firms with making use of the public subsidy to defray the costs to layoffs.

The similar activities are spreading among the unions of the Onahama Area Council of Unions, and this public subsidy machinery has become an important means to prevent dismissals.

Opportunistic, piggybacking nonpayment of wages and dismissal of workers are spreading in the disaster-stricken areas. It is only the power of workers union, unity and solidarity among workers that can confront with those anti-worker practices of business firms. Especially the unity and solidarity among those workers who rallied to the Onahama Mayday actions should be our start line.

Workers should unite!

We should fight for defense of those workers who have suffered their worst disaster of dismissal.

Let's wage our struggle against outrageous offensive dismissals!

Let's press the government and Tepco to guarantee the money to live on for all the workers!

Workers should unite!

Let's press the government and Tepco to accept their duty to finance the rehabilitation of local communities, industries, agriculture and fishery!

We cannot accept any rehabilitation without employment!

Let's secure jobs for the unemployed workers through rehabilitation projects!

Eliminate the special interest groups, and establish workers and disaster-sufferers' monitoring over the rehabilitation projects!

Workers should unite!

Let's demand public and lifetime healthcare for those who are engaged in the radiation-exposure labor!

The present system of society is premised on victimization of workers' health, as is clear from the radiation-exposed labor at the site of nuke disaster: let's change the very social system!

Let's demand decommission of all the nukes!

Let's steer for denuclearization and demand a thorough and radical review of the energy policy!

Let's press the Rengo (JTUC) to retract its pro-nuke resolution!

Let's fight together for decommission of nukes!

Workers of the world, unite! Long live the Mayday!
Let's fight together!

NUGW Iwaki Freedom Union of Workers is an autonomous collective of workers, which is engaged in some interior-decoration works as it's earning activities for the membership, and this collective is also a constituent union of the NUGW (National Union of General Workers) and it carries out the labor-counselling activities. The Freedom Union of Workers was founded originally by those workers, who occupied their workplace and waged their self-management struggle in opposition to the close-down attack by the management in the 1990s.

Solidarity Message to the May Day Rallies

Northeastern NTUC

Task Force on Big Earthquake Disaster in Eastern Japan, Northeastern ZENROKYO

We would like to extend our solidarity message from Northeastern region of Japan, to all the workers in the May 1 rallies.

Last March 11 the big earthquake and tsunami attacked the Pacific coast of the Northeastern region, and destroyed the vast areas. It is allegedly caused by extensive crustal movement which was 500 kilometers broad from north to south, and 200 kilometers from east to west. The death and missing toll has reached almost 30,000, and is increasing day by day. 130,000 sufferers still live in the evacuation centers.

The weak people in the stricken areas, like hospitalized patients, in-home patients, and people in the nursing homes, now live in extreme anxiety under rampant aftershocks and suffer from the continuous "second damage." Not only sooner relief and recovery of living conditions, but revitalized hope, solidarity, and symbiosis to survive are required as

well. Along the coast areas which used to be one of the most abundant fishing ground in Japan, countless houses, together with fishing industry, marine-product industry, agriculture were destroyed, and so many public institutions were lost that local government faculty was vastly damaged.

Further, the violent quake and huge tsunami hit the nuclear power plants built on the coasts of Northeastern and Northern Kantoh regions, northeastern part of Japan. The Fukushima No.1 nuke power plant was severely damaged. Owing to the misjudgment and mishandling by the TEPCO (Tokyo Electric Power Corporation), Nuclear Safety Commission, Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA), and the Japanese government, it was declared to be under serious nuclear crisis at level 7. The DPJ (Democratic Party of Japan)-led Kan administration failed to order timely evacuation, to cope with radioactive pollution, and to work out with local governments, which has put residents in despair and anger. We hence demand the DPJ government to tackle with its all might and solve the nuke plant disaster as soon as possible.

It is obvious that the pro-nuke position of the previous successive LDP (Liberal Democratic Party) administrations and the business elites, should be condemned. The president of Japan Business Federation had praised the Japanese nuke plants, saying that Japanese nuke plants are so excellent that they can survive the tsunami,' and, after the disaster, the president is quoted as saying that the safety standard of the government was too loose' and that the government should take responsibility for the compensation of the nuke plant disaster': he is protecting TEPCO and radioactive industry and defending the nuke-energy policy. The truth is that there have been researchers who cautioned against danger of the big earthquake and tsunami, and, in particular, the danger of the Fukushima No.1 Power Plant have been pointed out by many

people. We should not allow the politicians, business circle, and commentators to evade the responsibility on the pretext that the disaster was beyond anticipation.'

Hence, let's confront and contain the business circle, electric power industry, nuke-plant-related industry, METI (The Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry), university/academy, mass media which have been promoted nuke power plants. In solidarity with people of the world over, let's set to change the society into one without nuke power plants.

Let's not allow the politically motivated move to take advantage of the rehabilitation' process. We should counter those proposals which seek to 'take this chance to change the agriculture of the Northeastern region in accordance with U.S.-led TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership) frame' or 'reconsolidate the current local governmental system of prefectures and municipalities into larger administrative units.' Let's advance various kind of activi-

ties to protect livings and jobs of workers who are exposed to massive dismissal by rampant shutdown, bankruptcy in the stricken region, and increasing arbitrary dismissal by the excuse of the disaster nationwide. Lastly, we would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to plenty of encouragement and support from Japan and the world over. We know it will take long time and much effort from now on, but the people in the stricken areas have risen up in the ruin and started to rebuild their livings, labor, industries and communities. We Northeastern-ZENROKYO share the sense of despair and hope with stricken residents and will proceed onward. In sincere hope for successful May 1 Rally and Unity of the Workers of the World.'

The first two pieces are translated from the May-16 issue of the Kakehashi, JRCL/NCIW joint weekly. The third, Northeastern NTUC - is a slightly edited version of the original English text at: <http://nugw.kir.jp/2011/archives201...>

SPANISH STATE

"Nothing will be as it was before"

MIGUEL ROMERO ·

What was at the origin of this extraordinary mobilisation which is shaking the Spanish state?

To understand, we need to go back to the general strike of September 29, 2010, against the proposed pensions reform. In relation to what we had known in previous years, the strike had been a success. Around a quarter of the population participated. You should be aware that the number of strikes has fallen in recent years in the Spanish state; there is a permanent dialogue between the trade unions and the employers on wages and all the other questions. The strike marked a social remobilisation then.

But a media offensive was immediately launched presenting the movement as a setback. The union leaderships were strongly affected by this campaign and the mobilisation remained without follow up. It is not certain that a new strike call would have met with success, but it would have sent a message of determination and courage: "we remain opposed to the project of the government". Instead of that, the unions negotiated with the government and accepted the pensions reform in return for some minor modifications.

The balance sheet was very heavy for the world of labour: those now active aged 40 -45, when they retire, will draw a pension 20% lower than the current one. This agreement sowed frustration but also passivity in the workers' movement. However, it led to anger among the youth who had supported the strike, solidarised with the pickets and so on. The idea spread that there was nothing to expect from the majority union. As to the minority unions, like the CGT, they have little weight. They would have the strength to become a point of reference, but their sectarian line prevents them doing this. They are content with a declaration. The conditions were

thus met for an initiative to emerge from the youth themselves.

What sectors are at the base of the movement?

In early 2011, you could sense a certain tension in the universities. But at the level of the anti-capitalist left, we were fairly pessimistic. We noted above all the absence of perspectives: the social impasse continued. In March, in Portugal, a "Precarious Youth" appeal was launched on the internet and led to an extraordinary demonstration of 250,000 persons, in Lisbon. The demonstration had very little political content: "We are humiliated"; "We are the best trained generation and we are unemployed or in precarious jobs". But the number of demonstrators was impressive.

This example had an immediate effect in the Spanish universities, notably in Madrid. We should say that unemployment affects nearly 20% of the population, or 4.9 million people. Unemployment among those under 25 is 40.5%. Most young people between 20 and 30 survive thanks to little jobs, on 600 euros per month. They are not then in a situation to have a life independent of the family.

Thus around a hundred students formed the group "Jovenes sin future" ("Youth without a future"). The platform described itself as an initiative of youths "Sin curro, sin casa, sin pension, sin miedo" ("Without job, without house, without pension, without fear"). The most important in this list is "sin miedo". I interviewed these youths at the time, for "Viento Sur". These are intelligent and modest persons. Their platform called for a demonstration for April 7. A few hundred people were expected. There were 4,000 to 5,000.

The success of the demonstration of April 7th led the organisers to call another, for May 15.

Meanwhile another group appeared: "Democracia real ya" ("A real democracy now!"). Its platform was very weak politically. At the social level, they condemned unemployment, the dictatorship of the market, and so on. But at the political level they described themselves as "neither right nor left". On the radical left, this initiative appeared as very suspect, because today in the Spanish state we face a very aggressive right. Moreover, nobody knew the initiators of this group.

Initially, "Democracia real ya" was exclusively Madrid-based. Appeals were also launched in other towns. Rallies were very modest elsewhere, but in Madrid the demonstration drew 20,000 to 25,000 people. It was a very combative and joyous cortege, very different from traditional demonstrations, which are boring. The demonstration ended at Puerta del Sol, with speeches very much to the left, very critical of the majority unions, made not by youths but by personalities, notably Carlos Taibo – a libertarian academic.

There was a small group from the black blocks in the demonstration, as is often the case. They provoked incidents. But the repression was very strong. Fourteen of them were arrested. That led to an immediate solidarity against the police. At that point a series of people, totally unknown, unorganised, had a fantastic idea: organising a camp the next day at Puerta del Sol. The initiative was very inspired, but it could seem bizarre. There were barely twenty or thirty people remaining on the ground. Yet the initiative snowballed. Initially dislodged from the square by the police, the morning of May 16, about a hundred people were brought to court. In the afternoon, several hundred, in fact several thousand people gathered at Puerta del Sol.

Sympathy from the people was huge. The rallies every evening at 8 pm swelled: 15,000, then 20,000 people. Immediately, the electoral campaign was completely transformed. Rallies were organised in more than a hundred towns. A town like Valencia, which is rather right wing, saw a rally of 10,000 on May 20. This hasn't been seen for a very long time. Recently there were 15,000 demonstra-

tors in Barcelona, 30,000 in Madrid – so many that access to the square was no longer possible.

The rally on Friday was forbidden by the Electoral Board. The minister of the Interior then gave the order to disperse people but it wasn't possible. This minister, Rubalcaba, is a politician without principles, but intelligent. He was close to Felipe Gonzales and was at the origin of the GAL [1]. He said "in reality, the function of the police is to resolve problems, not create them. Dissolving a demonstration of 30,000 people is to create a still bigger problem. The police should intervene only in case of conflict. Indeed, there is no conflict". Rubalcaba acted intelligently while playing his personal card, since he was a candidate at the elections. The people feared an expulsion of the demonstrators after midnight. At 2 am, the police withdrew: there was an explosion of joy. Another fact to note is that there were solidarity rallies in 538 towns around the world!

Who leads this movement? Is its content now clearer? What is the role of women? And that of immigrants?

The coordination involves around 60 people. They were aged from 25 to 28. These are graduates with good professional qualifications, unemployed, precarious, suffering poor work conditions, without political experience or affiliation. There were no students among them. In the rallies, there were very few youths from the popular neighbourhoods. To avoid giving the image of being a city centre movement the Madrid coordination decided to go into these neighbourhoods. As for the Manifesto it was quite good. It favours the nationalisation of the banks, the protection of the unemployed and so on. It also opposes the electoral law. It is a programme of democratic and social reforms. Ecology is there, though in a marginal way. There is no huge anti-capitalist consciousness. The slogan "a-a-a-anticapitalista" is often taken up in the demonstrations, but without great ideological content.

A lot of women are involved in the movement but the feminist movement is absent as are feminist de-

mands: there are many posters or cards relating to May 68, but not one on a feminist question. It is worrying. It is perhaps a result of the fact that the feminist movement in Spain has over the past 30 years turned around specifically women-related questions. The word "woman" is even absent from the Manifesto. The same goes for the young immigrants: there are many in the movement, but not in the coordination. All the spokespersons are native to Spain [2].

How do you see the perspectives of the movement?

Barring a surprise, the elections will give a big victory to the right, who will win in numerous regions and municipalities, and thus a defeat for the PSOE. It will be interesting to see the results of Izquierda Unida (IU). IU has tried to appear as the political expression of the movement. It is very opportunist, because IU is an institutional left, and not anti-capitalist. The polls give IU 6 to 8% of the vote. If they gain more than 8%, it will be an effect of the movement. IU plans a meeting with the leadership of the movement. There is a certain danger there. IU has no possibility of hegemonising the movement, because it is not an activist

organisation, but rather a sectarian and institutional one. But the institutional weight could appear interesting to the leadership of the movement, who could believe that they will thus have a voice in Parliament. That would represent a risk for the independence and radicalism of the mobilisation. The unions have also requested a meeting. In fact, the movement has become a political reference for everyone.

A question which will be posed now: "What next for the camps?" It needs to be raised, but it will be the subject of a debate, and other initiatives should take up the impetus, notably initiatives aimed at the popular neighbourhoods. The media say "it's over", as do the sociologists. They shouldn't be believed. I am perhaps too optimistic, but it seems to me unlikely that the movement will disappear. It involves too many people, too many youths who

think that this is "my movement", and who wish that "the struggle continues".

In Portugal, the big demonstration of 250,000 was not followed up. Here, the originality is that of a movement in an electoral period, whose most popular slogan is "PSOE, PP, la misma mierda es" (PSOE, PP, it's the same shit"), and which becomes a reference point for the majority of people. The enthusiasm is huge. The (correct) idea is that "nothing will be as it was before", that all will be better than before. For our current (young, non-sectarian, non-doctrinaire, closely linked to the social movements) it is an opportunity. But to continue will be difficult.

A key condition for the movement to continue is that it grows and makes links with other social movements: the women's movement, the ecologist movement and of course the workers' movement. That requires a medium term perspective, an accumulation of forces, and inputs from outside of the movement. We had a negative experience in 2009, with a very strong movement on the housing question: it could not continue due to internal dissensions provoked by sectarians. Movements of this type can only last if they are unitary.

Has there been any input from trade union sectors?

There is no left current in the big unions and the CGT [3] is marginal. There is then nothing other unhappily than the statements of leaders in favour of the movement (they could not do otherwise). There have been no communiqués of solidarity from the workplace committees or from workplaces on strike. Thus the movement is completely new, without any link with existing mobilisations [4].

What is the impact of the Arab revolutions? One notes a certain resemblance in the forms of action...

There is certainly an echo of the Arab revolutions from the viewpoint of the occupation of public space and the means of communication. The courage of the demonstrators is also something

which has been impressive. But while a comrade has spoken to me of "Tahrir Square in Barcelona" we should not exaggerate: there is no comparison from the viewpoint of the toughness of the struggle!

How should anti-capitalist activists act?

We have been present at the rallies since the beginning. Before, we were already present in "Jovenes sin future". On the contrary, we were completely

outside "Democracia real ya", like all other political currents. We have then participated in the drawing up of the Manifesto. We have very good relations with the non-sectarian autonomous current, which is very present in the movement. In a general way, it is necessary to be very prudent and reserved, notably in relation to self-affirmation: flags, stickers and so on.

PAKISTAN

"Raise our wages and pension!"

FAROOQ TARIQ ·

Speaking on the occasion, Irshad Ahmad, president of the powerful All Pakistan Clerical Staff Association (APCA) representing over 2 million clerical staff, warned the government of a total strike at government offices by the clerical staff if the wage is not increased. He also announced a massive Dharna in Islamabad on 28th May 2011.

Zafar Iqbal, president of National Organisation of Postal Employees (NOPE) representing over 20,000 postal workers in Pakistan, spoke against the proposed privatization of the postal services. "We will not accept any form of privatization, the government is trying to sell this most economical form of postal service in Pakistan available to the people and hand over to the multi national companies who are eyeing on the buildings of post offices at prime places of Pakistan" he said. We will fight together with Labour Party Pakistan and other organisation to defeat the government, he said.

Hasan Rana, general secretary Pakistan Telecommunication Employees union CBA, spoke about the termination of all PTCL main workers leaders because of their fight for better wages. "the privatization of PTCL meant massive job losses, termination of trade union activities, and lowering of the wages" Rana said.

Mukhtar Bukhari, president of the Workers' Action Committee of the privatized Habib Bank, demanded from the Chief Justice of Pakistan to hear the pending case against the privatization of the Bank. He said that 2300 workers of Habib Bank are fighting against termination of their services from the bank.

Zafar Iqbal Chitta, president of the All Pakistan Para Medical Staff Federation, representing over

80,000 para medical staff, explained the worsening conditions of the workers in the hospitals. "The lower staff is been totally ignored in the recent package of Rupees five billion for the doctors and nurses" he said. "there is no trade union rights for the health workers in Pakistan, the administration of different hospitals issued termination notices to the employees if they join this rally" he told the gathering. " we have defied these orders to join our brothers and sisters.

Riffat Maqsood, general secretary of the Women Workers' Help Line, spoke about the worsening condition of the people living in shanty towns. She criticized the recent so called anti encroachment campaign by Punjab government and said that this has laid many thousands workers out of their jobs and petty business. She explained the situation of the women workers and said we are proud that over 500 women workers are participating this rally of the Labour Party Pakistan.

Mushtaq Aasi, president of the Sweepers' Union, Lahore, spoke against the privatization of the sanitation system of Lahore. "Sweepers are worst paid workers and they are not treated with dignity. we are workers and demand dignity like all other workers, he speaking on behalf of over 10,000 workers mainly from Christian community.

Latif Insari, senior vice president of Labour Qaumi Movement Faisalabad, told the gathering of the continued imprisonment of the four labour leaders. "We have been sitting in a protest camp for the last 24 days in front of the jail in Faisalabad. On 1st of June massive protest rally will be taken out in Faisalabad against the arrest of the four," he told the gathering.

Dr Lal Khan, head of Pakistan Trade Union Defence Campaign, editor of Asian Marxist Review

and the main leader of the International Marxist Tendency, spoke about the solidarity of the working class in Pakistan and said that capitalism has failed to solve any of the basic problems of the people of Pakistan. "We are united in our fight against privatization and we will lend full support for this campaign of better wages and pension," he said.

Comrade Irfan, one of the main leaders of Communist Mazdoor Kissan Party, demanded an acceptance of the demands or face the music of the working class.

Khalid Mehmood, director of the Labour Education Foundation, spoke of the need of radical programme for the trade unions and need for more education and study circles for the unions to enable them to understand their rights and a way out to fight for workers rights.

Niaz Khan, general secretary of the Itehad Carpet Workers Union and general secretary of the National Trade Union Federation, said, "We have brought over 30 trade unions together for this sit in. This is a historic step forward in the unity of the working class and Left forces in Lahore."

Yousaf Baluch, Chairman National Trade Union Federation, congratulated every one on this fine expression of the unity of the trade unions in Lahore. "The NTUF will play its role along Labour Party Pakistan and other Left wing forces to bring all the fighting trade unions under one platform."

Mustansar Javed, president of the Railway Workers Union Workshop division representing over 20,000 workers, demanded an end of contract system and permanent jobs for all employees.

I spoke about the need to cut military expenditures, non-payment of foreign loans to enable the government to pay more for the working class and condemned the attitude of the Punjab administration for their anti-worker tendencies and said we are ending this Dharna, but not our struggle, "There will be more such events in Lahore, this is the beginning of the labour movement along with Left forces in the city." I thanked all the Left wing groups to join this rally and particularly the trade unions who opted to protest under the banner of a political party. This is beginning of a new era of class struggle. There will be more dharnas in Islamabad on 27th and 28th May.

The rally ended on a good note after three hours. Most of the electronic and print media was there including five live coverage wagons of GEO, Dunia, Express, Samma and ARY. The rally and Dharna will force the government to listen what the workers are demanding at present. I refused to meet the Speaker of the Punjab Assembly planned for 25th May and said the finance minister should come and speak to us. We ended the Dharna on our own and decided to continue the struggle in coming days and weeks.

JAPAN

Great East Japan Earthquake/Tsunami and Fukushima Nuke Disaster:

JAPANESE REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST LEAGUE ·

The unprecedentedly large-scale and grave combination of the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster has exposed the incompetence and irresponsibility of the bourgeois government and the electricity business, and the basic contradiction of the class society where it is necessarily the exploited, oppressed and discriminated who are to suffer the greatest damages: the contradiction has been intensified outrageously by the whole process of neoliberal globalization.

Our comrades of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures, sufferers of the disasters themselves, have been in full mobilization for varied activities to support disaster-hit inhabitants, to oppose the dismissals of workers ensued from the earthquake/tsunami, to campaign for preventing deterioration of nuclear damages and decommissioning the nuke plants, and to struggle for rehabilitation of local communities. Comrades and co-workers of non-stricken areas have participated in the on-site activities. Their campaigns and activities are now becoming a part of the currently expanding popular mobilization against the nuke-energy policy and for denuclearization.

The ESSF (Europe solidaire sans frontieres) financial-solidarity campaign, initiated by the appeal Antinuclear solidarity, financial solidarity... by Pierre Rousset and Danielle Sabai, seconded by our JRCL/NCIW international appeal Japanese organisations call for solidarity, has got rather favorable international responses. We have got the financial aid of 11,745 Euros (about 1,400,000 Yens) [More are going to be transfered] as contributions from comrades, friends, and fraternal groups and organi-

zations of Taiwan, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Republic of the Congo, France, Germany, England, Quebec and Asia at large. These contributions are genuine expressions of internationalism, and we greatly appreciate those internationalist contributions, and many thanks especially for the ESSF comrades' efforts.

The half of all the contribution has been handed to the Tohoku Zenroukyou (Northeastern NTUC – National Trade Union Council), and the Northeaster NTUC workers are utilizing the international contribution for disaster relief activities and organizing workers and popular resistances and campaigns against the workers dismissals and other social attacks.

The other half of the international contribution is to be handed to the workers group of Iwaki city, Fukushima prefecture, and those workers are to utilize the contribution for procuring necessary devices to carry out an independent measurement of radiation and propagate the radioactive information among the local population.

We are determined to strengthen and expand our activities, bearing the solidarity contributions from the international friends and comrades firmly in mind. We repeat: great thanks to all of you.

May 17, 2011

International donations are collected via Europe solidaire sans frontières (ESSF), Europe in Solidarity Without Borders:

Cheques:

Cheques to ESSF in euros only to be sent to:

ESSF

2, rue Richard-Lenoir	93100 Montreuil
93100 Montreuil	France
France	ESSF, account number 445757C
Bank Account:	International bank account details :
Crédit lyonnais	IBAN : FR85 3000 2005 2500 0044 5757 C12
Agence de la Croix-de-Chavaux (00525)	BIC / SWIFT : CRLYFRPP
10 boulevard Chanzy	Account holder : ESSF

QUEBEC

Building the political left in Quebec

BERNARD RIOUX ·

The political configuration of Quebec

Quebec is the second most populous province of Canada, with 7 million inhabitants, mainly French-speaking. The constitution of the Canadian state provides for sectors such as education and health to be under provincial jurisdiction. In Quebec, the national question (the opposition between federalism and sovereignty) has structured political life for the last fifty years, but we are now seeing a process of political recomposition on a left-right axis.

In Quebec, the Liberal Party (PLQ) has been in power since 2003. It is a federalist party, representing the Canadian bourgeoisie and strongly supported by the English-speaking population, including immigrants. Discredited by corruption scandals, its main strength remains the weakness of its adversaries.

The official opposition is formed by the Parti Québécois (PQ), a split from the Liberal Party which defends sovereignty-association with the Canadian state. Since the 1970s, the PQ has channelled social mobilizations towards the sovereigntist cause. Neoliberal and having postponed any concrete fight for sovereignty to the Greek Calends, the PQ is led by members of the small and middle Québécois bourgeoisie. The programme of the current leader of the PQ seems to consist of waiting for her turn in government. Several former leaders of the PQ, linked to federalist leaders, are promoting the neoliberal project under the name of the "lucid" group.

Democratic Action of Quebec (ADQ) is an "autonomist" party, in other words neoliberal and nationalist without being independentist. This party was

momentarily the main official opposition party in 2007, after having used the question of "reasonable compromises" [1] to promote its xenophobic discourse. ADQ is present in certain regions. We should also note that we are witnessing a rise of the Right in various forms, backed up by radical right-wing radios, neoliberal "think tanks" and supported by the concentration of the media in two great monopolies. The core of its discourse is centred on a phobia for public debt, the "generational shock" (the legacy of the debt and the payment of pensions) and on the waste of public money by the state.

Lastly, Quebec Solidaire (QS) is a new left party, which we will describe later. Gauche socialiste (Socialist Left, GS) [2] is one of the collectives (tendencies) recognized within Quebec Solidaire. We should underline here the historical disjunction between the existence of important social movements and the absence of a left party in Quebec since the end of the Second World War. The rise of social struggles in the period 1995-2005 made possible the emergence of a political alternative to the Parti Québécois.

Quebec less affected by the present crisis

Let us add that, on the economic level, Quebec, the society with the most socialized economy in North America, has been less affected by the crisis than the rest of the West. In fact, a manufacturing crisis has already occurred with the rise of the Canadian dollar under the effect of the oil exports of Alberta. This rise has also had negative effects on the forestry industry. During the period preceding the recession, Quebec had already lost 120,000 jobs, that is to say almost one in five. The wave of closures and lay-offs continues. The forestry crisis has been caused especially by overexploitation, by the

supine attitude of the federal government in the face of American violations of the free trade agreement of and by the situation of under-investment maintained by the companies concerned.

There has been, despite everything, a contraction of the economy and especially an increase in the public debt, which remains below the OECD average. The deficits are partly the result of the subsidies given to the car industry and the financial sector, as well as military expenditure, on the federal level. On the provincial level, a vast programme of renewal of infrastructures, mainly the motorways, surrounded by an odour of corruption, has constituted one of the main causes of the increase in the debt, along with tax cuts that favour business and the wealthiest citizens.

The dynamics of the social movements

The rate of unionisation in Quebec is 40 per cent and the trade union movement is powerful but not very combative, particularly since the defeats of 2003 (anti-trade-union law) and 2005 (decree imposing working conditions on state employees). The leaderships more or less formally support the Parti Québécois and its federal equivalent, the Bloc Québécois. They refuse to give their support to the building of a left party and advocate, on a national and local level, dialogue with the state and the employers in the implementation of neoliberal policies. The principal confederation, which represents 500,000 workers, has an enormous speculative pension fund managed by an army of financial product sellers. This situation pushes the main organization of the Québécois social movement to defend the rentier interests of the financial bourgeoisie and to depend on the tax incentives granted by the government to the pension fund, not to mention questionable relations between certain trade union officials and elements of the grey economy. The public sector unions, in spite of a strategic framework which aimed at negotiating before having the right to strike, were able to keep their heads above water, mainly thanks to a Liberal government discredited by corruption.

The women's movement organized a big mobilization of 30,000 women in the framework of the 3rd World March of Women in autumn 2010. A certain radicalisation of demands and actions was proposed, but without allowing this mobilization to really influence the conjuncture. A series of people's groups conduct struggles on social questions the (right to housing, the struggle against poverty, popular education, etc). The student movement is divided but has demonstrated its capacity for mobilization over the last twenty years, particularly with the victorious general strikes of 1996 and 2005. We have seen a series of ecologist mobilizations since 2003 which have led to the abandonment of the building of a gas-fired power station, the development of wind energy and at the challenging of projects to exploit gas (shale gas) and oil. This mobilization is mainly citizen-based and regional, in the sense that, in spite of elements of national coordination, it comes mainly from people who were initially not organized.

The neoliberal offensive takes mainly the form of budget cuts and increasing charges for public services. The people's and feminist groups, as well as the student and trade-union left, have established a Coalition opposed to the increase in charges and the privatization of public services. While refusing to join this coalition, the big trade-union and student confederations have created the Social Alliance, which organizes actions along with the Coalition.

The building of the political left

Since 1994, two processes of fusion of left political parties have made it possible to unite most of the left of the trade union, student, people's and feminist movements and most of the left political groups [3]. Quebec Solidaire is the result of this process of convergence. Gauche Socialiste [4], the section of the Fourth International, took part in this process from the beginning.

In the 2008 elections, Quebec Solidaire succeeded in getting a member elected to the Quebec parliament - Amir Khadir, who has been recognized as

being the Québécois political personality who is most appreciated by the population. The opinion polls indicate a constant rise in voting intentions, which oscillate at present between 9 and 15 per cent. This however over-estimates the real vote, which is confronted with the logic of the "useful vote" in the electoral system of British origin (first past the post).

Quebec Solidaire is a left party, ecologist and feminist. All of its structures must be based on parity between men and women, including the national and regional spokespersons. There exist ten collectives within it, including Gauche Socialiste, but the great majority of members are not linked to these collectives.

The platform adopted for the two elections in which the party has taken part proposed a series of social and economic reforms based on more progressive taxation, reinvestment in public services and social and ecological programmes, as well as limited nationalizations (energy).

An original and democratic process was put in place for the adoption of the programme. Spread out over several years, it dealt successively with five different themes:

- 1- The national, indigenous, immigrant and secular questions
- 2-
- 3- Economy and ecology
- 4-
- 5- Education, health and social justice
- 6-
- 7- Feminism
- 8-
- 9- Global justice
- 10-

Each one of these topics follows the same stages. We begin with "citizens' circles" open to non-members, which discuss openly the chosen themes, based on questions pre-established in a participation notebook. A synthesis of these circles is then established nationally, then re-launched in the local associations, which can propose modifications of

this synthesis. Finally, these amendments are discussed and voted on in the congress.

The first programmatic congress took place in autumn 2009. The principal orientation adopted defined QS as an independentist party, which will set up, if it is elected, a constituent assembly, whose results will be subjected to a referendum which could declare the independence of Quebec. This congress also took up the thorny question of secularism. The position adopted follows on from the thinking of the Federation of Women of Quebec and proposes an "opening" to the wearing of ostentatious signs (the Islamic headscarf in particular), indicating that it is by including women that we can make it possible to leave the ghettos of the communities. We also clarified our support for the self-determination of the indigenous peoples, which account for 2 per cent of the population but which are the majority over large swathes of territory, where they live under very difficult socio-sanitary conditions.

A congress on the economy, ecology and workers' social rights

The Sixth Congress Quebec Solidaire was held on 25, 26 and 27 March, 2011, in Montreal. 350 delegates discussed of a great number of proposals on the economy, ecology and work, which will constitute essential sections of its political programme. At its Fifth Congress, in November 2009, Quebec Solidaire not only defined a clearly independentist orientation, but also adopted a democratic strategy of accession to sovereignty, the perspective of a constituent assembly. This congress started to outline democratic reforms of representative institutions (the voting system) and defined the place of the regions. This Fifth Congress also defined the state of Quebec as being secular and democratic, specified the conditions of integration of ethno-cultural communities and the relations founded on equality that we will have to establish with the First Nations.

The Sixth Congress continued to define the political physiognomy of Quebec Solidaire, around the fol-

lowing fundamental orientations:

? democracy must also be economic democracy

? an ecologist vision which goes beyond the limits of green capitalism

? determination to defend and radically extend workers' rights

? the transversal character of the feminist struggle for the equality of women in all fields and all dimensions of economic, social and political life.

We want to illustrate here the spirit rather than the letter of the orientations adopted.

The economy must also be democratic

Democracy cannot stop at the gates of the workplaces. How can we speak about democracy if citizens do not have any say over the fundamental economic choices of the enterprise? This is why Quebec Solidaire intends, in the long term, to go beyond capitalism and establish an economic and political system that supports the common good and does not make growth an end in itself. Quebec Solidaire is in favour of a strong public economy but supports the development of a social economy (co-operative, community-based, social enterprises) while maintaining the place of the private sector, which will have to be defined. Nationalizations will not be carried out in a bureaucratic manner, but will have as their objective a democratic management system. The mining industry must be placed under public control, with a majority stake held by the state. In short, with regard to natural resources, Quebec Solidaire wants to put an end to the plundering of resources by the multinationals and to give back to the community the power to decide how to develop them.

An ecologist orientation which goes beyond the limits of a green capitalism

Quebec Solidaire defends the energy sovereignty of Quebec. The energy sector must be taken charge of by the public sector. Quebec Solidaire aims at making possible the transition towards another energy

system, which must include as a priority energy-saving and renewable energies. That is why Quebec Solidaire will put an end to the exploration and the exploitation of fossil energies such as the oil of the St. Lawrence Gulf and shale gases. It will also eliminate nuclear power and will stop the exploration and the exploitation of uranium mines.

The energy strategy of the Quebec state must be democratically established by the community, within which the workers of the sectors concerned will express their opinion. Quebec Solidaire recommends reducing greenhouse gas emissions between now and 2020, by at least 40 per cent compared to 1990, and defining a strategy to abandon fossil energies between now and 2030. Quebec Solidaire, breaking with the perspectives defended by green capitalism, is opposed to carbon credits, rejects false solutions such as biofuels and carbon capture, and taxes on carbon which hit especially the poor. The enterprises of the energy sector will be placed under public control (a majority stake held by the state), including if necessary full 100 per cent nationalization.

A radical extension of workers' rights

The congress adopted a series of orientations concerning trade union rights and the democratization of the work environment which will make it possible to radically improve the relationship of forces of workers in relation to the employers. Quebec Solidaire thus defines itself as an unwavering ally of the working and popular classes. The right to strike will be recognized in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The right to political and solidarity strikes will also be recognized. Lockouts will be prohibited. Other measures will make it possible to extend wage equity to all workplaces and to put an end to employment ghettos. For Quebec Solidaire, the concept of work must include the non-remunerated work that is essential for the existence of society, invisible work which is generally the lot of women.

Quebec Solidaire will defend an active and effective policy of full employment, including measures of

positive action for women, handicapped people, visible minorities and indigenous people.

The minimum wage will be increased substantially. The use by employers of involuntary part-time work will be strictly limited and the right to move on to full-time employment as soon as possible will be ensured. The working week will be reduced to 35 hours and then to 32 hours, with an alternative possibility of prolonging holidays. All of this will be done without loss of pay, with proportional hiring of new workers, without intensification of work and with strengthening of the conditions limiting overtime work in workplaces.

The transversal character of the fight for women's equality

The congress recognized that the often invisible work of women, whether it is paid or not, forms an integral part of the economy. In the discussion on workers' rights, the need for measures in favour of equality of women and men at work was constantly raised and supported by the delegates.

Strategy of construction

The definition of the programme which was adopted included the concept of strategy. Thus, the programme is not limited to ends, to the desired "project of society". It puts forward means necessary for its realization. The congress made it possible to give some precise details on this subject and thus to consolidate the vision of "the party of elections and the party of the street", which includes the question of the link with the social movements. Thus, in the framework of the orientations adopted on the ecological question, we specified that it was necessary to take part in the international popular movement which makes the link between the climate and social justice, and to draw inspiration from its recommendations. We have to associate the full range of social and political movements in a militant campaign for climatic justice.

Debates which, without settling everything, take Quebec Solidaire forward in the definition of its project of society

project

Quebec Solidaire made the choice of discussing orientations not by starting from largely ideological definitions, but rather from proposals for action aimed at achieving precise objectives. This choice by no means sought to build artificial consensuses. It aimed rather at making possible concrete debates based on evaluations of problematic situations and using the possibilities that they contain. It was a good choice. Instead of exacerbating nuances and divergences, this approach made it possible to outline the essential tasks which are before us, without making disappear the diversity of the objectives and the strategies present in this desire for social transformation which unifies Quebec Solidaire.

But the fact of concentrating on what was essential, of being satisfied with analyses that were often rapid and of not sufficiently clarifying the obstacles which we face in terms of the objectives that Quebec Solidaire has fixed for itself, led the congress to skip over many questions which the party will not always be able to avoid. This approach to debates will have to be modulated in order to further clarify for all the members of the party everything that is involved both in the analyses which back up the proposals put forward and in the strategies which it will be necessary to deploy to reach the goals that the party has fixed for itself. It will have to be corrected in order to give more time to the exchanges and to the appropriation of debates which are not always easy.

But to conclude, it should be underlined that the respect shown while engaging in debate, which characterized the whole of the congress, without exception, showed that the proclaimed desire of Quebec Solidaire to conduct politics in a different way is not a vain formula. It also made it possible to reinforce the coherence of a party which has many challenges to take up, but which increasingly demonstrates that it is being built as an essential instrument of an overall emancipatory project.

ECONOMY

For a Federal United Eco Socialist States of Europe: Another world is possible but not through reforming the European Union and staying in the Euro!

DAVID PACKER ·

There is much to admire and agree with about Michel and Ozlem's analysis of the roots of the crisis and we have offered a similar analysis [4]. There is also much to agree with on the solutions to the crisis: full public control and ownership of the banking system; progressively taxing the rich and wealthy and corporations; opposing all the austerity measures that Europe's ruling class is trying to impose on the working class, students and poor of the continent; and a debt audit to identify the source of the debt, its legitimacy and where the debt is held.

What we disagree with is the political premise, which suggests reform of the European Union in a general anti-capitalist direction while staying in the Euro is both possible and desirable. It is also claimed that staying in the Euro is more "European" and will strengthen internationalism rather than accommodate to an anti-European, rightward, nationalist shift.

Also, they argue, staying in the Euro will shield the working class from setbacks and defeats while fending off financial speculators. In addition, there is the implication that general blanket demands such as default should be raised in all the countries of Europe. Some Eco Socialist slogans have been added to make the whole project appear more appealing.

There are several problems with this approach.

The anti-capitalist demands that they propose are not compatible with membership of what is essen-

tially a neo-liberal institution such as the EU. If any country followed such a programme they would be thrown out.

Some have argued that it is better for tactical reasons to be thrown out of the Eurozone rather than leave because the left should not associate itself with reactionary nationalist forces, who also campaign to leave. Of course we should denounce right wing nationalism and argue that the working class maintains its independence from them, but their position assumes that staying in the Euro and in the EU is somehow neutral. We disagree with this because the EU is a neo-liberal capitalist club that not only facilitates and imposes massive austerity on the weaker economies in Europe, but is also deepening the inequalities between the larger economies and the smaller economies in the interests of French and particularly German capitalism.

Membership of the Euro does not protect the working class from epoch-defining defeats - quite the opposite. The Euro is the umbrella that the ruling classes are using through the EU, together with the IMF, to impose a massive austerity attack on the European working class to make them pay for the crisis. If it succeeds then the European working class will have suffered an historic defeat. As we have pointed out previously they do not face up to the fact that the contradictions of the Eurozone mean it cannot be reformed but needs to be broken up. [5] The Marxist economist Ernest Mandel pointed to these likely contradictions and consequences in 1992. [6]

Nor does the general demand for a debt default recognise the diverse sets of circumstances across

Europe. Where this is a credible demand in the smaller near bankrupt economies, Greece, Ireland and Portugal, we can support it, but in most of the major economies of Europe a default is first of all not necessary, as there is sufficient wealth through the banking system and in the rich corporations to avoid one, and second It fails to recognise the likely effects the general call for a default would have if implemented on the global financial system – a second credit crunch and depression as happened in the 1930s. That historic crisis was mainly due to major European governments' defaulting on their debt. [7]

There is no recognition of the effect a default would have on jobs, rapidly creating mass unemployment, and on the working classes' pensions as the bulk of these pensions are invested in government debt. That is why a debt audit is vital: Toussaint's six demands for Europe [8] address some of these shortcomings with dispensation for public holders of the debt. But it does fail to recognise the effect that a generalised debt default across Europe would have on the financial system.

In our view, the left should not be associated with demands that would have such serious and immediate consequences for the working class. It is not the job of Marxists to put forward demands that would immediately deepen the capitalist crisis in a way that would further batter working class living conditions. The consequent freezing of world credit and rapid descent into slump that would result from a default of a major economy would not create the best conditions for a fight-back, as the catastrophe of the 1930s has shown us. Our task is to put forward anti-capitalist demands, including transitional demands that would defend jobs, services and living standards and lead in the direction of revolutionary solutions to the crisis. Only this would be in the interests of the working class.

As Ernest Mandel stated : "For revolutionary Marxists, this, conflict is a typical inter-imperialist competitive struggle in which the working class has no reason for supporting one side against the other. [2] To the policies of both sides, they must counter-

pose the struggle for a Socialist United States of Europe, for a really unified Europe which could effectively surmount the antagonisms bred by capitalist competition; that could only be a Europe which has abolished both capitalist property and the bourgeois state. It is not by accident, moreover, that the present crisis in the Common Market coincides with a slackening of economic expansion which could be the preliminary signal of an opening recession in all capitalist Europe". [9]

Also, Ozlem overestimates the popularity of a general default demand in the major economies. The NPA in France, which has raised this demand is a significant formation but has membership of only a few thousand and is not a mass party with mass influence. Default on the debt would not be understood in rich counties like France, Germany or Britain.

More importantly, membership of the Euro has not protected counties from financial speculation; quite the opposite is the case. The financial markets can see the contradictions in the Euro that we have pointed out. They have seen that the peripheral countries would need a bailout and bet against their governments and corporate bond and share markets until the point of the bailout is announced. They can also see defaults coming and are betting now that these will happen.

Greece was the subject of derivative manipulation to hide its deficit to meet the budget conditions to enter the Euro. The investment bank responsible for these derivatives tipped off its hedge fund clients about the cover up and they speculated against Greek debt. [10] The way to end speculation is in fact to leave the Euro and deal with debt swiftly either through default as in the case of the peripheral countries or in the case of the major economies through taxing the rich and taking control and ownership of the banking system and setting out an orderly plan for dealing with the debt.

Without full control and ownership of the banking system even a debt default by a country like Greece would see a freezing of credit, leading to a deeper

recession and big losses to workers' pensions because the majority of a country's debt is held by domestic banks and domestic pension funds.

In fact sections of the European ruling class [11] are setting the scene for defaults by the periphery countries because they realise that the losses will be mainly borne by these countries themselves and the effects across the European banking sector would be minimal. They think it better to have an orderly default rather than spook the markets with a sudden one.

Many capitalist economists think the break-up of the Euro is inevitable and countries such as Greece would be better outside it. [12]

Attempts at putting forward proposals that reform the European Union lead Ozlem into dangerous territory. There is much talk of socialisation, a term associated with the public bearing the losses of the financial system, rather than outright public ownership and control.

Ozlem advocates improving productivity in the periphery countries as a solution that is shared with the ruling class as they seek to heap the blame for the crisis on the periphery countries' working classes for not working hard enough. Portugal's problem is not that it is uncompetitive but that it came into the Euro with its currency at too weak a level. This has seen its economy under perform compared to the major European economies and unemployment rise since it entered the Euro. [13] Leaving the Euro would see its economy become more competitive and allow it to fully utilise its food production potential. Becoming self-sufficient in food and improving its competitiveness would boost exports and reduce the amount of imports making it less vulnerable to importing inflation. This of course would not in itself be a long-term solution for the working class.

But those who say leaving the Euro would leave to economic isolation by the EU erecting trade tariffs misunderstand their use. These tariffs are in general a reaction to other major trading blocs e.g. the USA and China putting up barriers to European

trade. [14] This argument also ignores the fact that states such as Britain while outside the Euro still have the Eurozone as their major trading partner. But a country leaving the Euro would be moving in an anti-capitalist direction and would seek to develop different trading relationships with other countries which are moving in a similar trajectory based on an exchange of goods to meet basic needs.

Finally, Ozlem advocates increasing pension payments while implicitly advocating cuts in pensions through defaults instead of looking to alternative retirement provision.

This is not to say that independence from the Euro and the EU will solve the problems of these economies, but it will create better conditions: a weakening of pan-Europe capitalism, greater clarity and transparency, for the working classes in these countries to begin to deal with their own ruling classes. Rather than being an isolationist policy leaving the Euro and breaking up the European Union while putting forward radical anti-capitalist solutions will lead to more, not less international solidarity across Europe. Self-determination is essential for real international solidarity. It will inspire workers in other countries to follow and lead to the break-up of what is the major neo-liberal block in the world.

As socialists we would welcome the break-up of Britain by supporting demands for Scottish and Welsh independence because we see it as a step to breaking the British capitalist state. The same is true for the break-up of the Spanish State. Socialists should welcome the break up of the Euro zone and European Union. Both are key steps to creating an alternative, federal Eco Socialist Europe. Workers in England, Germany and France will see that there is a way to break the grip of European capital and its ruling classes and move in an anti-capitalist direction.

To stay in the European Union and the Euro the periphery countries in particular will see immigrants blamed for the austerity and very high levels of unemployment, which is already happening,

while in the major economies we will see a strengthening of the political right as their populations face cuts to fund bailouts of the periphery countries. These are the contradictions of the Euro that are not sustainable.

The European Union and the Euro are tools to manage the crisis in the interests of capital and protect banks from collapsing with the debt on their books. They are not the framework for progressive policies and Eco Socialism to be pursued.

Debt is not just an issue in the periphery but across the larger European economies too. The EU is now swinging into fighting inflation by raising interest rates – the first amongst the major mature economies to do so. The EU is dominated by the needs of Germany that has benefited from being a major manufacturing economy and by Chinese demand for engineering goods to be used in infrastructure projects. The German ruling class has improved the rate of profit by attacking German workers' wages and conditions.

Attacks on wages and conditions and budget restraint (massive cuts) are not as easy in other parts of Europe. But that is what the EU wants to do as its conditions for bailouts to the periphery countries. Is that what Ozlem wants? To punish the periphery countries and raise the cost of borrowing, slowing economies and creating bigger debts and deficits? This will have a major impact on Spain that has high exposure to variable mortgages. With 21% unemployment and a rise in interest rates Spain will be exposed to more house price falls and more real losses for the Cajas (Spanish building societies) which will eventually lead to more state bailouts for them and bring a Spanish bailout closer, with all its consequences for the Spanish working class.

Rather we should focus on key demands that can unite the working class across Europe and put a stop to austerity now.

These demands should include:

- leaving the Euro which would help lead to the break up of European Union and defaulting on unsustainable debt for periphery countries faced with EU/IMF imposed austerity. This would allow the working class of each country to face up to their own domestic and weaker ruling class. This would not be a move to save capitalism but to weaken pan-European capitalism and break it at its weakest links on the periphery; and it would be part of a series of anti-capitalist demands which we expand on below that could lead to the construction of a socialist economy and society;

- a full debt audit, overseen democratically, to reveal who is responsible and who holds the debt;

- taking banks under public control and ownership that can nullify a credit crisis in defaulting nations and provide resources to cancel and pay off large chunks of debt in major economies; Financial resources could then be directed to useful, green, planned investment.

- alternative retirement provision which means pension fund debt can be cancelled without a loss to workers – basic needs met through free on-retirement: housing, utilities, transport, basic food, education, health, culture and sport;

- a wealth tax on the superrich and a progressive tax on better off, increased corporation tax and a clampdown on tax avoidance;

- build green sustainable economies – free public transport, renewable energy, stop nuclear power, self-sufficient food production and distribution taking these industries under public control and ownership, sustainable affordable social housing;

- encourage the exchange of goods and services across Europe rather than neo-liberal trade and become more self-sufficient and green through internal production for need rather than profit.

This is the way that we can begin to create a real internationalist Federal United EcoSocialist Europe based on the institutions and relationships created by the working class and their allies through their struggles against the neo-liberal austerity policies

of the European Union and the Euro. It will be based on new equal relationships and forms of	power. Not ones based on the rule of Europe's finance capital and its multinationals.
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SPANISH STATE

Revolutions arrive too late or too early, but always when they're not expected

JOSEBA FERNÁNDEZ ·

We have no fear

15 May has opened a breach. Of that there is no question. It is a movement that opens new paths and that presupposes, bluntly, an inflection point in the social response to the crisis in Spain. Whoever in the Left can find no reason for celebration and joy, beyond the current uncertainty, has a serious problem. They have been, then, in an offside position.

Antecedents: the breeding ground, the dereliction of duties of some and the impotence of the "alternative"

Expanding once more about the factors that explain the profound deterioration in social, economic, environmental and all of political life in Spain does not make much sense. It's well known how the capitalist economic crisis smashed into Spain's growth model and how that has affected millions of people. The model of exit from the crisis has also tailed the elites — a dynamic "class struggle from above" that, dictated by the EU and IMF, has left a trail of victims and created a scene of crushing victory for banks, big capitalists and certain types of speculators.

The balance that has emerged from the break in the Spanish economy is an appalling one. Financialization of the middle classes, the "wealth effect" and the stupefying dream of an "ownership society" and "social ladder" had worked perfectly, as illusory mechanisms for the peaceful evolution of this country's developmental model. However, the bursting of the various bubbles that gripped the Spanish economy has blown up this scheme of fictitious capitalism. A society partly euphoric at the

credo of growth has been transformed into a society without social handles to grip. And, without venturing into psychological holes, it has gone from a citizenship based on networks of trust to a society suspicious of the social and political institutions on which the regime sits.

But this change was rapid. The knockout punch, suffered by the majority of the working classes, was administered and digested through different phases and moments. No one goes from euphoria to fear — and from there to outrage and mobilization — in a short and mechanical sequence. But, clearly, this was the "breeding ground" that would produce the "outbreak" the 15-M movement was constructing, little by little, and covertly. And, in recent months, it was being constructed outside of the channels and structures that were expected to star in any comprehensive opposition to the social emergency and coup being carried out against the lived economy and political sovereignty.

However, a previous breach had opened a few months earlier. It was 29-S [the general strike on 29 September 2010]. That day (and in the weeks of preparation beforehand) the real possibility of extending the framework of resistance and popular responses (from the world of work, and well beyond) was reaffirmed in the call for and fallout of the General Strike. For the social Left and anti-capitalist politics the conditions of continuity of the strike were a given: Neighbourhood platforms, new socialised work initiatives, collective learning for new activists, etc.

The winding up of the unions' oppositional, conflictual approach and the major unions' decision to commit to social dialogue and agreement presumed an inability to take advantage of a real political op-

portunity to intervene from these actors, an inability to follow a different model — the accumulation of forces in a social response to crisis. The damage caused by the pact over pensions to the morale of many activists, and the real (and deserved) delegitimation that the union leaders have suffered as a result explains why they cannot be perceived, at this time, as effective instruments through which the "general malaise" can be interpreted and channelled.

Neither, on balance, has what we call (broadly and diffusely) the alternative and anti-capitalist Left been much better. Obviously it hasn't played a role of legitimiser or stooge of the farce of social peace. But, yes, at least in its inability to express what could be the alternative in the street. While "resistance-ism" [resistencialismo] has been marked, organizational incapacities, narrow-mindedness, a real disconnection from those who are the core activists or, simply, the use of repertoires of action attractive and appealing for a different public face have led to demonstrations that, while necessary and relatively successful, could not initiate a cycle of mobilisation. Thus, the alternative unions, the more radical and coherent social movements and the radical political Left haven't been able to break from the circle in which they have moved. While it is true that the Left has expanded in recent months, its role as a catalyst for the battle in the streets has always had a ceiling on it. But it is also true that small initiatives that have been punctuating recent months and years have generated part of the discourse that today is drawing in more sectors of the now-mobilized.

Imitation effect and resistance in the world of the dispossessed

This lack of practical references, symbolic and identity-bound, has held back the possibility of social responses in recent months. Knocking at our door have been other people's experiences and new forms of self-organisation, in the form of riots, rebellions and revolutions. It was the Portuguese youth in their struggle against the IMF; Italian stu-

dents against Berlusconi, job insecurity and cuts in education; the Greek trade unionists and youth against debt and EU blackmail; universities occupied and mobilized in the United Kingdom; France rebellious and insubordinate against the loss of social rights. And there have been, like an unexpected miracle, the uprisings for dignity and against tyranny in the Arab nations. The youth of Tunisia and Egypt and many other countries, their social and political organizations, have in recent years heroically resisted economic and political dictatorships and have shown that it is possible to reach heaven by direct struggle, even in the worst conditions. And somehow, it is we who were afraid!

Now the contagion effect that these riots and revolutions have had on the planet can't be overestimated — how they are helping to transform many things and supposedly unchangeable realities in the management and governance of capitalism and imperialism on a global scale.

It is more difficult to demonstrate how they have specifically impacted on the awakening of instinctual rebellion in Spain. To not only two things: at the level of discourse and of forms of organization (management of social networks and symbolic force and real public space) they seem to have been an authentic inspiration.

Youth: an empty signifier yet full of content

Inigo Errejón said in a recent article in the mobilization of 7 April, "Youth Without Future" the concept of youth had been managed, successfully, as an "empty signifier" which encapsulated much of the social reality and collective imagination able to legitimise a protest of this type. It is an accurate analysis that, as we can see, is still working and will continue to do so.

Again, as already happened in the cycle of 1968 although in a completely different conditions [1], the youth, in various pockets of resistance, are acting as a true "tactical vanguard" in the context of an overall movement. We don't enter an opinion here on such thorny issues as the concept of "generations"

itself or on the available objective and subjective conditions for the mobilization of youth today. We simply assert its importance as an initiator of social antagonisms. And it is very uneven across demographic (Arab v European) and political (policies at movement level) contexts.

However, the focus of discourse and practice that hinges around insecurity is still being shown as an asset when it comes to uniting wills. The accumulation of experiences and counter-hegemonic discourse in universities in recent years is not negligible. The launch of an initiative with so much potential as "Youth Without Future" is just a sign of how sections of student activists have recognized that it is a discourse with the capacity to combine and refine mobilisation practices with a capacity for social impact.

In this sense, one can't understand 15-M without 7 April. And it may mean a movement in the streets without the special intervention and ownership claims, discourses and practices of groups such as "Youth Without Future." The alarming statistics of youth unemployment and insecurity were already signs of concern for sociologists linked to the PSOE and José Felix Tezanos or the IMF itself that has, more recently, dared to mention the risk of a "lost generation" in Spain.

The victories of 15-M and its risks: against the dictatorship of the markets, a rising movement

Something has changed since 15-M. In Madrid you can breathe the atmosphere of mobilisation. Of what is (or should be) a demonstration: take to the streets, connect with ordinary people, expand the space as you can. Lose the fear. That we were told weeks before on posters of "Youth Without Future" [2]. And it was collectively shouted in the streets of Madrid (and in many other cities): "Without fear". A fear that only we can shake off from the common, from the community. The great triumph of neoliberal politics has been its penetration into individual problems (in fear of work, of the future, of banks, of social disconnection). Only through collective channels, away from false individual solutions, can fear

give way to other states of mind. And part of that fear has shaken us. That is the lesson that, collectively, we have lived. Surely, it has been the experience that many people do not participate in the rituals of protest and various expressions of the Left. And that is a gift to the radical Left: the possibility of politicization of new layers.

The keys to the success of the protest, and its continuation, are circulating, and are starting to be widely recognized. Despite some ambiguous and contradictory statements in the posters that had circulated in the days prior, it was perceived that there was a possibility of widening the social spectrum, to reach so-far demobilized sectors.

The tension between organization and spontaneity is shown, again, insoluble and false. There is no scope for strengthening the mobilization and grounding of organised experiences without a space for spontaneity; but there also isn't room for it without prior organizational work that is also open to the unexpected.

In Madrid, the work and vision of "Youth Without Future" has allowed this platform to become the essential reference pole right now — for its dynamism, its fighting spirit and its ability to forge alliances. A public and media appearance, tolerated so far, but we fear a change of sign in the short term.

But 15-M has also not been a youth movement or a false signal of intergenerational conflict. It was the coming of what may be a new citizens' movement — diverse, with apparent contradictions, but with even more possibilities. A movement, even one difficult to characterize, that was necessary and that breaks the inertia of defeat and pessimism that had overtaken the broader social Left.

And if it's exciting for the number of people who have gathered (the largest demonstrations against crisis since the General Strike), it's because most of the speeches are typical of words that the Left has been insistently repeating long before the outbreak of the crisis: the dictatorship of the markets and banks, against the social cuts, against this model of

"democracy". And that is a victory: socializing on the street are the flags of the anti-globalization movement, of students, of teachers and health workers in struggle over recent years, of honest and militant unionists.

One might say that the narrative is not finished, is not complete. Of course not. It lacks many things: analyses of environmental destruction, of the energy crisis, of the finitude of the planet. Also of patriarchy and the crisis of care. Or a story on immigration, immigration law or CIEs. That is what is missing. And many other things.

But it is a discourse and practice that must be kept company, which it is possible to construct along the road. The sectors that have built the resistance — from schools, workplaces, from the environmental movement, from feminism — should (and should be able to) fill in the content.

The 15-M movement and the grounded platforms that are emerging are a possibility that the Left and social movements can use to expand the audience for their ideas and practices. Because these movements, fortunately, don't arise from agreements between apparatuses, they are not experiences for discussion among the most conscious. It is, finally, an ongoing experience for the movement. It is, paraphrasing Brecht in his polemic with the "identities", an experience that has "legs" and not "roots". These are the convergences that have a future: those who have "legs" (of marchers) and no "legs" (of a table).

The answer to this phenomenon of institutions and accommodation of the Left is symptomatic of the very success of the movement. [3] The stigmatization of the protests, the labels put on them, their underestimation and repression, are all palpable evidence of the concern they are causing. Some progressive intellectuals' voices have asked us to be indignant and react. When we do, we should not of-

fer alternatives to anti-systemic violence. It's always the same story with those stuck in being "politically correct".

The outlook for what comes after 15-M is uncertain. Of that there is no doubt. We know that more, however, will come on 22-M: more social cuts, less democracy.

We have always maintained that the "class struggle" is a long-winded battle. There are no shortcuts or magic bullets. Even when we know how to change the world. Neither 15-M nor what is happening now is a final lesson. But it has been a small tear in the normality of this democracy that gives a truncheon and anti-social orders under the spurious designs of what they call "market".

Use this crack, shape spaces of resistance on the ground that don't abandon the big problems, consolidate the spaces for the practice of resistance and of democracy that are the tasks that allowed us the cry of 15-M.

In mobilizing against the crisis and the fight against this world of looting, a small door has opened in this corner of the planet. Daniel Bensaid said that revolutions "arrive too late or too early, but always when they are not expected." He also said that revolutions are a miracle, but we even have to prepare miracles. What has erupted in 15-M (if not before, in 7-A) is not a revolution, naturally. But it is a real opportunity to build a strong movement against the effects of the crisis. With intelligence and a good dose of virtue and fortune, you can start changing things.

And as we have seen and experienced in recent years such opportunities are not abundant.

We shouldn't let it pass us by.

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SPANISH STATE

Rebellion of the indignant

ESTHER VIVAS ·

These are not then days of "business as usual". The comfortable routines of our "market democracy" and its electoral and media rituals have been abruptly altered by the unforeseen emergence in the street and public space of citizen mobilization. This "rebellion of the indignant" worries the political elites who are always discomfited when the people take democracy seriously... and decide to start practicing it for themselves.

Two years ago, when the crisis which broke out in September 2008 took on historic proportions, the "masters of the world" experienced a brief moment of panic, alarmed by the magnitude of a crisis they had not anticipated, through their lack of theoretical instruments with which to understand it, and feared a strong social reaction. Then came the empty claims of a "refoundation of capitalism" and false mea culpas that little by little evaporated, once the financial system was underpinned and in the absence of a social explosion.

The social reaction has been slow in coming. Since the outbreak of the crisis, social resistance has been weak. There has been a very large gap between the discrediting of the current economic model and its translation into collective action. Several factors explain this, in particular, fear, resignation before the current situation, scepticism with regard to trade unions, the absence of political and social reference points, and the penetration among wage earners of individualistic and consumerist values.

The current outbreak did not, however, start from scratch. Years of work on a small scale of alternative networks and movements, initiatives and resistance of more limited impact had kept the flame of contestation alive in this difficult period. The gen-

eral strike of September 29m 2010 also opened a first breach, although the subsequent demobilization by the leaderships of the CCOO and UGT and the signing of the social pact closed the path of trade union mobilisation and furthered if possible, the discredit and lack of prestige of the biggest unions among combative youth and those who have launched the camps initiative.

Indignant!

"Indignation" so much the fashion through the pamphlet by Hessel [the former French resistance fighter Stéphane Hessel], is one of the ideas that define the protests which have started. Here there reappears in another form, the "Ya Basta!" of the Zapatistas in their uprising of January 1, 1994, then the first revolt against the "new world order" proclaimed by George Bush senior after the first Gulf War, the disintegration of the USSR and the fall of the Berlin wall.

"Indignation is a start. One is outraged, rises up and then one sees" said Daniel Bensaïd. Gradually, however, we have passed from discomfort to outrage and from that to this mobilization. We have a true "mobilized indignation". From the earthquake of crisis, the tsunami of social mobilization develops.

To fight more than unease and indignation is required, we must also believe in the usefulness of collective action, that it is possible to overcome and that all that has gone before is not lost. For years the social movements in the Spanish State have essentially known defeats. The lack of victories which show the usefulness of social mobilization and increase the expectations of the possible weighed like a heavy slab on the slow initial reaction to the crisis.

Precisely at this point the great contribution of the revolutions in the Arab world to the ongoing protests has registered. They show that collective action is useful, that "Yes we can". That is why they, as well as the less covered victory against the bankers and the political class in Iceland, have been a reference point from the beginning for the protesters and activists.

Along with the belief that "this is possible", that things can be changed, loss of fear, in a time of crisis and difficulties, is another key factor. "Without fear" is precisely one of the slogans most heard these days. Fear still grips a large majority of workers and popular sectors and leads to passivity or xenophobic and unsympathetic reactions. But the 15M mobilization and the camps expanding like an oil slick are a powerful antidote to fear that threatens to dismantle the schemes of a ruling elite at the forefront of an increasingly delegitimized system.

The 15M movement and the camps have an important generational component. Each time a new cycle of struggles breaks out, a new generation of activists emerges, and "youth" as such acquire visibility and prominence. While this generational and youth component is essential, and is also expressed in some of the organized movements that have been visible lately like "Youth without future", it must be noted that the ongoing protest is not a generational movement. It is a movement of criticism of the current economic model and attempts to make workers pay for the crisis which is fundamentally weighted towards youth. The challenge is precisely that, as on so many occasions, the youth protest acts as a triggering factor and catalyst for a broader cycle of social struggles.

The spirit of anti-globalization returns

The dynamism, the spontaneity and the thrust of the current protests are the strongest since the emergence of the anti-globalization movement more than a decade ago. Emerging internationally in November 1999 at the protests in Seattle during the WTO Summit (although its antecedents go back to the Zapatista Chiapas uprising in 1994), the anti-

globalization wave quickly came to the Spanish state. The consultation for the abolition of the foreign debt in March 2000 (held the same day as the general elections and banned in several cities by the Electoral Board) and the big mobilization for the summit in Prague in September 2000 against the World Bank and the IMF were the first signs of this, particularly in Catalonia. But the mass movement really arrived with the demonstrations against the World Bank Summit in Barcelona on June 22 and 24, 2001. Just ten years later we are witnessing the birth of a movement whose energy, enthusiasm and collective strength has not been seen since then. It will not, therefore, be a nostalgic tenth anniversary. Quite the contrary. We are going to celebrate it with the birth of a new movement.

The assemblies now in Plaza Catalunya (and, indeed, all the camps around the state beginning with that at Sol in Madrid) have given us priceless moments. The 15M and the camps are authentic "foundational struggles" and clear signs that we are witnessing a change in cycle and that the wind of rebellion is blowing again. Finally. A true "Tahrir generation" emerges, as did before a "Seattle generation" or a "Genoa generation".

Through the "anti-globalization" impulse across the planet, following the official summits in Washington, Prague, Quebec, Goteborg, Genoa and Barcelona, thousands of people identified with these protests and a wide range of groups from around the globe had the feeling of being part of a movement, of the same "people", the "people of Seattle" or "Genoa", sharing common objectives and feeling part of the same struggle.

The current movement is also inspired by the most recent and important international reference points of struggle and victory. It can be situated in the wake of movements as diverse as the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia and the victory in Iceland, placing their mobilization in a general struggle against global capitalism and the servile political elite. In the Spanish state, the 15 M demonstrations and now the camps, in a simultaneous example of de-

centralization and coordination, generate a shared identity and symbolic membership of a community.

The anti-globalization movement had it the international institutions, WTO, World Bank and IMF and multinational companies in its line of fire. Later, with the start of the "global war on terror" proclaimed by Bush junior, criticism of war and imperialist domination acquired centrality. The current movement places as its axis the criticism of a political class, whose complicity and servitude to the economic powers has been more exposed than ever. "We are not goods in the hands of politicians and bankers" read one of the main slogans of 15M. There is criticism of the political class and professional politics and criticism, not always well articulated and consistent, of the current economic model and financial powers. "Capitalism? Game over".

Towards the future

The future of the 15M initiated movement is unpredictable. In the short term the first challenge is to continue to build on the existing camps, set them up in cities where they do not yet exist and ensure they continue at least until Sunday May 22. May 21, the day of reflection, and May 22, election day, will be decisive. In these two days building the camps at a mass level is essential.

It is necessary to also consider new dates for mobilization, in the wake of 15M, to maintain the rhythm. The main challenge is to maintain this simultaneous dynamic of expansion and radicalization of the protest which we have experienced in the last few days. And in the case of Catalonia, look for synergies between the radicalism and desire for a change in the system expressed in 15M and the camps, with struggles against public expenditure cuts, particularly in health and education. The camp in Plaza Catalunya has already become a meeting point, a powerful magnet, for all the more dynamic sectors in struggle. It has become a meeting point for resistance and struggle, for building bridges, facilitating dialogue, and propelling future demonstrations. Establishing alliances between the protests under way among unorganized activists, and the alternative trade unionism, the neighbourhood movement, neighbourhood groups and so on, is the great challenge of the next few days.

"The revolution starts here..." was the claim yesterday at Plaza Catalunya. Well, at least a new cycle of struggles is beginning. So there is no doubt already that, more than a decade after the rise of the anti-globalization movement and two years after the outbreak of the crisis, social protest has come back to stay.

EGYPT

Egypt's unfinished revolution

MOSTAFA OMAR ·

The sheer number of those participating in the uprising, as well as their percentage compared to the total population, is unprecedented and astonishing. It is estimated that between January 25 and February 11 at least 15 million people out of a population of 80 million—more than 20 percent of the population—took part in the mass demonstrations and mobilizations that forced Mubarak to resign. A friend of mine in Cairo reminded me—and he was probably bragging a little bit—15 million protesters is a number that exceeds the total number of people who participated in all the protests that took place in all the countries of Eastern Europe at the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

It is true that young people led the charge on January 25, and it is true that most of the four hundred martyrs were under the age of thirty, but from day one young people were not alone in the streets. From day one, the Egyptian uprising was a popular revolution. From day one, millions of workers and government clerks, poor peasants, and poor housewives took part in all the mobilizations across the country.

When you walked across Tahrir Square you saw throngs of poor workers, poor peasants, struggling government clerks; you saw poor housewives who fight every day in order to keep their children somewhat fed and alive; you saw thousands of disabled people on crutches and in wheelchairs ignored by the government for decades; you saw thousands of retirees who cannot afford meat and even certain kinds of vegetables; you saw men and women, Muslim and Christian. All of these groups came to participate, came to support and to protect the youth against the regime's crackdown.

The masses of poor and working-class people who took part in the uprising—as everyone else who also took part—wanted democratic reforms. But workers and the poor also want social justice and the redistribution of the country's wealth, after thirty years of brutal privatization, impoverishment, and neoliberal policies pushed by the Mubarak regime.

It was truly a national uprising—every city and province up and down the country took part. And, believe it or not, as militant and determined as the revolutionaries were in Cairo, which got most of the media coverage in the West, the revolutionaries in other cities such as Suez and Alexandria, the second largest city in the country, were even more militant and bolder.

For example, the protesters in Cairo concentrated on Tahrir Square and bravely held it for eighteen days by fending off numerous bloody attacks by the police and Mubarak's thugs.

But in a city like Alexandria the protesters did not adopt a Tahrir Square strategy. They did not wait for the police to attack. The protesters came out every single day in the tens and hundreds of thousands from every neighborhood and street to confront the police; they fought back against police bullets and tear gas over and over again until they defeated the police.

I listened online to an amazing tape of radio communications between the police headquarters in Alexandria and police commanders in the field trying to deal with the flood of angry protesters in the ten minutes before the city fell to the revolutionaries. In the tape police officers are begging headquarters for reinforcements to deal with what they described as massive, dangerous crowds of ten, twenty, and thirty thousand people closing in on them everywhere in the city. Headquarters is help-

less because all of the officers in the field—literally all of them—are asking for reinforcements. Headquarters advises officers and units to retreat to precincts. The officers respond: "Sir, protesters are burning the precincts." The tape dramatically ends with the commander at headquarters asking an inferior officer for an explanation for the police defeats. The officer simply told him: "Sir, it is over. The people are in the saddle."

The Alexandria story was repeated in Suez and in city after city. Protesters marched on police precincts, on National Democratic Party (NDP) headquarters, on municipal buildings, on governors' mansions, and on and on.

And just as the revolt was massive, the celebrations that took place when Mubarak fell were breathtaking in their size and joy. On the night that Mubarak resigned, 5 million of us celebrated in Tahrir Square for twenty-four hours. I thought it must have been the largest celebration event in the country. I was corrected by friends in Alexandria, who told me: "You have a population of 20 million in Cairo and 5 million came out. We have a population of 10 million in Alexandria and 7 million of us jammed the Mediterranean Boulevard from one end of the city to the other."

I read in books about great revolutions for social justice. I read that millions who were involved in those revolutions not only change oppressive social institutions but they also rediscover their humanity in the process. I must say that I am lucky to have witnessed this process of social and human transformation firsthand in the few weeks that passed in Egypt. I have seen and talked to so many people who tell you that they feel proud of what they did; they feel that they are no longer strangers in their own country; they feel human for the first time in their lives.

I have never seen so many millions in Egypt look more proud—so proud of what they and other revolutionaries have accomplished, so proud that they have done what they themselves never believed they could do. People look more relaxed and at

peace and you can see it on their faces. They tell you: Gone are the days when we felt helpless and little, gone are the days when the police could humiliate us and torture us, gone are the times when the rich and the businessmen think they could run the country as if it was their own private company.

Everywhere people posted the January 25 revolution stickers—on their cars, in coffee shops, in their homes. Thousands of young people formed committees to clean the dirty streets in their neighborhoods. Thousands of others donated blood to those injured in the uprising. Young artists painted revolutionary graffiti rejecting corruption and celebrating equality between Muslims and Christians everywhere. Egyptians even started standing in line at stores and in government buildings out of respect for others—something you don't usually see in Cairo. In the days and weeks after February 11, one could sense intense excitement and hope in the air. Indeed, the revolutionary uprising brought big and amazing changes. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces—which dumped Mubarak in an attempt to save the entire social system and rules the country for the time being—made significant concessions to the revolution under intense popular pressure.

For example, the Council arrested some of Mubarak's corrupt political and business allies and froze their assets. It also froze Mubarak's own assets and promised to put him on trial.

Today, we can watch many much-hated corrupt figures on television screens, not smoking cigars in fancy meetings, but wearing prison clothes and awaiting trial. Today we watch the much-despised former minister of the interior who ordered the shooting of protesters, not walking like an arrogant despot spitting in our faces and brutalizing opposition figures or innocent people—we watch them in prison clothes and awaiting trial.

The arrests and trials of some high-profile corrupt officials were and still are a great source of euphoria for millions. But many ordinary people also realize that they made the revolution not just to pun-

ish a few figures in the old regime, they revolted in order to change the whole regime.

Therefore, for many, Mubarak's ouster represents only the beginning of the revolution, not the end. Their slogan very quickly became: In every corner of Egypt, in every factory, school, and company, there are 1,000 small corrupt and criminal Mubaraks that we have to fight against and get rid of.

On February 12, only hours after Mubarak resigned, workers, students, and even the oppressed Coptic minority all immediately began organizing to end decades of exploitation and oppression. Millions of poor and oppressed people have been engaging in amazing and inspiring actions for social justice and democratization of all aspects of society.

But of course the Egyptian ruling class—which is wounded and shaken by the revolutionary upsurge—is still quite powerful and is fighting back to preserve its rule and privileges, and is doing so with the help of and under the leadership of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces which is a sanitized name for what is actually Mubarak's own army generals.

In other words, immediately after Mubarak fell, an intense period of social and class struggle opened up in the country. Millions of workers and students began to try and shape the outcome of the revolutionary uprising through a series of daring and brave new rounds of struggle. I want to give you a sense of some of these struggles and I will start with the unfolding workers' uprising.

There is no doubt that the strikes by industrial workers which took place on February 9 across Egypt were a key reason why Mubarak's generals in the army decided that he must go, before the revolutionary uprising could gain more depth and fervor and threaten the whole social system.

The Council was definitely correct to be concerned. Starting February 12, hours after Mubarak quit, workers all over the country—every single day, in

the public and private sectors—have been striking, protesting, or sitting in. Oil workers, teachers, nurses, bus drivers, janitors, journalists, pharmacists, all the way to clerks in posh country clubs have been organizing and protesting.

Workers' demands vary from one sector to another but they revolve more or less around four main issues:

- 1) Workers everywhere want to raise wages and benefits.
- 2) Workers want permanent status for the millions who have been working as temps, sometimes on contracts as short as three months.
- 3) In the public sector, workers want an end to the neoliberal policies of privatization of companies. Moreover, many are calling for the re-nationalization of companies that were privatized and sold to investors at below-market values.
- 4) Finally, and this goes to the heart of the struggle for economic democracy, workers in the public sector are demanding the ousting of all corrupt CEOs appointed by Mubarak. In Mahalla, 24,000 textile workers struck last month, ousted the corrupt CEO, and forced the army to accept their own nominee for replacement.

And it is the same story in other factories and companies across the country: workers' expectations are very high, workers' militancy and confidence is phenomenal.

Two weeks ago, near my house in central Cairo, I witnessed one of those militant strikes firsthand. Twelve hundred government printing workers who produce school curriculum books went on strike to protest low salaries (an average of \$100 per month), the outrageous salary of the CEO (\$60,000 per month), disrespectful treatment at work, temporary work contracts, and terrible healthcare provisions. Three hundred workers attempted to rush the building to get to the CEO's office, but an army unit stopped them. So, the strikers laid siege to the company building and locked their corrupt CEO in his office on the fifth floor for thirty-six hours. The

army officer in charge, along with a union representative, negotiated all the workers' demands with the CEO for twenty-four hours. The army officer forced the CEO to concede 90 percent of the workers' demands so he could disperse them. The CEO caved in. The army officer and the union representative came down and announced the settlement. The strikers were ecstatic and almost dispersed.

But the agreement did not include the rehiring of temporary workers. Some angry young workers whose temporary contracts had been recently terminated were infuriated and attempted to storm the building again. Meanwhile, an older, militant, woman clerk pleaded with the rest of the workers not to abandon the youth. Most of the crowd decided to stay. They sent the union representative and the army officer back upstairs to tell the CEO to re-install all temporary workers and offer them permanent contracts immediately, instructing the union rep not to come down again without a "yes" on all demands. These types of militant strikes, sit-ins, and hunger strikes are taking place all over the country every day.

Workers are also breaking with the government-run Trade Union Federation and are forming independent unions. A section of militant workers are also in the process of forming a new political party, the Workers' Democratic Party.

I want to briefly take a look at the students' initiatives and struggles. When the army finally opened schools and universities, millions of students, teachers, and university professors—many of whom were part of the January 25 uprising—opened a new front of struggle. In one university after another, mass student and faculty rallies are taking place to elect all college presidents and deans in order to get rid of all those appointed by Mubarak. In some universities, students are camping out à la Tahrir to win their demands. And in all colleges, the students forced the government to finally implement a year-old court order to remove the secret police from all campuses.

High school and middle school students also formulated their demands and grievances. They rallied to demand an end to corporal punishment and removal of all sections in the curriculum that refer to Mubarak's so-called accomplishments. The ministry of education complied.

A wave of struggles for democratization is sweeping every corner and sector of society. Journalists are ousting pro-Mubarak editors. Cinema actors and workers rebelled against their autocratic union president. Soccer referees are threatening to strike over pay. Non-soccer athletes are demanding that sports clubs stop spending all their money on soccer players. The Boy Scouts of Egypt are demanding elections, and on and on. Fans are boycotting many of their once-beloved famous actors and singers who supported Mubarak.

Soccer fans go to soccer games, but very few fans actually bother to watch and cheer for their team. Organized fan groups that took part in the revolution and lost many martyrs are angry that their idols, the big-time famous players, did not show up in Tahrir and that some of them openly supported Mubarak. The fans taunt those players at games with angry chants and with huge banners. One of these banners at a recent game read: "We supported you every second and everywhere but where were you when we needed you?" When the uprising in Libya began, fans went to a game with a big banner in the colors of the Libyan, Tunisian, and Egyptian flags; it read: "The Free Republic of North Africa." At every game you find hundreds still chanting against Mubarak and the former minister of interior, or chanting to remove the governors.

But, the unfurling of these revolutionary forces across society has met from day one with vicious opposition from the ruling class. The Egyptian ruling class—which is quite strong and more established than say the Qaddafi regime—this ruling class is using all its ideological and sometimes repressive powers to fight back in order to end, or at least slow down, this flood of struggle and high expectations among workers and the poor.

For example, since February 12, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces has followed a policy of rejecting— or stalling—every popular demand of the January 25 revolution in order to demoralize people. The Council initially rejected the popular demand to dismiss the last cabinet appointed by Mubarak. The Council also rejected the demand to dismantle the entire secret police apparatus and vowed that it would only reform it.

The Council daily denounces striking workers and calls on them to return to work. In some cases it has tried to arrest strikers.

The remnants of the NDP and the secret police burned a Coptic church in Helwan, south of Cairo—in order to incite a civil war atmosphere between Muslims and Christians and in this way split the revolutionary camp. Again, while the army stood watching, thugs organized by the NDP and the secret police attacked Christians who were protesting the church burning in one poor Cairo neighborhood—they killed nine and injured dozens.

More recently, the army refused to draft a new constitutional declaration—and insisted on forcing people to vote on nine amendments to the 1971 dictatorial document. Moreover, the army brutalized protesters at Tahrir Square on March 9 with electric batons and tortured those it arrested for hours in its field headquarters in the Egyptian Museum. I have to be honest, for a few moments towards the end of February into the first days of March, there was a widespread feeling of anxiety among millions who supported the revolution that all was not going well, that the revolution was under siege at best—or that the counterrevolutionary forces were actually winning at worst. Fortunately, a deep reservoir of revolutionary aspirations and readiness to struggle to win our demands turned things around in a matter of seventy-two hours.

First, mass demonstrations and an unrelenting popular opposition forced the Council to dismiss the Mubarak cabinet on March 3. On March 4, while millions were celebrating this victory, revolutionaries laid siege to the headquarters of the secret

police in Alexandria and shut it down. The next day, protesters marched on secret police headquarters in city after city. In some places, protesters occupied these buildings, freed political prisoners in torture chambers, and walked out with tons of secret documents detailing repression and torture.

This courageous move by thousands of protesters forced the army to occupy and shut down all secret police headquarters. A week later, as millions were still reading through the leaked documents, the army finally dismantled that heinous institution and arrested tens of its officers, charging them with corruption and torture.

The dismissal of Mubarak's appointed cabinet and the defeat of the secret police gave a tremendous boost to everyone who supports the revolution.

The same week, mass mobilizations by Christians to protest the burning of the church in Helwan brought one more important victory to the side of the revolution. Tens of thousands of Christians, along with large numbers of Muslim supporters, occupied the north side of Tahrir Square, laying siege to the state television building to demand that the army rebuild the burned church and provide equality and protection to Christians. After an amazing eight-day occupation, reminiscent of the great occupation of the square in January, the army finally caved in and rebuilt the church.

It was not only a great victory for Christians who have been systematically discriminated against for decades. But, more importantly, widespread solidarity from Muslims with Christian protesters at the television building and elsewhere in the country reignited a sense of common destiny and so far has defeated the counter-revolutionaries' divide-and-conquer schemes.

Whither Egypt?

The next few days and weeks in Egypt will witness a continuation of the social and class polarization that erupted after February 11. On the one hand, the Supreme Council and the new Cabinet have escalated their antirevolutionary rhetoric and mea-

tures. They are supported by large sections of the frightened middle classes and, of course, the wealthy.

For example, this week the Cabinet announced a draconian law that would criminalize certain protests and strikes in periods of emergency in the future.

In addition, the army attempted to use force to break up a ten-day-old sit-in by students in the Faculty of Mass Communications at Cairo University demanding the dismissal of the corrupt Dean.

Both the army and the cabinet can now rely on a new ally in their campaign for "stability" and "law and order": the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Fundamentalist Group. The Muslim Brotherhood and the more reactionary fundamentalists campaigned vigorously to pass the cosmetic constitutional changes proposed by the Supreme Council. These groups turned the referendum on those changes into a referendum on the "Islamic" identity of the country. They told people that it was their religious duty to vote "yes" in order to prevent the establishment of a secular state with equal rights for the minority Christians.

Incredibly, in their demagogic effort, the Muslim Brotherhood formed a de facto bloc with their former jailers, Mubarak's National Democratic Party, which is discredited but yet to be dismantled—the only other political group in the country to support the army's proposals. In other words, and to the benefit of the old regime, the fundamentalists are attempting to polarize the country on religious lines and thus weaken the incredible unity between Muslims and Christians forged since January 25.

Remnants of the old secret police, meanwhile, are attempting to wreak havoc in the country through a campaign of fires aimed at ministry of interior buildings to cover their past crimes, and threats to assassinate public figures who support the revolution such as Mohamed El Baradai and Kefaya leader George Ishaq.

However, in the last two weeks, we have also seen a number of positive developments on the side of those who support the revolution. First, a growing minority who initially supported the Supreme Council and believed the lie that it aims to defend the revolution is rethinking its position. During the month of March, the Council and its cabinet daily showed their contempt for the masses of poor people to the point where the new prime minister compared strikers to street thugs.

Youth organizations that sprang up during and after the January 25 revolution have started in recent weeks to publicly criticize the timidity of the Supreme Council in meeting the revolution's demands for democracy and social justice—something you could not do in the first few weeks after February 11. Moreover, many activists and ordinary people are drawing the conclusion that the army is complicit in all counterrevolutionary actions.

To challenge the Council's timidity, youth organizations called for mass mobilizations on Friday April 1 under the slogan "Save the Revolution." On that day, hundreds of thousands of protesters took to the streets in Cairo, Alexandria, and cities across the country to call on the generals to listen to their demands.

The mood in Tahrir Square and elsewhere was militant and ecstatic. People came with signs, banners, and chants that put the generals on notice. The protesters gave the Council an ultimatum of one week to arrest the former president Mubarak and put him on trial for corruption and murder. In Tahrir Square, tens of thousands attended a popular trial for the deposed dictator presided over by well-known radical judges.

And for the first time, thousands chanted against General Mohamed Tantawi, the head of the Supreme Council and Mubarak's former minister of defense. Protesters demanded an end to all military trials, complete freedom of assembly and workers' right to strike, the dismantling of Mubarak's National Democratic Party, and the arrest of many top corrupt officials.

These mass mobilizations forced the army to flinch. In less than twenty-four hours after the protests, the Supreme Council ordered the Cabinet to speed up the arrests of corrupt officials and those who are responsible for murdering protesters during the revolutionary uprising.

Secondly, workers' strikes continue to spread and to become more militant. For example, for two weeks, thousands of media workers carried out an incredibly militant sit-in inside and outside the giant building of the government-owned television and radio service near Tahrir Square. They demanded the democratization of the institution, higher wages, and the removal of all CEOs and managers who supported Mubarak and spread lies about the January 25 revolution. The protesters threatened to take the television station off the air if their demands were not met, and for days they chased hated managers in corridors and on stairways. Finally, on April 2, 2011, the day after the mass mobilizations of April 1, the Supreme Council removed the top leadership of the TV and Radio Services—a clear victory for the media workers.

In late March, railway workers shut down all train movements in the south of the country, cutting off all entries and exits to the tourist cities of Luxor and Aswan to push their demands for fair wages.

Meanwhile, workers continue to build new independent unions, breaking from the government-controlled Trade Union Federation. On March 25, thousands of mass transit workers—whose strike during the January 25 uprising was instrumental in paralyzing Cairo and in bringing down Mubarak—announced the formation of an independent union after a four-year struggle against the government-run union federation.

The same day hundreds of nurses, workers, and doctors at Manshiat Al Bakri Hospital in Cairo announced the birth of one united independent union after two months of feverish protests and organizing. Mahalla textile workers whose struggle is widely seen as one of the main sources of inspiration

and many others are also forming new independent unions.

All these groups of workers are joining the newly formed Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions. Three weeks ago, workers' strikes and protests forced the current Cabinet to change the old labor laws and to recognize all independent unions.

Political parties

In the days after February 11, thousands of Egyptians began to form all sorts of new political parties.

The once-banned Muslim Brotherhood and disparate Islamist groups are scrambling to form new political parties. The leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood has announced that it will form a political party similar in outlook to the Islamic Welfare Party in Turkey. The Brotherhood has struck a tacit alliance with the Supreme Council and offers itself now as a force for stability and law and order. To prove its allegiance to the Council, the Brotherhood refuses to support workers' strikes and also declined to support the April 1 mobilization, calling for patience and more time for the Cabinet. The Islamist fundamentalists are also mobilizing a reactionary campaign to Islamize society. Its supporters are denouncing women who do not wear the headscarf and demonizing Christians. Whereas the Brotherhood assures everyone that it will respect women and minority rights, the fundamentalists are calling for the implementation of strict Sharia laws, such as cutting off the hands of those who steal.

On the other hand, many liberal figures and forces announce a new party almost on a daily basis. Most of these parties are developing a left-liberal program or a social democratic platform for change.

Similarly, workers and the left are also initiating their own organizations and parties to fight for workers' demands and a radical democracy. For example, hundreds of militant trade unionists have come together to initiate the Workers Democratic

Party. Also, hundreds of socialists, progressives, and unionists are forming a broad left party called the Socialist Popular Alliance.

In universities, majorities of professors and teaching staffs have been supporting and joining all kinds of student mobilizations to democratize the campuses.

On a neighborhood level, popular committees to defend the revolution—initiated by socialists and other activists in Tahrir—have spread to more than eleven governorates and have organized several thousand in mobilizations around social justice issues and to purge all remnants of the Mubarak regime.

And whereas the Supreme Council and the Cabinet ignored women in all their appointments of ministers and constitutional committees, women play a much bigger role in new unions, left parties, and the popular committees to defend the revolution.

Conclusion

It is fair to say that most of what the Egyptian revolution achieved in democratic changes after February 11 can only be attributed to massive popu-

lar pressure and courageous mobilizations of thousands of revolutionaries such as the marches on the secret police headquarters or the April 1 demonstrations.

Millions of those who support the revolution have not yet joined in some of these activities. As time passes and promises by those defending the old system are broken, the revolutionaries could win over millions of new recruits to their efforts to finish off the Mubarak regime. And as millions join this revolutionary wave across the Arab world, the balance of forces will continue to tip against the old order.

Meanwhile, all current organizing efforts by workers, students, and other revolutionaries provide the basis both for much bigger rounds of struggle and an alternative to the reactionary projects of the old ruling class and the Islamic fundamentalists.

As one revolutionary put it: "The Spring of the Egyptian Revolution has just started."

This article is based on a speech given at the Left Forum conference in New York City on March 20, and has been expanded by the author.

HAITI

Haiti's humanitarian crisis

ROGER ANNIS AND KIM IVES ·

The world was rightly aghast at the chaos it read about or watched on television. But the implication by some that Haitians were to blame, and that Haitian elections unavoidably lead to such chaos, is false. In reality, the November exclusion election and its second-round denouement on March 20, 2011, is simply another chapter in foreign, primarily U.S., imperial policy in Haiti over the past two decades that has sought to disenfranchise the Haitian masses and roll back the national sovereignty of Latin America's first independent republic.

Grasping this reality not only allows decryption of election myths but also explains why so much of the international relief and reconstruction effort since the January 12, 2010, earthquake has been a failure, and what can be done to reverse that.

An election outcome foretold

Concerned voices in Haiti and abroad warned against the timing and terms of the November 28 and March 20 votes. The country, they said, was still reeling from an unprecedented humanitarian crisis that should receive all available attention and resources.

They condemned the arbitrary and patently unjustified decision of the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) to ban candidates from former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's Fanmi Lavalas, clearly the country's largest and most representative party, along with 13 smaller parties. The CEP remains an appointed body (by outgoing President René Préval) instead of the permanent council elected by local assemblies that is stipulated by Haiti's 1987 Constitution.

Critics also said that the minimal infrastructure for holding a fair and representative vote did not exist, at least during the crucial first round, namely, an accurate voters' list, adequate mechanisms for voter registration, voting-day facilities allowing people to cast their vote with relative ease, and the presence of security and observer personnel at polling stations to guard against abuses and irregularities. [1] Indeed, some 1.5 million Haitians in the West Department where the earthquake struck still have no real address, living in about 1,300 makeshift tent and tarpaulin camps.

The post-earthquake crisis was compelling reason enough to postpone a vote. But when the cholera epidemic erupted in mid-October, the push for elections became absurd. A Haitian patriot residing in France wrote to one of this article's authors:

They could have found another way to govern the country than to stage an election over the earthquake ruins and dead bodies still warm from cholera infection or from lack of medical attention caused by the electoral chaos. My anger remains so strong against those who advocated elections to govern...what? I barely recognize my country as being such.

But the UN Security Council and the powers that dominate it disregarded doubts and protests from Haitians and pressed ahead, anxious to renew a democratic facade on their illegal occupation of Haiti. From their standpoint, a chaotic vote might look bad before the world, but the alternative, proposed by Haitian popular organizations, was worse: the formation of a provisional government that would convene a new CEP whose members would be drawn from recognized and representative popular and civic groups. This was how the 1990 elections that first brought Aristide to power were organized.

And so Haiti stumbles along with a deeply flawed electoral exercise whose only certainty is that the presidential winner will be a rightist politician friendly to Haiti's elite and foreign capital, if not inspired by Duvalierism.

Author Peter Hallward has written a post-earthquake afterword to a new printing of his seminal 2007 history of modern Haiti, *Damming the Flood: Haiti, Aristide and the Politics of Containment*. Penned in September 2010, before it was clear that elections would take place, his words still capture the essence of Haiti's dilemma:

The period that began with the military coup of September 1991 is best described as one of the most prolonged and intense periods of counterrevolution anywhere in the world. For the last twenty years, the most powerful political and economic interests in and around Haiti have waged a systematic campaign designed to stifle the popular movement and deprive it of its principal weapons, resources and leaders. The January earthquake triggered reactions that carried and that are still carrying such measures to entirely new levels. [2]

From Duvalier Dynasty to military coups and intervention

To anticipate what lies ahead in Haiti, it is important to understand the origins of the popular movement for democracy and social justice that has shaped the last 25 years. The movement's resilience is a legacy of the astonishing and successful war for slave liberation and independence of 1791–1804, an event that continues to reverberate in Haitians' consciousness and world history.

The uprising that overthrew the 29-year rule of the Duvalier family dynasty in February 1986 opened the prospect for democratic rule. But while the dictator JeanClaude "Baby Doc" Duvalier and his family had to flee, the repressive apparatus of Haiti's wealthy elite remained intact. What followed was a tumultuous, four-year struggle to hold a national vote.

Washington and the Haitian bourgeoisie, working through the Armed Forces of Haiti (FAdH) and

death squads, tried violence and every trick in the book to control that process, including drowning in blood an attempted November 1987 election and staging a pseudo-election two months later that was almost universally boycotted.

The founding of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in the United States in 1983 signaled a new strategy by Washington of installing heads of state in its neocolonies through engineered elections rather than through military coups. This strategy, much to Washington's surprise and dismay, met its first defeat in Haiti in December 1990. Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a former liberation theology Catholic priest, won the presidential election, Haiti's first democratic election in many decades, with 67 percent of the vote, heading a broad, unstructured, popular movement called the Lavalas (meaning "flood"). His closest rival, the Washington-backed candidate and a former World Bank official named Marc Bazin, won a paltry 14 percent.

But Haiti's elite appealed the vote, in the words of first coup Prime Minister Jean-Jacques Honorat, to "a higher authority" than the Haitian people. On September 30, 1991, the army and police staged a coup, exiling Aristide. The FAdH, with civilian frontmen, established a reign of terror for the next three years.

The coup had a devastating effect on political as well as social and economic life. Soldiers and paramilitary gunmen killed and exiled thousands, including many of Haiti's most talented and battle-tested political leaders. But the popular movement was resilient. Much like the newly freed slaves' response to Napoleon Bonaparte's attempt to reintroduce slavery in 1802, the Haitian masses in the early 1990s showed the world their resolve to stop a return to neo-Duvalierist dictatorship.

Resistance to FAdH rule erupted in mass protests, aerial leaflet drops, and anti-coup pamphlets and radio broadcasts. Giant pro-democracy demonstrations and conferences grew in Haitian diaspora poles like New York, Miami, Montreal, and Paris.

Tens of thousands of refugees took to the high seas in wooden sailboats destined for Florida; most were intercepted by the U.S. Coast Guard. Haiti was becoming ungovernable, and its puppet governments an embarrassment. To counter brewing revolutionary projects, stem the tide of refugees, and reestablish stability for U.S. investors, the Clinton administration gambled that it could use Aristide to front for the neoliberal reforms it sought to implement in Haiti. Surrounded by 22,000 U.S. troops, Washington flew Aristide back to Haiti on October 15, 1994, the first time anywhere it had reinstalled a president previously ousted by a U.S.-backed coup. But Aristide did not follow the Clinton script for privatizing state industries. Worse yet, in 1995 he abolished the Haitian army, depriving Washington and Haiti's elite of their principal lever for controlling Haitian governments since U.S. Marines ended their 20-year occupation in 1934.

In 1995, while Haiti remained occupied by UN troops, the U.S. Embassy insisted on elections to replace Aristide, despite the Haitian people's call for him to recoup the three years he spent in exile. On February 7, 1996, Aristide handed over power to his former Prime Minister, René Préval. But where Aristide resisted the privatization of state enterprises, Préval welcomed it. He also granted Washington the right to penetrate Haitian waters and airspace at will.

Meanwhile, Aristide and his colleagues founded the Fanmi Lavalas party in late 1996 and began preparing for the 2000 election. In May and November elections that year, the new party captured the Parliament and reelected Aristide as president. In turning the presidency over to Aristide in early 2001, Préval was the only Haitian head of state in the last 70 years to serve a full term and hand over power to an elected successor.

The new government promised to "invest in people" and make good on social justice projects for the masses. But after Lavalas swept the Parliament in May, a powerful triumvirate—the United States (tellingly, under the Clinton administration), shadowed by Canada and the European Union—im-

posed a crushing embargo on foreign aid and loans to Haiti.

The three powers—who named themselves "Friends of Haiti"—nurtured both vocal and violent oppositions, ranging from paramilitary "contras" assaulting people and government facilities from protected bases in the Dominican Republic to concocted and sometimes phantom groups dressed up as representatives of "civil society."

It all led to a second coup d'etat, on February 29, 2004. But this time, there was no Haitian Army to do the dirty deed. It was carried out by foreign soldiers. A U.S. Navy Seal team, directed by the U.S. deputy ambassador Luis Moreno, whisked Aristide and his wife from their home in Tabarre into exile in Africa, while U.S., Canadian, and French troops occupied strategic locations around the country.

Ten lost years

The 2004 coup was another heavy blow against Haiti's burgeoning political leadership and capacity. Not only was the president kidnapped, but most of the country's governing institutions were dismantled—the legislature, the senate, municipal governments, schools, and post-secondary institutions. Once again, thousands of leading political figures were killed, imprisoned, or driven into hiding or exile.

The occupied country was nominally ruled for two years by U.S.-installed de facto Prime Minister Gérard Latortue and President Alexandre Boniface. Aid was unblocked but increasingly directed exclusively to NGOs and charities, completely bypassing the government and deliberately fostering service provider networks parallel to and independent of Haitian government oversight.

The 2004 coup has been more lasting than that of 1991 because powerful new players are assisting the United States in destroying Haitian democracy and sovereignty. These include:

? Imperialist powers, notably Canada and France, who bring money, police, soldiers, and lots of polit-

ical experience in the business of neo-colonial rule.

? The UN Security Council, which provided authorization for the coup and subsequent occupation, notwithstanding that this is a flagrant violation of the UN Charter's Article 7. In June 2004, the Council created a military occupation force to take over from the United States, Canada, and France called the UN Mission to Stabilize Haiti (MINUSTAH). Most of its foot soldiers are drawn from other neocolonies in Latin America and Asia. Today, it numbers 13,500 police, military, and administrative personnel.

? Latin America's larger capitalist countries, including Brazil (which leads MINUSTAH's military component), Chile, and Argentina. They provide a useful fig leaf for what is essentially a Washington-run operation, as cables recently released by Wikileaks reveal.

? NGOs and foreign-financed Haitian "civil society" organizations that became knowing or unwitting accomplices in the coup, often under the watchword that the uncooperative President Aristide had to leave office "for the good of the country."

It is ironic that Brazil, the last nation in Latin America to outlaw slavery, is now policing the first nation to do so. Brazilian commanders have led assaults on urban shantytown strongholds of armed, anti-occupation Lavalas partisans with the same savagery they have displayed in raids into Rio de Janeiro's favelas. At U.S. Embassy urging, Brazil directed two bloody and indiscriminate assaults on "bandit" strongholds in the huge Port-au-Prince district of Cité Soleil in July and December 2005. Dozens of innocent civilians died, as documented by human rights and other fact finding delegations.

Despite international aid conferences and agreements such as the Interim Cooperation Framework (CCI) of 2004, Haiti's agricultural production continued its precipitous decline under the coup regime. Light manufacturing, profiting from Haiti's less than \$1 a day labor (which economists like Oxford's Paul Collier argue is Haiti's greatest national asset) also declined. "Everything is broken in

Haiti," said U.S. attorney Thomas Griffin following a visit to the country in late 2004 that produced the first comprehensive look at human rights since the coup. [3] "Haiti's people churn inside a hurricane of violence," his report said. "Haiti's security and justice institutions fuel the cycle of violence."

A February 7, 2006, national election did little to alleviate conditions in the broken country. While René Préval was reelected president, many who voted for him simply considered him a lesser evil. Potential Fanmi Lavalas candidates were effectively banned from participation because they were sitting in jail or in exile. Préval has since proven to be a great disappointment to the Lavalas base that voted him in.

The shattering of Haiti's political and social institutions by coups and political instability have made the country exceptionally vulnerable to a string of natural disasters in the past decade, including hurricanes in 2004 and 2008 that all but destroyed Gonaïves, Haiti's fourth largest city, and, of course, the January 2010 earthquake. The latest disaster has been the inadvertent introduction into Haiti of cholera by MINUSTAH's Nepalese contingent in October 2010. It was inevitable that a large, foreign military occupation force drawn from other poor nations around the globe would bring new diseases to Haiti. Nothing was done by the UN Security Council and other international agencies to warn against that, much less prevent it.

Why Haiti?

"Why Haiti?" is a question often asked when observers confront Haiti's political history. Where are important oil or other natural resources in Haiti that might explain imperialism's relentless drive to control the country? And surely imperialism is not threatened by Aristide's reformist societal project whose goals he once described as merely moving "from absolute misery to a dignified poverty."

But it's not the search for oil reserves, potential tourist enclaves, plentiful cheap labor, or pots of gold that drives imperial policy (although the coun-

try does have gold reserves now being exploited in these recessionary times by Canadian mining firms). At least, not these reasons alone. It is above all to counter the threat of a "bad example," as the Haitian people proved to the rest of the hemisphere in 1804, and again in 1990. Imperial powers loathe governments of social justice in Haiti or elsewhere in Latin America and the Caribbean because they radicalize and raise the expectations of the poorest masses throughout the hemisphere and the world.

Mark Weisbrot of the Center for Economic Policy Research (CEPR) writes on this in a recent Guardian article:

"People who do not understand U.S. foreign policy think that control over Haiti does not matter to Washington, because it is so poor and has no strategic minerals or resources. But that is not how Washington operates, as the WikiLeaks cables repeatedly illustrate. For the State Department and its allies, it is all a ruthless chess game, and every pawn matters. Left governments will be removed or prevented from taking power where it is possible to do so." [4]

Haiti's heroic, nineteenth century example was a considerable influence on the rise of the civil rights and anticolonial movements in the United States and around the world following the Second World War.

And the revolutionary inspiration flows both ways. On a clear evening, the shoreline of Cuba is visible from the northeast tip of Haiti. The United States has long feared the influence of Cuba's socialist revolution on the consciousness and political will of the Haitian people. In postearthquake Haiti, amidst thousands of NGOs with multimillion dollar budgets, Cuba, without fanfare, has become Haiti's largest health care provider. Its network of community clinics has treated close to half of the tens of thousands of people afflicted with cholera. Since 2005, Cuba's Latin American School of Medicine has graduated 70 Haitian doctors per year, a priceless national acquisition.

Bolivarian Venezuela has also earned a special place in the hearts of Haitians. Its aid and assistance to Haiti over the past decade and since the earthquake surpasses anything that the imperial powers have offered, including new power plants in Cap Haïtien, Gonaïves, and Port-auPrince. With little advance notice, Hugo Chávez received a hero's welcome by tens of thousands in the streets of Portau-Prince when he made his one visit to Haiti, in May 2006.

A shared future with the peoples of Latin American and the Caribbean

Haiti's unique history, language, and culture can mislead the casual observer to exaggerate its isolation from its Caribbean and Latin American neighbors. Sadly, its history as a victim of imperial interference and intervention is very much a shared one. The 2009 coup against the elected president of Honduras is only the latest of imperial interventions past and present bearing all the same trademarks as Haiti's 2004 coup. [5]

Since the earthquake, we have seen a continuation of the same failed policies in Haiti, including the militarization of aid response by the governments of the United States, Canada and France in the critical weeks following January 12. [6]

The tragedy laid bare for the world to see the rotten foundation bequeathed to Haitian society by two centuries of plunder and intervention.

The political side of the post-earthquake intervention has also advanced. The November election was nothing less than an orchestrated play to ensure that a pliant president, legislature, and senate would be duly installed. In December, the Organization of American States (OAS) effectively supplanted the CEP as the "final arbiter" of the November 28 election. It arbitrarily excluded Jude Célestin from the second-round presidential vote and placed Michel Martelly on the ballot in his place. The move was not even submitted to a vote among the members of the CEP. Only four of the

CEP's eight members approved the move, instead of five, the majority constitutionally required.

The November vote was shunned by three quarters of Haiti's 4.7 million eligible voters, according to the CEP's own figures. In no way does it represent a measure of the Haitian people's will. "With so many irregularities, errors, and fraudulent vote totals, it is impossible to say what the results of this election really are," declared the CEPR's Mark Weisbrot on December 30. "If the Organization of American States certifies this election, this would be a political decision, having nothing to do with election monitoring."

Regardless of the outcome of the March 20 electoral exercise, the revolutionary anger of the Haitian masses will lead to months of uprising and unrest. And the successful return of Jean-Bertrand Aristide to the country will strengthen the popular movement. The three principal targets of popular rage are:

- 1) The UN occupation and the cholera it has introduced into Haiti;
- 2) The slow or non-existent response to continued postquake homelessness by NGOs and the former president Bill Clinton-led Interim Haitian Recovery Commission, whose board is dominated by foreign bankers and government officials, along with Haitian bourgeois representatives; and
- 3) The Haitian people's complete and flagrant disenfranchisement in the November 28 vote.

Ultimately, protest could send the UN occupation packing. It costs some \$612 million annually, and the UN has just asked for an additional \$850 million on top of that.

Protest will also further destabilize Washington's "Ministry of Colonial Affairs," as Cuba calls the Organization of American States. In late December 2010, the organization's representative to Haiti, the Brazilian Ricardo Seitenfus, was summarily fired after delivering a searing indictment of Haiti's foreign occupation.

"We want to turn Haiti into a capitalist country, an export platform for the U.S. market, it's absurd," he said. "When the level of unemployment is 80 percent, it is unbearable to deploy a stabilization mission. There is nothing to stabilize and everything to build."

"We must build roads, erect dams, participate in the organization of the State, the judicial system. The UN says it has no mandate for that. Its mandate in Haiti is to keep the peace of the graveyard." [7]

Haiti's resistance is creating a wedge in the U.S. dominated OAS alliance and is encouraging Latin America towards the alternatives of the ALBA social/economic alliance of progressive governments and UNASUR, an organization that encompasses most of the continent's Spanish-speaking governments. In this way, Haiti continues playing its pioneering role in history. Haiti's future lies squarely with its brother and sister peoples of the Americas and their shared aspirations for social justice, national and racial equality, and peace with Mother Earth.

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ECONOMIC CRISIS

The Latest Fibs From World Financiers

PATRICK BOND ·

Apparently, "one in three Africans is middle class" and as a result, Africa is ready for "take off", according to African Development Bank chief economist Mthuli Ncube last week at the World Economic Forum-Africa summit in Cape Town. "Hey you know what, the world please wake up, this is a phenomenon in Africa that we've not spent a lot of time thinking about."

Ncube defines middle class as those who spend between \$2-20/day, a group that includes a vast number of people considered extremely poor by any reasonable definition, given the higher prices of most consumer durables in African cities. The number of people spending between just \$2 and \$4/day constitutes a fifth of all Sub-Saharan Africans, even Ncube admits, while the range from \$4 to \$20/day amounts to 13%, with 5% spending more than \$20/day.

Below the \$2/day level, 61% of Africans are mired in deep poverty, a stunning reflection of ongoing underdevelopment due to imperialism, the Resource Curse and nefarious African elites.

It's just as Walter Rodney explained in his book *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* nearly four decades ago: "the operation of the imperialist system bears major responsibility for African economic retardation by draining African wealth and by making it impossible to develop more rapidly the resources of the continent. Secondly, one has to deal with those who manipulate the system and those who are either agents or unwitting accomplices of the said system."

Playing both roles, the likes of Ncube have not changed their neoliberal tunes, they simply hold up a small sliver of (desperately entrepreneurial)

Africans engaged in petty commodity exchange as the hope for the future.

Such distortion-heavy Afro-optimism seems to arrive in waves. After 1950s-70s independence dreams soured, the early 1990s witnessed hopeful democratization tendencies, yet most subsequent elections were tainted.

By the mid-1990s, as *Time* magazine reported, "when a new generation of leaders emerged, Africans dared to hope that things could finally be changing. People like Issaias Afewerki in Eritrea, Laurent Kabila in Democratic Republic of Congo, Paul Kagame in Rwanda, Yoweri Museveni in Uganda and Meles Zenawi in Ethiopia promised a new style of leadership that focused on building economies and democratic nations instead of shoring up their power by force and ensuring that they and their friends got rich. When President Bill Clinton visited Africa in 1998, he touted this generation as Africa's great hope."

Though these elites were all soon subsequently unveiled as ruthless dictators, Afro-optimism spread with the 2001 New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad) and its 2003 African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). But the programmes' champion, Thabo Mbeki, was fired by his own party in 2008, and the two other highest-profile African Union (AU) leaders were the tyrants Zenawi (the lead AU climate negotiator and APRM chair still today) and Moammar Gaddafi (recent AU president). Nepad and the APRM were written off.

The broken ICT techno-fix

One basis for Afro-optimism today is the availability of cellular telephony in many areas formerly off-grid for communications. Of course, similar high hopes for raised productivity through technology leapfrogging led to the last quarter-century's micro-

finance fantasies. But it has become clear in recent months in India (with its 200,000 farm suicides) as well as the the microdebt mecca of Bangladesh that there was too little economic space to allow women to borrow at high interest rates so as to compete in glutted petty commodity markets.

The Bank's most recent policy paper argued, "Success of Information and Communications Technology (ICT), especially mobile phone penetration, shows how rapidly a sector can grow. It also shows how the public sector can set the conditions for the exponential growth of a vital industry that could transform the continent."

The reality is less encouraging. Although Africa is better with cellphones than it was without (say, fifteen years ago), the actual performance of the industry unveils telling weaknesses. These include the role of multinational capital in sucking out profits and dividends, the lack of genuine competition (collusion is notorious even in the largest economy, South Africa), relatively high prices for cellphone handsets and services, and limited technological linkages to internet service.

Last year, a report ("Towards Evidence-based ICT Policy and Regulation") by Johannesburg researchers Enrico Calandro, Alison Gillwald, Mpho Moyo and Christoph Stork unveiled a host of ICT deficiencies, because although "the mobile market, has experienced significant growth, outcomes have been sub-optimal in many respects."

For example, the authors argue, cellphone penetration "figures tend to mask the fact that millions of Africans still do not own their own means of communication." Moreover,

- Africa continues to lag behind other regions both in terms of the percentage of people with access to the full range of communications services and the amounts and manner in which they can be used – primarily as a result of the high cost of services;
- the cost of wholesale telecommunication services as an input for other economic activities remains

high, escalating the cost of business in most countries;

- the contribution of ICT to gross domestic product, with some exceptions, is considerably less than global averages;
- national objectives of achieving universal and affordable access to the full range of communications services have been undermined either by poor policies;
- as a general trend across the continent, while the voice divide is decreasing, the Internet divide is increasing and broadband is almost absent on the continent;
- the fixed-line sector continues to show no signs of recovery as most countries experienced negative growth between 2006 and 2008.

Indeed for nearly all of Africa, cellphone penetration rates "remain below the 40% critical mass believed to trigger the network effects associated with economic growth" and even in more mature markets (Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Tunisia and South Africa), "The high 'penetration' figures result from the use of multiple-SIM cards, resulting in overcounting, often by several million."

As for internet, they report:

- broadband uptake trails even other developing regions in the world with a penetration rate below 2%;
- low penetration rates are mainly a result of the prohibitively high costs of Internet services;
- the landing of several undersea cables and a number of terrestrial fibre investment projects have led to a significant reduction in the costs of accessing the Internet. In some countries, the drop in wholesale prices has not, however, filtered to end-user prices;
- digital literacy and the affordability of access devices like personal computers, is expected to remain a challenge.

The researchers conclude, "large numbers of citizens across the continent still lack access to or cannot afford the kind of communication services that enable effective social and economic participation in a modern economy and society."

Macroeconomic mumbo-jumbo

Given this reality across the board, there are practically no micro-economic successes to speak of. So the current Afro-optimist wave is a tsunami of macroeconomic propaganda, led not by African politicians and their northern helpers, but by resurgent multilateral development banks.

In February, the World Bank issued its strategy document, "Africa's Future and the World Bank's Support to It", followed in April by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) "Regional Economic Outlook" for Africa.

The latter report notes "a structural upbreak in growth encompassing 21 of the region's 44 countries. Many of the strongest performers have sustained their superior performances for a decade or more through good times and bad and increasingly they exhibit characteristics associated not only with faster growth, but more sustained growth. For now, at least, the lions continue to roar."

But once we correct the economists' definitions of GDP growth by factoring in environmental destruction and non-renewable resource depletion, even a 2006 World Bank report ("Where is the Wealth of Nations?") concedes a net ongoing reduction of African wealth.

One motivation behind this hype is a return to austerity and intensified globalization, following a brief period of much higher African deficit spending required to counteract the world crisis. The IMF Regional Economic Outlook's 'Main Findings' argued that African countries' budgets "should be moving away from the supportive stance of the last few years."

And African central banks should raise interest rates, says the IMF: "Monetary policy remains looser than desirable in many countries in the region,

even before the recent surge in fuel and food prices." Normally with higher prices on imported oil and grains, a lower interest rate would compensate to boost weaker domestic economies. But no, the IMF's main fear is always inflation, since the institution represents bankers, who fear the erosion of the value of their main asset, money.

Out of 22 recent IMF Africa programmes, according to a 2010 Center for Economic and Policy Research study, 17 were contractionary orders and just 5 expansionary. Even South Africa was advised in September 2008 to intensify its neoliberal bias.

By that time, African fiscal deficits were blooming: a slight spending increase conjoined with a huge revenue drop, generated a switch from a positive fiscal balance (6% of GDP) to a huge deficit (-6%) between 2008 and 2009. That's how Africa survived the world crisis without more damage.

Popular protest as antidote

Imposing a new round of Washington Consensus policies risks causing what even World Bank chief Africa economist Shanta Devarajan in 2009 termed "the specter of political instability and social unrest". For Devarajan, "market-based reforms, which were painful in the first place but which African countries implemented because they could see the impact they were having on growth, are likely to lose political support because they no longer deliver results."

At the same press briefing, Bank Africa Vice President Obiageli Ezekwesili worried, "It is precisely in a season of crisis like this that African governments must stay the course of market-based reforms."

Last month, a journalist asked IMF Managing Director Dominique Strauss-Kahn about the North African uprisings: "Do you have any fears that there is perhaps a far left movement coming through these revolutions that want more, perhaps, closed economies? I mean, there have been a lot of pictures of Che Guevara there."

Strauss-Kahn's reply was telling: "Good question. Good question. There's always this risk, but I'm not sure it will materialize."

Instead, Strauss-Kahn's institution claims that Africa has 17 "Great Takeoff" countries with at least 2.25 percent/year per capita GDP rates over the prior 13 years, featuring "macro stability, good institutions, and pro-growth structural reforms."

Likewise, authors of the World Bank's new Africa strategy "conclude that Africa could be on the brink of an economic takeoff, much like China was 30 years ago, and India 20 years ago."

And the African Development Bank parroted at the World Economic Forum, "Due to strong progress in and across many African countries, people are beginning to predict that Africa's economy may take off as did China's 30 years ago and that of India 20 years ago."

These raised expectations are absurd. In a low-profile study published in February, three IMF economists (Gonzalo Salinas, Cheikh Gueye, and Olessia Korbut) at least recognized (while disagreeing), "The apparent stagnation of SubSaharan Africa (the poorest region in the world) in an era of freer

markets has fueled strong criticisms against market reforms. Indeed, condemnation of economic liberalization has become part of mainstream development thinking, and several commentators urge African countries to accelerate growth by modifying their comparative advantage on natural resources."

Given how disastrous globalization has been for Africa, a "far left movement" is long overdue, to democratize societies (as is underway in not only Tunisia and Egypt but Swaziland, Uganda, Zimbabwe and other countries), to preserve natural resources (especially fossil fuels) and rethink the merits of extractive industries, and to meet basic needs and balance local economies through domestic ("import-substitution") production.

Only with such a movement can we move from the Bretton Woods Institutions' feeble-minded hucksterism to a genuine Afro-optimism, bottom-up and people-powered. Until then, the global financial agencies' desperation for an African success story should be taken with not a grain, but a calabash full of salt.

From Counterpunch:

<http://www.counterpunch.org/bondo51...>

ECONOMIC CRISIS

The Euro Pact: when the kidnapper rescues you

DANIEL ALBARRACÍN ·

With the Euro Pact, the bailouts of Greece, Ireland and now Portugal mean a still greater process, if possible, of socialization of debts. Especially of private debt, which in Spain represents, according to data from the Bank of Spain for 2010, 78% of the total. This debt that weighs down the economy, with tax cuts and bailouts to the banks, has raised the public debt. This also involves a transfer of income: creditors - especially the big central European banks - return their loans - increasing their solvency; meanwhile, the new debts owed by states rescued by the EU will be paid by all citizens - at the expense of reduced public services and social rights - and the working population - in the form of more unemployment, counter-reforms in the labour market and reduced working rights.

These recipes will further economic depression and submit us to the dictatorship of creditors; and those who had been responsible for the crisis will be its beneficiaries. The same policies that have deepened divergences and uneven development in Europe, far from being corrected, will be deepened. And public debt will increase. Who is saving who then? The chickens are cooped up with the fox.

There is no easy alternative. We have two options: rescue and adjustment measures, or attack of the "markets" on the public debt. How to break out of this tragic dilemma? Little Iceland disobeyed: it rejected social adjustment measures, it has not returned the debt to the creditors, it has prosecuted the perpetrators of the crisis, and has nationalized banking while rejecting the "bailouts" demanded by the creditors, and it is coming out of recession! In

addition, while the interest rates on public debt issued by Greece and Ireland have risen after their respective bailouts, those of Iceland have experienced a significant decline.

The European Trade Union Confederation has proposed an issue of Eurobonds that would alleviate abusive differentials in risk premiums. It also demands that the European Central Bank adopt a monetary policy based on the creation of employment, developing greater cooperation between member states.

The trade unions in the south of Europe go further, calling for greater regulation of financial markets, a tax on financial transactions, the creation of a European Debt Agency for debt - embryo of a European Public Treasury - and a bigger public budget for the EU. These measures would be effective for cutting off the recessionary drain, given that they would get round the existing financial short circuit; they would also lay some groundwork for a more ambitious progressive reform.

But tackling the crisis for the benefit of the majority would require even more far-reaching and bold measures: rejection of the measures of adjustment and socialization of the debt; public audit of the conditions in which the public debt was issued, acquired, and financed; restructuring and cancellation of socially unacceptable debt so that creditors bear the main burden of the crisis; relaunch of public banks; and re-fiscalisation of the income from capital, by investing new public revenues in socially useful initiatives and sustainable energy transition, with effects of economic recovery and the generation of employment.

We need a profound change in European policy to promote not only a strong regulation of financial markets, but also international tax harmonisation based on direct and progressive taxes, as well as in-

creased wages and social rights. The management of the deficit and the debt should be prefigured with a criterion that ensures countercyclical investment policies in the recession we are going through, something that the Euro Pact prevents

We need to find a path towards a supra-national alliance which is opposed to the Euro Pact and politically supports and coordinates the construction of

another Europe. That means advancing firm criteria for driving EU policies in favour of the social majority represented by the labouring class, in a direction diametrically opposed to what is becoming ever more a Europe at the service of the large financial oligarchies.

[This article was also signed by Bibiana Medialdea, Bruno Estrada, Manuel Serra and Nacho à lvarez].

LUXEMBOURG

Class struggle in a "haven of peace and social progress"

MURRAY SMITH ·

Up until 30 years ago the economy of Luxembourg was dominated by heavy industry, centred on iron and steel. Like other Western European countries it was severely affected by the crisis of the 1970s. A process of restructuring and downsizing of the steel industry followed, carried out under the direction of what was then the European Community, via the Davignon Plan, and affecting not only Luxembourg but other countries, in particular West Germany, France and Belgium. Eventually the Luxembourg national steel company, ARBED, merged in 2002 with the French company Usinor and the Spanish Aceralia to form Arcelor, which was in its turn taken over by the Indian steel company Mittal in 2006. Today, ArcelorMittal is the largest steel producer in the world. It has its headquarters in Luxembourg and still employs several thousand workers in the country to produce high-quality steel, many fewer than Arbed employed in its heyday (4000 production workers today, as against 30,000 in 1975). Nevertheless, even though the steel industry is a shadow of its former self, its history still looms large over Luxembourg and in particular over the workers' movement.

The southern part of the country, the centre of the iron and steel industry, is known as the "Red Lands", from the colour of the iron-laden earth. But the name could also aptly describe the political colour of the area, the most left-wing part of the country, centred on Luxembourg's second city, Esch-sur-Alzette.

Deindustrialisation

Luxembourg, like a number of other EU countries, has undergone a process of deindustrialisation. Of course there is still an industrial sector, including not only steel, but also some new high-tech industries such as SES, founded in 1985, which produces satellite telecommunications equipment. But today it is the tertiary, service sector that is dominant. And as the industrial base of Luxembourg has narrowed, the country, and above all its capital, has become a major financial centre.

On a world level, 80 per cent of exports consist of material goods (including iron and steel) and 20 per cent services (including financial services). Luxembourg is exactly the opposite: 20 per cent of its exports consist of material goods (of which steel still represents 37 per cent) and 80 per cent services. Financial services alone account for more than 50 per cent of exports. This compares with 30 per cent for Switzerland and only 10 per cent for Singapore. Luxembourg has 0.007 per cent of the world's population and 0.095 per cent of world GDP. It has, however, 15 per cent of exports of financial services: 17th place in the world; 65th place for material goods (source: WTO). Within the EU, with 27 per cent of exports of financial services, Luxembourg is second only to the United Kingdom. [1] Speculative capital in Luxembourg represents 50 times the country's GDP, while the funds held by the banks represent 30 times GDP. Luxembourg has a larger share of investment funds than any other EU country. In particular it holds an incredible 85 per cent of the cross-border trade in Europe in UCITS collective investment funds. [2] The sums involved run into trillions of euros. (One example of a Luxembourg-based UCITS fund was

LuxAlpha, the principal European antenna of the Madoff scam.)

The growth in the financial sector is not particular to Luxembourg, although Luxembourg provides an extreme example of it. On a European level, it reflects on the one hand a certain process of deindustrialisation in the advanced capitalist countries, with a shift of material production towards emergent economies and the growth of the services sector. But the financialisation of advanced capitalist economies is above all an expression of the tendency for profits to be directed towards finance because of the lack of sufficiently profitable productive investment. And of course the vast sums of money that are placed in the Luxembourg financial sector do not come from Luxembourg (or only to a small degree), but from all over Europe and the world. And Luxembourg does everything it can to attract this capital. Taxes on business, at 21.1 per cent, are the lowest in the EU (EU average 44.2 per cent). [3]

Luxembourg's success in carving out a place for itself in the new financialised international constellation explains in large part the maintenance of relatively high standards of living and of social protection. At the same time the dominance of finance is an Achilles heel. Luxembourg was quite sharply hit by the 2008 financial crisis and remains vulnerable to future shocks. Probably as a delayed effect of the 2008 crisis, bankruptcies in 2010 in the financial sector were higher than the total of the three previous years combined. But bigger dangers lie in wait. Luxembourg contributed 200 million euros to the loan for the Greek bailout and 50 million for Ireland. It may be thought that it was cheap at the price, when you consider that holdings of debt by Luxembourg banks and financial institutions in the so-called PIGS (Portugal, Ireland, Greece and Spain) amount to 62 billion euros. So Luxembourg, like its larger neighbours (Germany, France, UK ...) is in fact protecting its own banks and financial institutions. After the recent annual visit of experts from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to take the pulse of the Luxembourg economy, the

newspaper *Le Quotidien* reported that "the IMF points out that the banks situated in Luxembourg are susceptible to being exposed through their international groups to the sovereign debts of certain European countries. This problem is considered by the IMF to be serious" (April 5, 2011).

Working-class composition

The other very important feature of Luxembourg is the composition of its population and in particular of its working class. Luxembourg has a population of 500,000, which now includes 43 per cent of non-citizens. This is the highest percentage in both the EU and the countries of the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Within the school system the proportion of non-Luxembourgers is around 50 per cent. The vast majority of the resident migrant population is from the EU, only 6 per cent coming from outside.

This is the result of a conscious immigration policy by successive Luxembourg governments from the 1950s onwards, seeking to encourage white European migrants. By far the largest group of immigrants comes from Portugal. The small population of non-European origin includes a contingent from the former Portuguese colony of Cape Verde. Non-citizens have certain voting rights after five years of residence, but have been slow to use them. Unlike Luxembourg citizens, who are automatically put on the electoral register, foreigners have to make the request. All foreigners can vote in local elections after five years' legal residence. EU citizens can vote in European elections, but only Luxembourg citizens can vote in parliamentary elections. Foreigners can apply for Luxembourg citizenship after seven years of residence. There has been an increase in demand since a 2009 reform making it possible to have dual nationality.

Migrants play a key role in the Luxembourg economy and social structure. In 1980, the number of those paying social security contributions, a good indication of the size of the workforce, was 158,000. Non-Luxembourgers already represented 33 per cent of the total. Today the workforce is

349,000, a 120 per cent increase. And whereas the number of Luxembourgish workers has only increased by 4 per cent in 30 years, the number of non-Luxembourgers has shot up, now representing 68 per cent of all workers – 24 per cent of the workforce are migrants who live in Luxembourg and 44 per cent are "cross-border workers" (frontaliers) who live outside Luxembourg and commute to work there every day. The biggest contingent comes from France, followed by Belgium and Germany (47 per cent of frontaliers are from France, with 23 per cent each from Belgium and Germany). When we look at the private sector, the percentage of Luxembourg citizens is even lower than in the economy as a whole, at 25.4 per cent. French workers alone account for 27.34 per cent, followed by Portuguese, Belgians and Germans, all between 11 and 13 per cent. Non-Europeans account for just over 3 per cent. Unsurprisingly Luxembourgers are much more strongly represented in the administration and more generally the public sector and are much less present in manual and unskilled jobs (less than 10 per cent in the building industry, for example).

This important role of non-Luxembourg workers, both residents and frontaliers, has a number of consequences. In the first place, leaving aside the frontaliers who live and vote in their countries of origin, a considerable percentage of migrants living in Luxembourg are outside the political process, especially as regards the national parliament. Luxembourg citizens, including of course those of foreign origin, vote to elect a parliament and government which take decisions that concern many residents (and non-residents) who have no say in these decisions.

Luxembourg political parties do have non-Luxembourg citizens among their members (the Socialist Party – LSAP – has just announced that 13 per cent of its members are non-citizens, an increase from 6 per cent two years ago), but they are still very largely composed of Luxembourg citizens. Their composition certainly does not accurately reflect the diversity of the workforce or even the resi-

dent population. There are however organisations which do better reflect this reality – the trade unions.

Trade unions

The trade unions in Luxembourg are relatively strong. A comparative study in 2003 listed Luxembourg among a dozen or so European countries where trade union membership was rising. The four Luxembourg trade union groupings cited in this study showed growth of more than 40 per cent between 1993 and 2003. [4] A recent study shows an overall level of unionisation of 41 per cent, which places Luxembourg seventh in the European table, according to the OECD. [5] This percentage refers only to workers resident in Luxembourg, whatever their nationality, not to frontaliers, but the latter are also organised in Luxembourg unions. The two main union confederations at least are actively engaged in recruiting them and have offices in the regions of France, Belgium and Germany adjoining Luxembourg. Over a longer period, reflecting the transition from industry to services, the level of unionisation has actually decreased, from 64 per cent in 1970-71, indicating that union membership, while increasing, has not kept pace with the rapid expansion of the service sector and particularly of finance. However, at 39 per cent, the level of unionisation in the banking and insurance sector is still quite significant.

The main union grouping is the Independent Trade Union Confederation of Luxembourg (OGBL) with 66,000 members. Historically, the OGBL has been close to the Socialist Party (LSAP), but the links have become very much distended with the neoliberal evolution of the LSAP. The OGBL has now taken a position that membership of its executive bureau is incompatible with being a member of the Luxembourg or European Parliament or occupying a position of responsibility in local government. Following the 2009 elections Jean-Claude Reding, president of the OGBL, came out with a very forthright statement: "The Socialist Party must know that we will not take account of their participation

or not in the government. If the party remains the ally of the unions and defends the social state, we can only be delighted. If it is not capable of playing this role, it would be better if it did not go into government. Moreover, it would come into conflict with us."

The second biggest confederation is the Luxembourg Christian Trade Union Confederation (LCGB), which as its name suggests is close to the Christian Social People's Party (CSV), and in this case there seems to be no problem with the link. The union's president is in fact a CSV member of parliament. The General Confederation of Civil Service Workers (CGFP) is a sectoral union. The fourth union grouping is based around ALEBA, the Luxembourg Association of Bank Employees. Then there is the FNCTTFEL (Landesverband), which organises rail and other transport workers and local government workers. There are some other, minor unions. In spite of this plurality there seems to be less inter-union rivalry than in, for example, France. There is however a definable (and majority) class-oriented wing of the trade union movement, consisting of the OGBL, FNCTTEL and ALEBA. This bloc at present controls the CSL, a chamber elected by all workers in the private sector which regularly produces documentation and analyses that are useful for trade unionists and those on the left generally.

Luxembourg social model

The two main political parties are the CSV and the LSAP. They govern in coalition. But the CSV is the dominant force, having won 38 per cent of the votes and 26 out of 60 seats in the 2009 legislative election. It and its predecessor have been in government, generally in coalition, and invariably providing the prime minister, for all but six years since 1918, except of course during the interregnum of the German occupation from 1940-44. The LSAP, whose vote has been in steady decline since 1964, received 21.6 per cent of the vote in 2009. Other pro-capitalist parties are represented in parliament. The Democratic Party (DP) is an

unashamedly liberal formation, comparable to the German Free Democratic Party. The Greens (Dei Greng) cannot be characterised as being on the left – they represent what might be called "eco-liberalism". They govern the municipality of Luxembourg City in coalition with the DP. There is also a somewhat eclectic populist party, the ADR.

An absolutely central element of class relations in Luxembourg is the so-called "Luxembourg social model", sometimes simply described as the "Luxembourg model". The basis of this is that social questions should be dealt with and if possible resolved in consultations between government, employers and the unions, through a process of conciliation and compromise, with the aim of arriving at a consensus. This does not only, or even primarily, concern wages which are negotiated with employers. It covers social security, unemployment pay, the minimum social wage, the minimum guaranteed income (RMG), taxation, pensions and so on. The rationale is that the "social model" provides a high level of security for workers and their families and that in return social conflicts, strikes, etc., are reduced to a minimum. Indeed strikes are only authorised after a process of conciliation has been gone through.

Let us look briefly at what the Luxembourg workers' movement has to defend.

Indexation of wages, linking them to price rises, was won for the public sector after World War I, for heavy industry in 1936, for all workers in 1975; a minimum social wage was introduced after the World War II, and is at present the highest among the 20 EU member states that have a minimum wage. There is a state pension system, described by the IMF and the OECD as "very generous", a health-care system, etc. Child benefits are the highest in the EU. A study showed that in 2008 Luxembourg had the strongest job protection legislation in the EU and the second strongest in the OECD after Turkey (the United States came last). On the other hand, in terms of hours worked per year, Luxembourg has among the highest in the EU, 1806 (1876 in the UK) and unlike the situation

in most EU member states, the number of hours worked actually increased between 2000 and 2008. And the overall high standard of living conceals inequalities. There are poor people in Luxembourg who have difficulty making ends meet. Housing in particular is very expensive. Nevertheless the overall picture is one of high living standards and a strong level of social protection. And it should be noted that in this respect that Luxembourg has gone against the general tendency in the EU in that social protection has actually been extended over the last 20 years, whereas elsewhere it has in general been eroded via liberal counter-reforms. But as we shall see these gains are now coming under attack.

The key to the functioning of the Luxembourg social model is the concept of the tripartite, meetings held regularly, usually once a year, between employers, government and unions. The present Tripartite Coordinating Committee was established in 1977, but its roots go back much further. Dialogue between unions and employers began to be institutionalized in 1924 with the creation of the first *Chambres professionnelles* on an industry by industry basis. In 1936, following on a demonstration by 40,000 workers, there was established the National Council of Labour, an organism for conciliation between the unions and the employers, and the first collective bargaining agreements were signed. 1966 saw the creation of the Economic and Social Council. The specific immediate role of the tripartite established in 1977 was to establish a social pact to oversee the restructuring and downsizing of the steel industry. Until 1980 employers and unions had a veto over decisions, but subsequently decisions were taken by consensus. Until 1986 the parliament was involved, but this did not happen again until 2008, under the impact of the financial crisis.

Evidently for the system to work correctly there has to be a certain degree of social cohesion, a spirit of compromise, and for that each of the partners has to have an interest in the process. This has been placed under some strain by the crisis – and also by

the reaction of the EU, national governments and employers to the crisis.

Haven of peace and social progress?

In Europe on the whole there is a sharpening of class relations, a sustained offensive against the social gains, rights and standard of living of the working class, young people and pensioners. [6] Clearly, the speed and intensity of this offensive varies from country to country. Luxembourg may seem like a haven of peace and social progress. Someone arriving from say, Britain, might well think they'd died and gone to heaven. But although things have so far moved more slowly here, the direction is unmistakable.

Everyone claims to defend the Luxembourg social model. Not only the unions, but the government and the employers. As far as the government and the employers are concerned, such declarations are partly because the population is profoundly attached to this model and no one can afford to appear not to support it. But the attachment to social peace is unfeigned; it is an asset which helps to encourage foreign investors. As Francois Bausch of *Dei Greng* put it during the tense negotiations of the 2010 tripartite: "It is never good to put social peace in question. It is one of our great assets in order to convince enterprises to come to Luxembourg. Unlike in France for example, they have the guarantee that there won't be a strike every couple of days."

In order to preserve his room for manoeuvre, Luxembourg's Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker was obliged to reject the crude aggressiveness of the initial Franco-German project for a competitiveness pact, refusing to accept outlawing of wage indexation and the pension age being fixed on a European level. Juncker not only loudly defends the Luxembourg model but even allows himself such demagogic sallies as "after all, we don't carry out policies for the banks and big capital". Which, of course, is precisely what he does do.

Luxembourg is an integral part of the EU and has been since the beginning. Juncker himself is president of the Eurogroup of eurozone finance ministers. He will oversee in his own way the application of neoliberal EU policies to Luxembourg. And where he advances prudently, others beat the war drums. There is a clearly identifiable hardline, neoliberal faction in Luxembourg, including among others Yves Mersch, president of the Central Bank, Michel Würth of the UEL (main employers' organisation) relayed in the political sphere by the minister of finance, Luc Frieden, the new president of the CSV parliamentary group (and former president of the ABBL, the Luxembourg bakers' association) Lucien Thiel, and the DP.

The year 2010 was marked by sharp political tensions as the meeting of the tripartite failed to reach agreement after a series of meetings in March and April. An offensive conducted by finance minister Frieden and the employers aiming at the liquidation of wage indexation was met by the intransigent refusal of the unions. There were other issues involved, in fact a whole plan of austerity, but it was around the index that the conflict crystallised. Already a year before, on May 16, 2009, in the run-up to the legislative elections in June that year, there had been a demonstration of 30,000 workers around the slogan, "We will not pay for your crisis!" More precisely, a communiqué of the OGBL in March 2010 declared, "the crisis must not be used as a pretext for any kind of social dismantling". But it is precisely the policy of the EU to use the crisis in this way. Following on the breakdown of the tripartite there was a series of political manoeuvres. After a special congress the LSAP took a position in defence of the index. Juncker threatened to break the logjam by the government taking decisions, but did not do so. Significantly, the union front held together. The OGBL declared that the index was worth a general strike.

The crisis rumbled on over the summer, becoming sharper in September as the prospect of the adoption of the budget approached. The government had decided on a reform of child benefits which

disadvantaged frontaliers. The unions produced a show of strength, with a rally of 5000 on September 16, including delegations from unions in France, Belgium and Germany. The OGBL had programmed and announced four regional demonstrations in October, to which the LCGB announced its support.

Finally, the government resorted to the stratagem of convoking a bipartite with the unions. An agreement was concluded by which the index stayed, with a moratorium on its application until October 2011, and some secondary concessions. The proposed demonstrations were cancelled. The crisis was defused and there was a palpable sigh of relief in many quarters. The left of centre weekly *Le Jeudi* produced an article entitled "The consensus found again", which ended "as for the third partner of the tripartite, the employers, they can only take note today of the failure of their propositions of social deregulation, even if they could have believed in them over recent weeks". But it was not as simple as that, far from it. The employers protested loudly at the government-union bipartite. But they were rewarded a few weeks later with a government-employers bipartite in which they won concessions, notably subsidies which covered the cost of indexation and of an increase in the minimum wage. This time it was the unions who protested.

Austerity

So somewhat laboriously, the Luxembourg social model had worked. What is the situation now? First, it is one thing to declare that "we will not pay for your crisis", it is quite another not to do so in practice. And there the figures speak clearly; the austerity plan is being applied. Adding up the cost of all the government's measures (crisis tax, solidarity tax, income tax increases, increased charges for health insurance ...), we arrive at a figure of 231 million euros to be paid by individual taxpayers, as against a possible maximum of 62 million for companies. The weight of taxation falls on the revenues of labour, not on those of capital. Second, in 2009 the OGBL defined "red lines" which the govern-

ment could not cross without provoking a frontal conflict. One of those red lines was the index. The other two were the reduction of starting salaries in the civil service and an increase in the retirement age. The two principal measures that the government is presently proposing cover those points. The government is proposing not only to reduce starting salaries in the civil service but to introduce a system of continuous assessment of the "performance" of government employees, opening the door to the individualisation of salaries. The proposed reform of pensions, piloted by the Socialist Party minister Mars Di Bartomeleo, does not actually raise the retirement age. What it does do is to announce that while it will still be possible to retire on a full pension at between 60 and 65 after 40 years' work, future pensions will be worth 15 per cent less than today's. Which implies at some point raising the retirement age, and/or encouraging workers to make up the shortfall by taking out private pension plans. This corresponds to the long-term aims of the EU – to move from public pensions to private pension funds, leaving the state pension as a safety net for the poorest citizens. And there is no guarantee that the index will remain untouched. The IMF has helpfully suggested excluding food and petrol prices from its calculation, a way of maintaining the form of indexation while emptying it of its content. On another front, the opening of postal services to competition is due to come into force in 2013 and the telephone sector has been hived off, following the example of other countries.

Resistance

There are therefore conflicts on the horizon which will generate tensions in the Luxembourg social model. They will still be conducted within the parameters of this model. But the sense that is given to it will vary. The unions will defend the traditional model in which they obtained real gains, attacking the employers and government for moving away from this. The OGBL, during the crisis of the tripartite in 2010, while stoutly defending its positions,

criticised the employers for their "extremist" positions and for breaking off the social dialogue and the government for its "duplicity".

For their part, the government and the employers will continue to adhere to the form of the tripartite, while trying to transform it into an organism where the unions are co-opted into negotiating improved productivity and competitiveness – the two key words for European capital – for enterprises in Luxembourg. The importance of the index is not so much, or not only, what it costs employers, but the very existence of such a mechanism (characterised by the OECD as "archaic"), incarnating as it does the link between wages and inflation, not productivity or competitiveness.

So far the unions have demonstrated a considerable will to resist. What is most striking is that the political expression of this resistance is much weaker. It is not possible to speak of a left wing in the LSAP, although that does not mean that there are not individuals who are more to the left, more attached to the defence of workers' interests. But in fact the only party which consistently defends the point of view of organised labour is Dei Lenk (The Left).

Dei Lenk (The Left)

Dei Lenk was formed in 1999. But it came out of a previous history. An important part of its roots lie in the Communist Party of Luxembourg (KPL). The KPL, formed in 1921, was for several decades a force in Luxembourg politics. It was sufficiently strong in 1944/45 to be included in the government, as were the Communist parties in France, Italy and Belgium at the same period. It reached the high point of its support in 1968, with over 15 per cent of the popular vote and six MPs. From there it declined, losing its last MP in 1994. There were no doubt sociological reasons for the decline, in the weakening of the industrial working class. But the party remained uncritically pro-Soviet and rigidly Stalinist in its internal functioning and political conflicts broke out, leading to a split and the creation of the New Left (Nei Lenk) in the early 1990s. The principal leader of Nei Lenk was Andre

Hoffmann, who was later elected to parliament for Dei Lenk in 1999. The other main component of Dei Lenk was the Revolutionary Socialist Party, the Luxembourg section of the Fourth International. When Dei Lenk was formed the KPL initially participated, but subsequently withdrew, though some of its members remained. In 2004 the KPL and Dei Lenk both stood candidates and the split vote led to no one being elected. Dei Lenk had to wait till 2009 to win back a seat, again with Andre Hoffmann, who enjoys great personal popularity.

Dei Lenk is still a small party, with about 300 members. (But that figure has to be taken in a Luxembourg context. In 1964, the KPL, with several MPs, had, according to the US State Department, only 500 members. [7] Today the LSAP claims 5800 members.) Dei Lenk is however active on many fronts. The question of being present in parliament is important for the party's visibility, but it is its campaigning activity that is most important. In 2005, without parliamentary representation, Dei Lenk played a central role in the campaign around the referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty, where to general surprise the "no" vote was nearly 44 per cent – and was in the majority among industrial workers and young people. Last year Dei Lenk organised a campaign on the right to work and on employment protection.

On April 3, Dei Lenk held its 8th national congress. Present were representatives of the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) and the Left Party from France and Die Linke from Germany. Dei Lenk is an active member of the European Left, which has affiliates in more than 20 countries. The main subject of the congress was the preparation of this autumn's communal (municipal) elections, where Dei Lenk hopes to win seats in the main towns and reinforce its implantation locally. The guideline of the campaign is, faced with the crisis, to make the communes centres of resistance and springboards for alternative policies. The central theme of the campaign will be housing. There is very little social housing in Luxembourg. To rent a three-bedroom apartment costs approximately the minimum wage,

and house prices have risen by 20 per cent since 2005. More broadly defence of public services will be at the centre of the campaign, along with proposals to involve citizens in the running of local authorities. Another proposal is to abolish the residence requirement for non-Luxembourg citizens and put them automatically on the electoral roll.

The congress also adopted resolutions in solidarity with the Arab revolutions, against repressive measures towards asylum seekers and in opposition to nuclear power – on the latter issue a very wide spectrum of opinion has crystallised in Luxembourg. Andre Hoffmann set the cat among the pigeons by revealing in parliament that the Luxembourg national pension fund was investing in Tepco, the owner of Fukushima, and other companies involved in producing nuclear power – as he had previously revealed its investments in companies producing depleted uranium armaments.

Dei Lenk is an anti-capitalist party in a country where it would be illusory to hope for a rapid transition from capitalism. It therefore has to combine immediate demands and campaigns with opposition to the system and explanation of the class nature of the government and the state, against the widely held idea that it is an independent arbiter. As Serge Urbany, spokesperson for Dei Lenk, put it at the congress, the party has to become a social and ecological alternative "to the capitalist system and within the capitalist system" that is to propose concrete responses to the problems of today while defending the need for another type of society. That means not simply saying "no" to the government's attacks, but proposing alternatives. For example, by placing the burden of taxation on companies and in particular the financial sector, rather than on wage earners. And in relation to the government's plans to reform the civil service, proposing that measures to improve public services should come from committees representing civil servants and those who use the services. Dei Lenk has also launched the idea of a socio-ecological regional [8] development fund, which would invest particularly in alternative forms of energy.

As regards its view of the future society, article 1 of Dei Lenk's statutes explain that overcoming capitalism is not an end in itself, but "the means of establishing an active democracy, including in workplaces and the economy". It goes on to stress that the aim is to end not just economic exploitation, but also social, sexual and ethnic oppression and discrimination. It concludes by saying that "there is no ready-made plan of a socialist society, the society of tomorrow will emerge from the reality of today, from the needs and the demands of women and men living in today's society".

Opinion polls indicate that Dei Lenk can increase its representation in parliament and in local gov-

ernment. But even at present, its influence is wider than its modest forces might indicate. In particular, it is taken seriously by and attracts the sympathy of many trade unionists. An indication of this is the fact that since the beginning of the year Dei Lenk has had formal meetings and exchanges with delegations from most of the main trade unions, not only from the more class-oriented wing like the OGBL and the FNCCTFEL, but also the LCGB and the CGFP. Given that the unions will be at the centre of the battles to come, that is a very positive sign.

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FRANCE

Olivier Besancenot will not be NPA candidate in 2012

OLIVIER BESANCENOT ·

"Do not forget the men who will serve you best are those who you chose from those among you, living their own lives, suffering the same ills."

Challenge yourselves just as much as the ambitious newcomers, while others who consider only their own interests always end up being regarded as indispensable ...

Choose instead those who do not seek your votes; the most important virtue is modesty and it is for voters to recognise their chosen representatives, and not for them to push themselves forward. "

Appeal of the Central Committee of the National Guard of the Paris Commune, March 25, 1871.

Comrades,

I will not be the candidate of the New Anti-Capitalist Party in the presidential election of 2012. This is a political decision that I have taken. And if I want today to pass the baton to one of our comrades, I am not saying that I no longer wish to be involved in all our struggles; quite the contrary. Rather, I believe that the NPA has an opportunity to establish itself on a new basis, in accordance with the project of emancipation which more than ever motivates me.

Firstly, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those in the NPA - and in the LCR before - who have been actively involved in the collaborative work for which I have served as spokesperson these last ten years. To all the comrades of the local branches who put up posters, distributed leaflets, organised rallies (and who have always welcomed us with open arms), to those who gathered signatures for our candidacy in 2002 and again in 2007, and those comrades in the leadership who worked

on the arguments, orientation, communications and security, to all of you I want to say thank you. This team has taught me a great deal and contributed a huge amount throughout this funny experience of being a spokesperson.

I have tried, for my part, to do my level best in order to acquaint a broader audience with our ideas and beliefs, and I fully intend to continue to do so in order to communicate our program, promote our actions and to increase our vote. NPA activists and, more generally, all those fighting to change the world can count on my commitment.

This is therefore a political decision, one that should not come as a great surprise. For many months I have been one of those warning our party against the political risks of excessive, exaggerated, personalisation. That ideas are embodied within a specific social and political context, and that it is necessary to delegate the tasks of activists through public representation – for a specific and time-limited mandate – is one thing. It's quite another to play the media game as a substitute for real grassroots action in the class struggle.

We organise daily in our workplaces, in struggle, at election time, to defend the prospect of finally ridding society of alienation, exploitation and oppression. Emancipation from contemporary forms of servitude necessarily implies a break with the current system. This rupture presupposes a growing popular engagement with politics. Whenever possible, this break must intervene here and now, without holding back its seething revolutionary promise until tomorrow.

This means that here and now we call, tirelessly and conscientiously, on all those anonymous citizens to take ownership of their destiny. That is why we always exalt the popular classes to burst onto

the political scene by breaking the speakers erected by politicians in order to keep us away from the arena where our lives are played out. Wherever we operate, we carry this original and subversive message to housing estates, businesses, schools, the universities, street markets, in protests during the elections. This message is the hallmark of our party, and we must not tarnish it in the name of some electoral reflex.

We created a sensation when the LCR had the audacity to introduce a young worker, a postman, in the 2002 presidential election. Let us once again cause a sensation today with other unknown candidates during the next elections who will highlight all that we really are: a collective tool and a heterogeneous group. To strive to demonstrate that we do not need politicians to express ourselves, to understand and propose solutions, is a progressive act. To reassure themselves by thinking we should "play safe" would yield, on the contrary, to pernicious conservative instincts which should be left to others. However, we do not conceive of political like the other parties do.

Such a move would also, in my view, resolve an untenable contradiction, which sees us denouncing a system where politics has become a form of marketing on the one hand while on the other involuntarily integrating ourselves into the traditional political scene by embedding our movement and ideas in the ritual debates. That risks eventually transforming us into a caricature of ourselves, even into an alibi for the failures of the system.

Like any of you, this is a prospect which I find personally unbearable. I do not want to feel like I am one of the traditional politicians in the eyes of the general public, something which has influenced our position in recent years. My continuing to work in the post office - an activity that I never let go - is not a long term serum powerful enough to counteract the dynamics continuously imposed on the consensual electoral battlefield and in the media. The young worker who set out to attack party politics in

2002 inevitably became, in 2007, someone who "was playing politics while continuing to work" and probably the person who "does politics tout court" in 2012. I am a militant and an activist and I want to remain so. Releasing me from this contradiction is the best guarantee that I will be able to continue to continue the fight of the NPA in the public arena, but in a different way.

So I ask you to be supportive of my choice, recognising it as a desire that the NPA can finally establish itself. Find yourselves not a familiar name but a reappropriated collective identity which can be deployed on a more conscious and more consistent basis. More aware of the need to carry on a revolutionary, internationalist, lively and open project which is clearly distinct from the present system. More constant in its overall activity in everyday life, intervening constantly in workplaces, housing estates, and among the youth, and leading an active resistant network of social movements - around work, anti-racism, environmentalism, feminism and so on.

The presidential election will take place within a year. This gives us time to prepare and make 2012 a major step in our rebuilding process.

I am prepared to invest myself 100% in our party, the NPA, and to support as best as I can our candidate so that we can intervene effectively in the next presidential election, for we must continue to communicate our message to millions of people instead of shutting ourselves off from the world. The moments of uncertainty which the labor movement in France has been experiencing should not overshadow the unstable political situation largely caused by the global crisis which the capitalist system has faced over the last three years.

The Arab revolutions prove one thing: the winds of history are shifting and can turn quickly.

Revolutionary greetings,

Olivier

CANADA

The federal NDP's electoral breakthrough in Quebec: A challenge to progressives in Canada

RICHARD FIDLER ·

To a crowded room in which nearly everyone was waving Canadian flags, the NDP leader delivered two thirds of his remarks in English without ever mentioning the expression "Quebec nation". The scene, televised across Canada, did not go unremarked in Quebec, where most of the NDP's sudden support had come from nationalist-minded voters, including many sympathizers of Quebec independence.

The NDP breakthrough was the big surprise of the May 2 federal election. In a wave of support that developed into a veritable tsunami, the NDP took 42.9% of the Quebec popular vote, winning 58 of the province's 75 seats under the first-past-the-post system and defeating most MPs and candidates of the pro-sovereignty Bloc Québécois, now shrunk from a caucus of 50 to only four MPs in the House of Commons. And along the way the NDP candidates reduced the much smaller contingents of Quebec Conservatives and Liberals to six and seven seats respectively.

In the Rest of Canada (ROC), the NDP share of the popular vote increased from 17.5% in the previous federal election (2008) to 26.3%, largely on the coattails of the Quebec surge. But the party's net gains outside of Quebec were limited to five new seats.

With a total of 102 seats — 60% of them from Quebec, where in 2008 the party took 12.2% of the vote and only one seat — the NDP now constitutes the Official Opposition. This is clearly a major achievement for the party. It was won despite the almost unanimous opposition of the big-business media: 31 Canadian newspapers editorially endorsed Harper's Conservatives; one, the Bloc

Québécois (Le Devoir); and one, the NDP (Toronto Star).

However, it is an Opposition with little parliamentary clout. Stephen Harper's Conservatives, the "Tories", with just 39.6% of the popular vote, elected 167 MPs, giving them a clear majority in the 308 seat House. As for the Liberals, they elected only 34 MPs, an all-time low for that party.

The NDP can abandon its dream of "making Parliament work." It will work well, but not for the NDP's natural constituency — what it referred to in the campaign as "working families."

A new Conservative hegemony

Over the next four or five years, the reinforced Harper government can be expected to pursue even more vigorously the right-wing agenda it has followed for the past five years of its minority government: more war and militarization, privatization of social services and federal institutions (Canada Post?), the weakening or abolition of many regulatory bodies, more "free trade" and investment deals, increased spending on police and prisons, and a complete flouting of the most minimal environmental measures that has already turned Canada into an international pariah petro-state. Quebec will be further marginalized through the addition of new parliamentary seats in British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario, where the Tories are strong.

With the crushing defeat of the Liberals, Harper has now established the Conservatives as the hegemonic party of capital. But this hegemony comes at a price. Capital in Canada has traditionally ruled through a system of alternance between Liberals and Conservatives, each ready to replace the other

if defeated in Parliament or by the electorate. However, with the crushing defeat of the Liberals, and the victory of the NDP, the scenario has radically changed. Although the Tory government's parliamentary majority is secured for four or five years, the alternance is now up for grabs. For Canada's ruling circles, this poses a dilemma. Should they bank on rebuilding the Liberals? Or should they start thinking of the NDP as an acceptable option at the federal level, as they already do in some provinces where the NDP has governed for many years?

Provincial office is one thing. But the central government, with its crucial jurisdiction over banking and finance, foreign affairs, the military, trade and commerce, criminal law and the senior courts and judiciary, etc. — and above all its role in protecting the territorial and institutional integrity of the state and forestalling any challenge by Quebec to that integrity — that's a somewhat different matter.

The difficulty here, of course, is that the NDP, created at the aegis of the trade unions in English Canada, has historically been viewed by Capital and labor alike as a workers party and for that reason has never enjoyed the confidence of big business — despite all the efforts of NDP leaders down through the years to neutralize and overcome that antipathy.

For the time being, a choice between a reconstituted Liberal party and the NDP as the party of federal alternance remains open for debate. The outcome will depend very much on how the situation in Quebec evolves. Meanwhile, Harper is being reminded that he must rule in the interests of the entirety of the capitalist class, and not just a right-wing faction of the class. Whether or not that will require him to rein in some of the more extreme rightist elements in his caucus remains to be seen.

Little policy debate

Despite the serious stakes involved, the election campaign was characterized by a remarkable absence of discourse on the major issues confronting

the country — from the wars in Afghanistan and now Libya to the looming climate and environmental catastrophe, the economic crisis and the "national question," the ongoing disaffection of Québécois with their place as a nation in the Canadian constitutional setup. In the media and party platforms, voters were essentially asked to choose between competing menus of promises that purported to increase their disposable income in various ways, as if politics and citizenship itself involved little more than a consumer marketing exercise. Most media analysis during the campaign centered on speculation as to how many seats the shifting percentages in the polls might yield to each party as a result of tactical vote-splitting between parties in the multi-candidate ridings. But serious policy debate? There was very little of that. It is not easy, therefore, to decipher what the May 2 vote indicates about shifts in public opinion.

Le Devoir's Josée Boileau expressed the frustration of many on the lack of substantive policy debate, in an April 29 editorial on the federal election:

An ageing Canada is spinning its wheels [s'auto-suffit]. It does not dream, does not assume new challenges, does not see itself as a source of inspiration, nor does it draw inspiration from what is done elsewhere. ...

Last week Le Devoir interviewed Bolivia's ambassador to the United Nations, who reported on his moves to get the UN to adopt a Charter of the rights of nature. Bolivia itself, seeing the climate changes that have melted its glaciers by one third, adopted similar legislation last December and has appointed an ombudsman to enforce it.

Moreover, the country dreams of an international tribunal of climate justice, and of replacing the notion of GDP by an indicator of sustainable development. In short, Bolivia is talking 21st century! Here, we are still talking ancient Greek.

It was also — and even more importantly — an election campaign nearly devoid of serious mobilizations outside the electoral arena around issues of importance to working people that could have con-

tributed to policy debate. The antiwar demonstrations in mid-April were small. Despite the threat to abortion rights and equality legislation posed by a Conservative victory, the women's movement was largely unheard. A Parliament Hill demonstration on May Day, initiated by the Hamilton Steelworkers union locked out by US Steel, attracted only a thousand or so demonstrators, although it was addressed in part to an issue of great concern to millions — the vulnerability of pensioners who are being deprived of their life savings and old-age security by corporate bankruptcies and downsizing.

In the youth-based environmental and social movements, many activists are inclined either to abstain from electoral politics or to focus their political action on the community rather than "national" level. [1] Some who did become involved in the election were initially at least attempting to forge an informal "anybody but Harper" coalition that could elect candidates of any party but the Tories. The NDP's sudden surge in pre-election polling tended to convert many of these to NDP votes, which on election day helped to defeat a few Liberals and allow the election of some Tories.

Notwithstanding the lack of substantive debate, a few observations can be made, I think, about the trends revealed in the May 2 voting. With special reference, as usual, to Quebec, that deep and decisive fault line in Canada's political landscape.

The Liberal fall from grace

For the Liberals, now down to 34 seats with only 18.9% of the popular vote — their worst result ever — the election was catastrophic. Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff, defeated in his own riding, resigned as party leader the next day. Ironically, the voters' immolation of "Iggy" coincided with the news on election eve of the U.S. assassination of Osama bin Laden; Ignatieff first sprang to public prominence in the wake of 9/11 as a Canadian professor at Harvard who authored newspaper articles defending torture in the pursuit of terrorists.

Throughout most of the 20th century, the Liberals ruled as Canada's "natural governing party," the party's parliamentary representation traditionally drawn from most parts of the country, including Quebec. That hegemony originated in the late 19th century when a Conservative government suppressed the Northwest Rebellion of French-speaking Métis and Indigenous peoples and hanged its leader Louis Riel. Quebec's resulting hatred of the Tories endured for well over half a century.

The Liberals' slow decline began almost 30 years ago, in the wake of the Trudeau government's unilateral patriation — despite unanimous opposition from Quebec's National Assembly — of Canada's constitution imposing a complex amending formula that virtually rules out fundamental constitutional change and a Charter of Rights specifically aimed at overruling crucial features of Quebec's language laws. Their unpopularity in Quebec crucially paved the way for the victories of Brian Mulroney's Conservative governments in 1984 and 1988.

The Liberals enjoyed a decade-long return to government beginning in the early 1990s in the wake of the defeats of the Meech Lake and Charlottetown constitutional agreements, which broke up Mulroney's alliance of western provincial autonomists and Quebec "soft" nationalists and produced the Reform and Bloc Québécois parties. In 2000, the Liberals were even able to outpoll the Bloc in Quebec as a result of popular disaffection with the Parti Québécois, the BQ counterpart, and the PQ government's "zero deficit" austerity program. But the Liberal party was massively rejected shortly afterwards when the sordid details emerged of the "sponsorship" scandal in which the federal Liberals had spent millions of government dollars on illegal funding to subvert the Quebec sovereigntist movement. The Bloc Québécois recovered its lead and the Liberals were once again relegated to their largely Anglophone enclaves.

Having gone through three leaders in the last five years, the federal Liberals are now in existential crisis.

In 2006 the Conservatives regained office, this time as a merged and blatantly "neoliberal" Reform-Conservative party under Stephen Harper. But they had few seats in Quebec, and now they have lost their tiny enclave of ridings in Quebec City to the NDP.

The Bloc Québécois: An exhausted strategy?

The big loser in Quebec was of course the Bloc Québécois. How did this happen?

The BQ originated as a party of disappointed federalists; its first MPs, in 1991, were Conservatives and Liberals who broke from their parties in the wake of English Canada's rejection of the Meech Lake constitutional agreement, which had been intended to legitimate Canada's Constitution in the eyes of the Québécois. The Bloc was to be Quebec's agency in Parliament during the negotiation of Quebec's independence following the 1995 Referendum.

When the Referendum narrowly failed — just under 50% of the voters opted for the "yes" — the Bloc evolved into an insurance policy for Quebec, a means of avoiding the conflict of legitimacy for the Quebec nation that had arisen in the early 1980s when the National Assembly voted against the patriation deal but the Quebec MPs in Ottawa voted for it. As such, the Bloc's MPs, for five successive elections comprising two-thirds of Quebec's deputation in the House, became an enduring symbol of Quebec's alienation from the Canadian Confederation. They purported to defend "the interests of Quebec" conceived as a purely nationalist non-class specific counterpart to the Parti Québécois and its bourgeois independentist perspective.

The Bloc's program was similar to the NDP's in many respects, excepting the Bloc's allegiance to a sovereign Quebec — at best, proposals for modest reforms within a neoliberal context. Where it differed, it was sometimes to the right. For example, while the NDP promised to "review" the Tories' decision to spend billions on the purchase of new F-35 fighter jets, the Bloc demanded only that a "fair

share" of the planes' manufacture, deployment and maintenance be done in Quebec — a position that grated on the antiwar sensibilities of many Québécois. However, both Bloc and NDP voted with the Tories and Liberals in favour of Canada's participation in the NATO assault on Libya. And the NDP program promises to "maintain the current planned levels of Defense spending commitments." This general all-party agreement on Canada's massive increase in military spending under recent Liberal and Tory governments helped to preclude debate on foreign policy during the election campaign.

In recent years, with little prospect of an early move toward sovereignty under the PQ, progressive opinion in Quebec increasingly questioned the Bloc's utility in Ottawa and began to look for potential allies in English Canada. During the 2008 federal election campaign, a debate opened up within the pro-independence left over whether to vote for the Bloc or the NDP. It foreshadowed the movement from below that suddenly erupted during this year's campaign. And when the polls this April indicated swelling support for the NDP, the Bloc reverted to its specifically sovereigntist base, hoping to mobilize support through speakers like PQ leader Pauline Marois and former premier Jacques Parizeau, ghosts of elections past. This reinforced the popular perception that the Bloc had outlived its claim to represent Quebec's interests, broadly defined, on the federal level.

The NDP: A vote for the party, not the candidates

The NDP's Quebec candidates surfed into office on a wave of popular disenchantment with the Tories, Liberals and Bloc. A post-election survey by Léger Marketing published May 7 reveals that the uppermost concern among Quebec voters, including many former Bloc supporters, was to find some way to block the Conservative government and that the Bloc was no longer seen as the best rampart. The NDP was perceived as the one party that offered some prospect of change. At the same time, NDP voters indicated that the potential for consti-

tutional change was not a major factor in their decision. The Québécois have largely abandoned any expectation of constitutional change coming from Ottawa or the ROC — which does not mean they have abandoned their desire for greater national autonomy or independence.

The huge majorities the NDP registered in many ridings were gained without real organization or presence of the party. However, it fielded a candidate in every riding, not only to sustain the illusion of a potential party of government but also to benefit from the generous state funding for every vote a party gets under the election laws. [2] Many of these candidates were poteaux ("poles"), as they are known in Quebec — stand-in placeholders without known roots as activists in unions or social movements in the respective communities. At the outset of the campaign, they were not expected to win. Some are already proving an embarrassment to the party, such as the young woman elected in a rural 100% Francophone riding who does not speak French, lives a three-hour drive from the riding, and vacationed in Las Vegas during the campaign.

There are some notable exceptions, of course. One is Nicole Turmel, a former president of the Public Service Alliance of Canada, one of Canada's largest unions. Another is Romeo Saganash, elected in a far northern riding, a Cree leader who was one of the negotiators for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. At least one new MP, Alexandre Boulerice, a trade unionist and environmental activist, is a member of the left-wing pro-independence party Québec Solidaire; he was communications director for the NDP campaign in Quebec and says he is a supporter of Quebec independence.

Two of the party's Quebec MPs are former Liberals. Thomas Mulcair, deputy federal leader, was once a cabinet member in the province's Charest government and is former legal affairs director of Alliance Quebec, the Anglophone lobby that has led the fight against Quebec's language laws. Françoise Boivin is a former Liberal MP. They are committed opponents of Quebec sovereignty. The particular views

of most of the other new MPs are not known. It is a safe bet that many support Quebec's traditional nationalist demands for linguistic, cultural and jurisdictional autonomy; some probably harbour sovereignist sympathies. This ensures a sharp conflict within the party if the Layton leadership pursues the NDP leadership's longstanding dream of replacing the Liberals either through elimination (their original project) or merger — an attractive goal to them today, when they could be in the drivers' seat in any such agreement. We had a foretaste of this in December 2008, when the Liberals and NDP signed onto a coalition government agreement (with Bloc support) in an unsuccessful effort to defeat the Harper minority government.

The electoral breakthrough in Quebec will — at least for the next four or five years, the term of Harper's majority government — bring the NDP face to face with the reality of Quebec and the national question. This will be a new and no doubt unsettling experience for the party and its hundreds of thousands of members and supporters across Canada. If the NDP is to develop a meaningful understanding of the national question and foster relations of active solidarity with the progressive forces within Quebec, it will have to jettison a lot of baggage from its past. This will involve much more than a rhetorical adherence to Layton's concept of "asymmetrical federalism" — which, by the way, was not mentioned in the party's formal election program. The pressures will grow exponentially if, as opinion polls predict, the PQ forms the next government in Quebec.

A dismal history of failed encounters

Historically, the NDP has failed to gain even a modest foothold among Quebec's French-speaking majority. Shortly after its founding in the early 1960s, the party's Quebec supporters split, a largely Anglophone minority refusing to follow the majority in establishing an autonomous albeit sympathizing Quebec counterpart, the Parti Socialiste du Québec. The PSQ advocated a new constitutional relationship of two "associate states", Quebec and

Canada, but was outflanked by the pro-independence RIN [3] and later the development of the Parti Québécois. (PQ founder René Lévesque incorporated the "associate states" formula in his party's program, with the proviso that Quebec had first to separate before it could negotiate a new relationship with the ROC; he called it "sovereignty-association").

In the early 1970s, the NDP's exceptional opposition to the War Measures repression in the October Crisis attracted to the party a contingent of Francophones led by union leader Raymond Laliberté. [4] At the party's 1971 federal convention, most of them allied with the left-wing "Waffle caucus" delegates around resolutions in support of Quebec's right to self-determination; they lost interest in the party when it subsequently expelled the Waffle.

In the early 1980s, the party leadership under Ed Broadbent endorsed unilateral patriation of the Constitution without Quebec's consent, and in 2000 the party voted in favour of Bill C-20, the Clarity Act, which (among other things) made Quebec sovereignty following a successful "yes" vote contingent on agreement by the federal Parliament — a blatant violation of Quebec's right to self-determination.

This brief historical sketch omits many incidents of a similar nature in the course of the NDP's problematic relationship with the Quebec national question. It is now 50 years since the party's founding. Whatever excuse there may have been in 1961 for the party's ambivalence on the Quebec question, the electoral breakthrough today occurs in a very different context — characterized most notably by the existence of a powerful pro-sovereignty movement and the existence in Quebec politics of a fledgling left-wing party, Québec Solidaire, which seeks to arm the independence movement with a progressive social agenda that differs radically from that of the capitalist PQ and BQ.

Yet in every major confrontation over the national question that has arisen, the NDP's Canadian na-

tionalism — its commitment to the federal state structures — has trumped any sympathies for Québécois nationalist challenges to those structures.

It need only be added that this blindness if not hostility to Quebec's concerns and demands has not elicited major opposition within the NDP's ranks. Globe & Mail political columnist Jeffrey Simpson notes: "As we saw during the Meech Lake and Charlottetown constitutional debates, rank-and-file NDPers are no more inclined to humour Quebec than supporters of other [federalist] parties." However, I would argue that such indifference more often than not reflects ignorance of what is at stake than it does conscious opposition to Quebec's fundamentally democratic aspirations as a nation with its own dynamic of development. Getting up to speed on these issues now becomes a major challenge facing NDP members and supporters in the Rest of Canada. Let us hope that the new contingent of MPs from Quebec can assist them in this task.

The Sherbrooke Declaration

When Jack Layton took the leadership of the NDP in 2003 he undertook to shift the party's approach toward a more sympathetic stance on some long-standing Quebec demands. [5] In 2005 the General Council of the party's Quebec section adopted a document now commonly known as the Sherbrooke Declaration. Entitled in part "Federalism, Social-Democracy and the Québec Question," it was subsequently endorsed by the federal NDP at a 2006 convention and is the most complete statement of the NDP's current position on the national question. [6] What does it indicate of current NDP thinking?

The Declaration is thoroughly federalist in orientation. It rules out any prospect of constitutional change, the usual way the national question is posed in Canada. It admits that the refusal of successive Quebec governments (both sovereigntist and federalist) to sign on to the 1982 Constitution "is a real untenable problem in the long term" but

states the party's objective "in the medium term" is "to get results that could allow Quebec to embrace the Canadian constitutional framework." In the TV debates, Layton referred to this as "creating winning conditions" for Quebec.

The document refers to Quebec only once as a "nation" (quotation marks in the original) and says that Quebec's national character "can be expressed in the context of the Canadian federation." It "recognizes Quebec's right to self-determination," but emphasizes that in the NDP view this right can be "exercised within Canada," and that in any case it "is not useful or necessary" to "legally formalize this process."

It says the NDP "would recognize a majority decision (50% + 1)" in the event of a referendum on Quebec's political status but cannily formulates this as 50% + 1 "of the Québec people" (and not voters!). And it adds that the federal government must "determine its own process in the spirit of the Supreme Court ruling" on the Quebec Secession question (1998). That ruling specifically denied that Quebec could secede without the consent of the other provinces as well as the federal Parliament, or without determining the borders of an independent Quebec. (Significantly, the Sherbrooke Declaration, in its definition of the Quebec "nation", does not include a reference to territory. [7])

The Sherbrooke Declaration does not repudiate past positions of the party on the Quebec national question. In fact, it is explicit that the Declaration "does not make obsolete the other positions taken earlier," citing (inter alia) NDP positions on bilingualism and multiculturalism. French is defined as the "language of work and the common public language" in Quebec; but Quebec's Charter of the French Language (Law 101) says French is the official language and the common language, full stop, not simply of the "public" sphere. Instead, the Declaration proclaims the party's support of the federal Official Languages Act within Quebec — a law that grants equal rights to English in federal institutions.

There is nothing in this document that is incompatible with the parliamentary NDP's support of the infamous Clarity Act.[8] In fact, these positions are largely incongruent with the Québécois nationalism that has fueled the province's emergence as a self-conscious nation in recent decades and — in the face of intransigent resistance from Ottawa — stimulated the movement for sovereignty or independence.

However, these issues were not aired much in this campaign, other than in the French-language leaders' debate, when Layton sidestepped Bloc leader Gilles Duceppe's challenge to support the Bloc position on applying the provisions of Law 101 to federal government institutions in Quebec.

A repudiation of sovereignty?

It is unlikely that many of those who voted for the NDP were aware of the party's actual positions and record on these issues. For most, it was probably enough to know that the party differed in significant ways from the Tories and Liberals, and seemed more sympathetic to some of Quebec's outstanding national grievances. In any event, a commonly expressed theme of voters' comments in talk shows and media interviews was that Quebec's constitutional status would and should be determined in Quebec, not Ottawa. Thus the "poteaux" phenomenon; people voted for a party, not the individual candidates.

Does the NDP sweep denote a repudiation of Quebec sovereignty by the Québécois, as alleged by prominent NDP supporters in the ROC such as Stephen Lewis? No serious commentator in Quebec — from committed federalists to disappointed Bloc Québécois supporters — makes that argument. Sovereignty still registers about 40% support in opinion polls, and the Bloc, while reduced to four seats, still managed to win the support of 23.4% of Quebec voters. It broods on the sidelines, hoping no doubt that the NDP's neophyte deputation in Ottawa will implode before the next federal election, when the Bloc could again be a potential contender!

It is significant, however, that once again the Québécois have voted overwhelmingly for parties that do not form the government in Ottawa, a manifestation of their alienation from the federal regime. (Prior to the Bloc's formation, Quebec tended to vote in federal elections for the party perceived as likely to form the government, in the hope that this would guarantee it a voice in the cabinet.)

The durability of the NDP's gains in Quebec is by no means certain. The party faces many challenges as the Layton leadership strives to incorporate its new Quebec MPs into a functioning caucus in Parliament, and the latter in turn face a major challenge in the need to build understanding and support for Quebec aspirations within the party, and among its working-class supporters, in the ROC.

And Québec Solidaire?

The NDP victory is naturally attracting much interest, and speculation as to its meaning, in Québec Solidaire, the independentist party of the left that seeks office only within Quebec. In a post-election statement, QS co-leader Amir Khadir expressed regret at the Bloc defeat, but praised Layton for his "intelligence and understanding of Quebec." The NDP, he said, "will show itself worthy of the confidence the people of Quebec have placed in it, and will reject the opportunism of the federalist elites who interpret that support as rejection of the idea of sovereignty." And he added, in this optimistic vein:

Quebec has shown once again to what degree it is a distinct society. The Québécois have demonstrated a thirst for change and an attachment to progressive values. When the day comes that we decide to be independent, no one will be able to prevent us. Independence does not belong to a political party, it belongs to the Quebec people.

Responding to a reporter's question at his media scrum April 21, Khadir noted:

I think a Quebec in which Québec Solidaire were in power might be better able to negotiate Quebec's future, a sovereign future decided by the

Québécois, with a Canadian government led by Jack Layton rather than a Michael Ignatieff or a Stephen Harper. It seems to me that this should be obvious for most sovereigntists.

Writing in the May 3 issue of the webzine Presse-toi-à-gauche, Bernard Rioux, a leader of the QS collective Gauche Socialiste, welcomed the NDP's gains and the division in the sovereigntist vote between Bloc and NDP.

It is the sign that we in Quebec can no longer present sovereignty as being beyond the left-right polarization. Already, on the Quebec scene, the birth of Québec Solidaire posed this need to link the project of an egalitarian, feminist and ecological society, the project of national independence, and the democratic process of achieving independence, as the three dimensions of a redefinition of our struggle for national emancipation. This is the orientation that should inspire us to redefine the struggle for real social transformation and for our national independence.

Rioux pointed as well to the internal dynamics of the NDP. These, he thought, will also be radically transformed.

As Official Opposition, the NDP will be placed in the centre of Canadian politics. It will be traversed by a series of strategic debates: over orientations in opposing the Conservative government, over relations with the Liberal party, over Quebec's place in the Canadian confederation. With more than half of its caucus from Quebec, it cannot be content with an economistic discourse in abstraction from all the questions related to Quebec's national oppression.... With the Canadian nationalism that oozes from this party, and the presence of sovereigntists in its caucus, other waves could shake the party.

The election result is a startling reminder of the volatility of Quebec politics. At the same time, it underscores the centrality of events in Quebec not only to Canadian politics but especially to the fate of progressive forces in the Rest of Canada. It demonstrates the potential for Quebec to become,

once again, a bulwark of resistance to the aggressive rightist program of the Harper government.

Socialists in the ROC will have to think about possible means of taking advantage of this new situation, and especially of engaging positively with Quebec progressives and independence supporters who will

be encouraged by the NDP's electoral advance to take a new interest in developments in the Canadian state.

May 8, 2011

This article was first published on the the blog Life on the Left.

PAKISTAN

The bloody show will go on

FAROOQ SULEHRIA ·

The sensational killing of al-Qaida's figurehead king, Osama bin Laden, at a well-guarded compound in the scenic Abbottabad valley is incredible in many ways. Outside of Pakistan, it is incredible to believe OBL being hunted in a country considered US ally in 'war on terror' even if Gen. Musharraf was offering interesting clue. The back cover of his celebrated book, *In The Line Of Fire*, written in 2006, reads: "Since shortly after 9/11 — when many al Qaeda leaders fled Afghanistan and crossed the border into Pakistan — we have played multiple games of cat and mouse with them. The biggest of them all, Osama bin Laden, is still at large at the time of this writing but we have caught many, many others. We have captured 672 and handed over 369 to the United States. We have earned bounties totaling millions of dollars. Here, I will tell the story of just a few of the most significant manhunts".

He was the military chief, country's 'president' and chief architect of Pakistan's 'cat and mouse' policy all along the time Osama escaped Tora Bora and ended up at palatial villa we are watching ceaselessly on our TV screens across the world.

The 'cat and mouse' game now stands exposed, leaving Pakistan military deeply embarrassed. On May 3, the ISI spokesperson told BBC that it was ignorant of OBL's presence at the said compound. This is a lie even former ISI chief and staunch al-Qaida supporter, Gen Hameed Gul, is not ready to buy. In a recorded interview, Gul said: bin Laden being in Abbottabad unknown to authorities "is a bit amazing". Aside from the military, Gul said "there is the local police, the Intelligence Bureau,

the Military Intelligence, the ISI — they all had a presence there".

To unpack the 'cat and mouse' policy, some background information is necessary for any outsider. The ISI, or Inter Services Intelligence, is country's most powerful spy agency that controls--- from behind the scene--- country's foreign policy, politics and media while army as an institution is Pakistan's most powerful political and economic institution. Since independence as British colony in 1947, army has ruled the country for 33 years. It runs over two dozen business concerns: from banks to cement factories, Pakistan military is a major stakeholder in every sector of country's industrial and financial life. One third of federal budget is reserved for defense.

Ever since the start of Afghan conflict in 1979, the ISI has been a key player in Afghanistan. Pakistan's military strategists consider Afghanistan a backyard that may provide, what they call strategic depth, in case of any likely Indian aggression. Also, the military strategists want to control Afghanistan in order to gain influence in Central Asian States blessed with immense gas reserves. In view of these considerations, Taliban and al-Qaida network have been protected and patronized by the ISI ever since 9/11. The strategy is to wait USA out. Like Soviet troops in the 1980s, ISI hopes US troops will also leave if Taliban continue bleeding them.

Hence, military has been until recently running with the al-Qaida/Taliban hare and hunting with the US hounds. It joined the hounds to secure \$11 billion military aid (since 2002) and has been running along the bearded hare to secure the so called 'strategic depth'. However, Washington found out the reality of 'cat and mouse' play after a while. Hence, it began to drone Taliban sanctuaries in Pakistan (Waziristan) in 2004 and raided the

Abbottabad's (in)famous villa on May 1 without any prior information to Pakistan.

However, when Obama mentioned Pakistani cooperation in hunting Osama down, it was an act of subtle diplomacy. Without logistic support from Pakistan, Washington knows, the NATO troops will be starving in Afghanistan. Hence, to secure supply lines, Washington will continue hunting along the reluctant ISI. The ISI, having badly exposed, will devise new strategy. For a while, it will hunt more seriously along the hounds while run more discreetly along the hare. It cannot give up either. The Pakistan military, ever since 1950s, has been trained and armed by the USA. A US military embargo will not merely render Pakistan military inef-

fective, it will also cost generals their perks and lavish lifestyles. The Khakis cannot give up bearded freemasonry either. 'Strategic assets' ---as Taliban/al-Qaida and their Pakistani counterparts are called in Pakistani media--- are not merely imperative for 'strategic depth.' They are vital also to bleed India in Kashmir. Conflict with India must be kept alive. The entire military façade in Pakistan is built upon the imaginary threat from India. Hence, Osama or no Osama, as long as the USA is there in Afghanistan while military continue calling shots in Pakistan, the Afghan conflict will continue unabated. It is a catch 22 situation.

From VIEWPOINT ONLINE : <http://www.viewpointonline.net/the-...>

BOOK REVIEWS

Why the revolt in Egypt?

DAN LA BOTZ ·

Why has the Arab world suddenly erupted in revolution from Tunisia to Egypt, from Bahrain to Yemen? Above all, why Egypt, the largest and most important of the Arab nations?

Popular accounts on television and in the press focus on social media, on Facebook and Twitter. Others, especially Al Jazeera's chiefs, not surprisingly, give a lot of credit to Al Jazeera. The central issue, we are told by almost everyone, is the desire for political democracy. The principal actors: the young professionals.

While there is some truth in this view, the roots of the Egyptian revolution lie deeper in its history, in its society, and in the experience and struggles of its working people. Rabab El-Mahdi and Philip Marfleet, the editors of *Egypt: The Moment of Change*, put together a collection of eight essays by as many experts that offers a compelling explanation for the revolution that suddenly drove President Hosni Mubarak from power and continues to challenge the new military government.

Written a year before the fact, their book virtually predicts the coming upheaval which is now history. The pithy introduction alone provides by far the best short account of pre-revolutionary Egypt, of Egypt in a pre-revolutionary period.

Anwar Sadat and Mubarak, they explain, transformed Gamal Abdel Nasser's nationalist state socialism into a model of neoliberalism in the Arab world. Most Egyptians saw their standard of living decline, and more than 20% became poor, living on two dollars a day or less. Many Egyptians — two out of twenty million — migrated to seek work in the Arab oil states.

A small minority of Egyptians grew richer, much richer. They backed Mubarak who, operating under

the 1981 State of Emergency Law, suppressed dissent and opposition through intimidation, arrest, and torture. Mubarak's National Democratic Party (NDP) won all elections through fraud and coercion.

The opposition, divided between religious and secular and among rival political parties, found it hard to unite against its government. Then beginning in the first years of the 21st century, things began to change.

Political Economy of Mubarak's Egypt

Ahmad El-Sayed El-Naggar describes the underlying political economy of the Mubarak years in his chapter "Economic policy: from state control to decay and corruption." The Egyptian revolution of 1952 under the Free Officers movement, followed by Nasser's election to the presidency in 1956, created a state capitalist system.

El-Naggar argues that nonetheless there emerged "a capitalist class loyal to the bureaucratic ruling class," but without much entrepreneurial spirit. With the onset of neoliberalism, former state bureaucrats sought out relations with more aggressive capitalists and created a new political economy based on "crony capitalism."

While this economic system was anything but spectacularly successful, the practices of cronyism and corruption enriched the new financial, industrial and commercial elite. Mubarak and this stratum of the wealthiest Egyptians succeeded in transferring the tax burden to the middle class and working people. At the same time they used their economic and political power to take over state industries and land belonging to peasant communities. And the door was thrown open to foreign investors. For

Egyptian farmers and workers the system would be a disaster.

Ray Bush in the chapter titled "The land and the people" explains how Sadat's and Mubarak's new order transformed the Egyptian countryside. In Egypt, 30% of the workforce toils in agriculture. Sadat and Mubarak reversed Nasser's modest agrarian reform laws of 1952 and 1961, which had redistributed about 14% of the land to about 10% of Egyptian farmers.

Under both state capitalism and neoliberalism, Egypt's agriculture could not keep up with its rising population, and the country became a food importer, relying on imports for 40% of its food needs.

Under the neoliberal regime's "de-sequestration" laws, land was taken back from poor farmers and returned to the old landlords or given to new ones, sometimes foreign capitalists. Massive irrigation projects threatened not only farms but also the environment.

Farmers lost land rights and saw their rents soar, while the media attacked them as lazy. Farmers fought back through militant protest, but faced with secret police spying and violent repression, it proved hard to organize a coordinated resistance.

The Workers under Mubarak

"Workers' struggles under 'socialism' and neoliberalism" are discussed in a chapter with that title written by Joel Beinin. Nasser's "socialist" Egypt had from the beginning suppressed and subordinated the workers' movement. The Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF) founded in 1957 was controlled by the state and remained so under Sadat and Mubarak.

Since 1954, despite a 1987 law granting the right to strike, there have been no legal strikes in Egypt. Union elections excluded opponents from the Muslim Brotherhood, the Communist Party, and any other organizations considered disloyal to the

state. The national unions never had direct elections for their executive committees.

Despite the state's strict control of the official labor unions, workers rebelled repeatedly against the politics and impacts of both state capitalism and neoliberalism. Strike waves in 1971-72, food riots in 1977, strikes again from 1984 to 1989, and most recently from 2004 to 2009 sometimes won concessions but always faced repression.

Taking the lead in the strikes were men and women employed in industry, particularly the textile industry centered in Mahalla al-Kubra, but groups as diverse as teachers and tax collectors also organized and sometimes struck. Strikes became increasingly political as workers demanded the right to independent labor unions and by the 1980s opposed the dictatorial regime of Mubarak.

Workers could be said to have led the right for democracy in Egypt in the 2000s, though democracy also meant a fight for economic justice.

The Democracy Movement

Paralleling the workers' movement of the 2000s was the broader democracy movement discussed by Rabab El-Mahdi in the chapter "The democracy movement: cycles of protest." Since the founding of the modern Egyptian state by the Free Officers in 1952 there has been one political party using various names but finally called the National Democratic Party (NDP). From 1976 to the elections of 2005, the NDP held a comfortable majority in the parliament.

While there had always been religious and secular opposition and politics right, center and left, state repression and political manipulation kept the opposition in check. (The role of torture in suppressing the opposition is discussed in Aida Seif El-Dawla's chapter "Torture: a state policy.")

Mubarak's foreign policy — discussed in Anne Alexander's chapter "Mubarak in the international arena" — that is, his alliance with the United States

and Israel, led to internal problems beginning with the second Palestinian intifada.

The second intifada led to massive street demonstrations in the Arab world, including in Egypt, opening up a new political era. The Popular Committee for Support for the Intifada brought together for the first time an alliance of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Nasserites, and Socialists. This experience in turn led to the creation of campaign groups for change in Egypt.

Old and New Oppositions

The Muslim Brotherhood, the largest organization of the political opposition, cannot simply be dismissed as a right-wing, petty bourgeois movement, argues Sameh Naguib in the chapter "Islam(s) old and new." Founded in 1928, by the 1940s the fiercely anti-Communist Muslim Brotherhood had become the largest political movement in Egypt.

During the Nasser period, the Brotherhood (officially outlawed in 1954) withered until by the 1970s it was little more than a remnant. During the Sadat and Mubarak years two different currents developed, one anti-Semitic, anti-Communist and anti-secular and financed by new bourgeois elements, the other Islamist students who gradually became radicalized under the impact of Egyptian foreign policy.

By the late 1970s the new radical student movement had split. One group evolved into the confrontational jihadi groups who assassinated Sadat in 1981 and were destroyed during the 1980s and 1990s by the Egyptian police through imprisonment, torture and execution. The other group, argues Naguib, became a mass populist, multi-class party whose political platform and practice are rife with contradictions.

Today the Muslim Brotherhood espouses political democracy and equal citizenship rights for men and

women, Muslims and Christians, but at the same time says no woman or Christian can become the president of Egypt.

Returning to El-Mahdi's discussion of the democracy movement, by the mid-2000s a new democracy movement had emerged with organizations such as the Popular Campaign for Change (known as "Freedom Now"), Kafiya ("Enough"), Women for Democracy ("The Street is Ours"), Youth for Change, Journalists for Change, Artists for Change and Workers for Change.

With hundreds of members and operating with peaceful guerrilla tactics coordinated by cell phones, computers and social media, this new movement began to organize quickie demonstrations in neighborhoods throughout Cairo.

One of the most interesting developments was the ability of left activists in groups such as the Revolutionary Socialist Organization to form alliances with the Muslim Brotherhood. And now the democracy movement and the workers' movements are in direct communication and coordination. We can only wonder, where will such alliances go now?

During the period from 2005 to 2010 the democracy movement and the workers' movement acted in parallel but without direct connections. Still, their demonstrations and strikes influenced each other and in 2010 exploded in the revolutionary movement which we are now witnessing.

After reading this book, which explains the long, slow buildup to the Egyptian Revolution of 2010, it is clear that forces have been unleashed which will to continue to fight not only for democracy but also for workers' demands for economic justice. We will have to wait to see if this becomes a struggle not only for democracy but also for socialism.

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BANGLADESH

Climate change and neoliberal policies: the case of Bangladesh

DANIELLE SABAI ·

Subjected to extreme geographical and climatic conditions, Bangladesh has established over the centuries an equilibrium which has made it possible for its dense population to live there. Global warming, reinforced by the application of neoliberal policies, has broken this fragile equilibrium. Undoubtedly, no country in the world is more vulnerable today and the population of Bangladesh is confronted by immense challenges...

Unprecedented climate change

No region of Bangladesh has been spared by climate change.

In the north of the country, the summer, which previously lasted two to three months, can now last for five or six months, with a substantial rise in temperature. Consequently, fertile land becomes arid and crops burn. The rivers dry up and the farmers depend on systems of expensive irrigation which pump subterranean water and gradually exhaust it. Since the 1990s, the peasants have also been confronted with the problem of the contamination of water from wells by arsenic, which is present naturally in the earth but which rises to the surface because of the pumping of subterranean water.

Cold and fog are becoming more severe during winter, destroying many harvests of vegetables and seasonal crops.

In the south too temperatures are rising regularly in summer and cold weather is more common in winter. The coast is subject to increasingly frequent cyclones and they are becoming more and more violent. The giant waves which invade the fertile land of the coastal areas increase the salinity of the land

and the rivers, making the land durably unsuitable for agriculture.

The country now has only three seasons, summer, winter and a rainy season, whereas it had six seasons previously. During these periods, the climate seems to have gone mad: the summers are increasingly hot and dry, the winters increasingly harsh and the rainy seasons increasingly wet. The floods and cyclones which Bangladesh has always had to face now come more and more frequently, and especially outside the expected periods.

Climate change is unquestionably responsible for these disorders, at least partly. The warming of the atmosphere accelerates the melting of the glaciers of the North and South Poles, leading to a rise in the sea level. The coastal parts of Bangladesh are gradually being submerged by salt water. The third report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) estimates that the country could lose 10.9 per cent of its land surface if the sea level rose by 45 centimetres.

In the north, the streams and rivers which cross Bangladesh are replenished by the melting of the Himalayan glaciers. With global warming, the melting of these glaciers is faster than the reconstitution of the ice. Thus, the rivers are decreasing gradually and if the phenomenon is accentuated, the rivers could soon be dry, which would lead to the north of Bangladesh turning into a desert.

But for the time being, the increase in rainfall during the monsoon, coupled with an acceleration of the melting of the glaciers, increases the quantity of water to be evacuated. The flowing of this water into the sea is itself made difficult by the rise in the sea level. The combination of these two factors makes floods more frequent and more extensive.

With the rise in the sea level, the dykes built in the 1960s, which are five metres high, are no longer sufficient to protect coastal villages from high tides. The combination of a rise in the sea level and a diminution of the billions of tons of silt carried by the rivers of the north no longer prevents the penetration of salt water into the lowlands. And the dykes retain rainwater on the landward side, thus accentuating the floods.

Neoliberal policies have worsened the situation

Changes in the climate are not the only factors responsible for the degradation of the environment, of which the Bangladeshi peasants are the first victims. In the 1980s, public authorities developed an economic policy that was oriented towards both exports and an increase in food production. This policy was impelled and supported by international agencies such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Asian Development Bank, the United States Agency for International Development and the Department for International Development of the United Kingdom.

As elsewhere, structural adjustment policies favoured in Bangladesh the privatization of large public companies and the opening-up of the energy sector to foreign capital. It was the same for the mining sector in the 1990s.

The withdrawal of the state precipitated a crisis in the sectors of education and health, opening the way to private services.

In the name of development, these economic reforms opened the way to the large-scale buying-up of land and to the dispossession of a million people. They created a cycle of dependence from which the Bangladeshi peasants have great difficulty in escaping.

Along the coast there was a proliferation of shrimp breeding, aimed at satisfying the rapidly-growing market in the rich countries. Bangladesh is today the fifth-biggest producer of shrimps in the world. Approximately 130 companies share the profits from this industry, which employs nearly a million

Bangladeshi workers for less than one euro a day. 190,000 hectares of mangrove and fertile land have been converted into aquicultural farms. Land that was in the beginning reserved for agriculture was bought from small producers at low prices, then transformed into shrimp farms, thus accentuating the salination of the land and making it definitively unsuitable for agriculture.

This industry endangers the means of existence of the peasants, without however providing a sufficient number of jobs. In the Sundarbans, the breeding of shrimps broke the fragile equilibrium which made it possible for the local population to live from the resources of the biggest mangrove in the world. The ecosystem cannot adapt quickly to the salination of water and the increase in temperature. The big trees are disappearing, as well as a large number of animal and vegetable species. The peasants who formerly cultivated rice and who did not find employment in the aquicultural farms have recycled themselves as fishermen in the Sundarbans. But the mangrove cannot withstand the combined pressure of an increasing level of artisanal fishing and the shrimp industry, which leaves behind it pools destroyed by the pollution generated by this industry. That causes an ecological catastrophe and reinforces the effects of climate changes, because the mangroves are buffers between the land and the sea. They protect from the erosion caused by the cyclones which sweep down on the coastal areas. Further inland, the drive to quickly increase the agricultural productivity of the fields has led to an excessive use of fertilizers. That has reinforced the reduction of biodiversity and the erosion of the land.

Food sovereignty and climatic refugees

The social challenges are immense for the 150 million inhabitants of Bangladesh, and in particular for the poorest among them. A third of the population lives below the poverty line and 70 per cent are landless. Climate changes and neoliberal policies are endangering the way of life of tens of millions of them. Forecasts indicate that nearly 40 million

people could become climatic refugees. The capital, Dhaka, will not be able to absorb the massive displacements of population that are foreseeable if part of the country is no longer habitable, because it is submerged by floods or has been turned into a desert. Dhaka already accommodates half a million peasants every year because of the destruction of their traditional environment. Nor can a solution be found in neighbouring India, which shares a 4000-kilometre long common border with Bangladesh, and which has erected a double barbed-wire wall, 2.5 metres high, along more than 2500 kilometres. The Indian government claims to be defending itself against terrorism and smuggling. In reality, it is preventing the flood of migrants on both sides of a particularly complex border. The solutions must be based on co-operation and mutual aid and certainly not on the blocking of borders and on repression.

In a country where agriculture accounts for 20 per cent of the country's GDP and 65 per cent of its labour force, food sovereignty appears as one of the key questions which must enable the peasants to both attenuate and adapt to the effects of climate changes, while feeding a mainly poor population.

The paradigm of food sovereignty is opposed to the dominant model of agribusiness, in which the search for profits takes precedence over the food needs of populations and respect for the environment. This paradigm "affirms the right of local peoples to define their own agricultural and food policies, control their own domestic food markets and promote local agriculture by preventing the dumping of surplus products. It encourages diverse and

sustainable farming methods that respect the land, and sees international trade as only a complement to local production. Food sovereignty means returning control of natural assets such as land, water and seeds to local communities and fighting against the privatisation of all life" [1].

The failure of the Copenhagen conference is there to remind us of the incapacity of the governments of the great powers to take the measures that are essential. The coming climatic catastrophe will not be avoided without getting out of the capitalist system, which is based on the search for maximum profit and unlimited accumulation, objectives which are in contradiction with the safeguarding of the environment and the satisfaction of social needs.

Peasant organizations like the Bangladesh Krishok Federation (BKF) and the Bangladesh Kisan Sabha (BKS) [2] organize workshops with peasants to evaluate the impact of climate change and to mobilize them on the questions of access to land and on food sovereignty. At the end of the year 2011, these two organizations envisage launching a food sovereignty caravan which would tour the country. The organizers want to inform and mobilize the most vulnerable populations, to share the experiences of rank-and-file peasant movements and to develop international solidarity on the questions of climate change and food sovereignty, in particular in South Asia. The role of these progressive and independent organizations is very important. They are an important part of the building of a radical mass movement for climatic justice on a world scale.

TUNISIA

"Work is a right, gang of thieves!"

NPA MAGHREB COMMISSION ·

The Tunisian economy is almost entirely turned towards outsourcing for export. With 1,250 French companies in Tunisia and one third of trade taking place with France, it is highly dependent. And in the countries of the South, the consequences of the global economic crisis have been far more severe than in the large imperialist metropolises: it is notably easier to dismiss employees and close factories where the rule of law is non-existent. Dictatorship is also a political system which exacerbates the exploitation of workers.

Thus, the global economic crisis has been experienced head-on by workers in Tunisia, with closures of plants from 2008, job losses and a tightening of working conditions, already harsh previously (up to 48 hours of weekly work). Unemployment (as high as 50% in the region of Sidi Bouzid) and casualisation explain the despair and lack of prospects of a youth educated to a level equivalent to that of European countries. To this is added the daily humiliations suffered for decades, the corruption that invades all layers of society like a generalized cancer and a nepotism which is increasingly unbearable for the population.

Initially, it was then the workers and unemployed of the poor cities who participated in the first demonstrations of anger following the revolt in Sidi Bouzid. During the first two weeks, the geographical boundaries of the revolt were those of a Tunisia divided by a vertical line into "interior" regions whose sole lot is misery, unemployment and marginalization, and coastal regions which for historical reasons and clan-based logics are not doing so badly.

The uneven organisation of the working class, together with the very weak mobilization of the inhabitants of the big cities during these first two weeks, kept the mobilization at the level of riots or revolts, even if the involvement of militants from the left of the UGTT prepared the ground for the emergence of a genuine revolutionary process.

Faced with this social anger, the regime had to make concessions and promises - that nobody believed. But its main response was repression, which very quickly broadened and hardened to the extent that the mobilization strengthened, leading to a cycle of repression - radicalization. And it was this bloody repression that triggered the mobilization in the other regions. In early January, the left of the UGTT succeeded in getting the federation to allow regional unions the freedom to call a general strike. And a part of the bourgeoisie and of the petty bourgeoisie saw the opportunity to get rid of this mafia regime which systematically racketeered them and joined the movement.

From there, the general mobilization was intended to put an end to the Ben Ali clan, and the demonstrations broadened and extended throughout the territory until the surprisingly rapid departure of the dictator. Political claims – the common denominator - took precedence over the denunciation of social injustices.

Immediately after the fall of the dictator, the social aspect was overshadowed. Today, the bourgeoisie still in power would obviously not welcome the deepening of the revolution, which would be at its cost. In terms of freedom and democracy, the deepening of the revolution would mean the strengthening and generalization of forms of self-organization (including the local Committees for the Protection of the Revolution) which are very heterogeneous at the moment but which would benefit the popular

layers. Socially, the strengthening of these forms of self-organization also means the return to the forefront of the question of social injustice, the basis of this revolution sometimes presented in a reductive manner as solely democratic. And the bourgeoisie can count on its imperialist supporters and a part of the petty bourgeoisie concerned with its own comfort and security, as well as figures from the Ben Ali regime, all winners in the development of the counter-revolution.

Thus, the social dimension of the revolution was, under the two governments of Ghannouchi and Béji Caïd Essebsi (since February 27), fully denigrated by the ministers, the mainstream media and opportunists on all sides, who denounced "purely material concerns which are detrimental to the economic stabilization of the country".

Propaganda against the UGTT and PCOT then developed in the press and audio-visual media as well as on social networks; the PCOT because it was the only party of the radical left, with some popular profile; the UGTT because it played a highly political role in the accompaniment and organisation of the revolt which, with the help of its most radical activists, turned into a revolution. It should be remembered that the role of the UGTT is complex, between the radicalism of a substantial part of its base and the sclerosis of its bureaucratic leadership.

The UGTT was also after the fall of Ben Ali the spine of the "National Council for Safeguarding the Revolution" comprising all parties not involved in the Ghannouchi governments, as well as various unemployed, youth and human rights associations. This Council was intended to be - and could have been - a tool for control of the activities of the interim Government. But its extreme heterogeneity (stretching from organizations of the far left to the very conservative Islamists of Ennahdha) prevented it from having a real weight and the defection – de facto – of the UGTT leadership has considerably weakened it. In addition, this Council being a cartel of organizations, it does not represent the reality of

the mobilizations where structures of rank and file self-organization are spreading.

Prime Minister Béji Caïd Essebsi has continued to manoeuvre to try to give an acceptable façade to a mobilized and highly vigilant populace, while preserving the interests of the state-party RCD. Thus, his decision to dissolve the RCD and the political police was only symbolic, since the police are still present on the ground and continue the same practices, and the former leaders of the RCD have not only been allowed to form new parties but also retain their places in the state institutions and some large enterprises. Counter-revolutionary forces are also trying - without real success until now - to divide workers by reviving tribal conflicts or regionalist sentiments.

The offensive of the pro-Gaddafi forces at the Tunisian border forces may also be a source of worry. Because apart from a government press release denouncing the violation of the Tunisian territory by Gaddafi's forces, there was no official reaction to the other possible violation that the imperialist forces propose to further establish themselves in the region.

Furthermore, institutionally, to empty the National Council for Safeguarding the Revolution of its content, the Government has set up a "Higher Body for the Realisation of the Objectives of the Revolution" responsible for proposing an electoral law for the constituent assembly elections on July 24. This bloated body has a purely advisory role and does not formally include the most radical parties (the LGO and the PCOT) and some organizations rooted in popular movements (including the structures of self-organization of workers and unemployed associations). Nevertheless, the demands of the street and the magnitude of mobilizations have forced this body to submit to the Government proposals in synch with the movement. It has thus proposed that the leaders of the RCD (from the reign of Ben Ali) are prohibited from participation in the elections. The Prime Minister's rejection of this proposal was strongly opposed by members of the Higher Body as it undercut the little legitimacy it had.

The organization of the constituent assembly elections is a victory in itself given the history of Tunisia. But several voices are now raised in favour of its postponement, basing themselves on four main arguments:

- Today, the only forces that are prepared, organized and equipped with the necessary means to conduct their electoral campaign are the counter-revolutionaries (the bourgeoisie, the remnants of the RCD and the Islamists). Therefore the question of the participation of figures from the old regime in these elections should first be resolved.
- The Islamists (ready to ally with the former leaders of the RCD) should not be offered an election campaign on a plate by organizing these elections on the eve of Ramadan.
- End of year university examinations would make sections of the youth, the main force of this revolution, less available.
- Finally, the newly formed parties as well as those which were forced into hiding under Ben Ali, should be given the time to organize and prepare for these elections.

The organization and coordination of the workers' movement may actually require more time, primarily because of the mistrust that prevails today (and which is fed by the government and the mainstream media) of all political parties, accused of opportunism. But the future of this revolutionary process is also and above all in the structures of rank and file self-organization. These structures are now fragile and their role unequal according to region and workplaces. But their development, their generalization and their radicalization are fundamental issues. It is crucial – according to the revolutionary activists – that the elections are a stage in the revolutionary process and not simply an institutional milestone leading to the predictable neoliberal outcome. And it is the responsibility of the revolutionary forces to build and strengthen these mobilisations, thus to be present among workers, in the workplace and in the popular neighbourhoods, to participate in the generalization of these

structures of self-organization. Finally, the creation of a political tool, defending the interests of the working class in the broadest sense, will be the consequence of this generalization and radicalisation of self-organizing structures.

This is what will give legitimacy to this tool and strengthen that of the organizations that have contributed. And this is possible because despite the pervasiveness of the issue of elections, the social mobilization continues. In regions of the interior as well as in the main popular neighbourhoods of the large cities, the population is expressing its disappointment at this revolution which has changed nothing in its economic situation and promises "a second revolution". Social mobilization therefore returns to the first level – even though it experiences ebbs. Strikes, protests and occupations of factories multiply. The main demands relate to job creation and job security, wage increases, improved working conditions and the exclusion of corrupt bosses compromised with the Ben Ali regime. The lock-out threats made against a number of workers partly explains the ebbs that the mobilization experiences. But the example of the garbage strike in itself shows the level of mobilization: Ten days of strike were finally victorious, ending the subcontracting system which meant insecurity and wage discrimination for these workers.

But despite the general combativeness and vigilance, the RCD is still in power and the assumption of power by the revolutionaries is not yet on the agenda. The counter-revolution is organized; the ruins of the old regime can be restored, with the assistance of the petty bourgeoisie, the national bourgeoisie and its imperialist supporters.

It is therefore a change in this relationship of forces that revolutionaries are working for today, as an unavoidable precondition for a change of direction. They are aware that the partial victories obtained until now (the fall of Ben Ali, the exclusion of ministers belonging to the RCD, the dissolution of the RCD and the political police, the exclusion of governors, delegates, directors of public and private companies) have been through mobilizations in the

street and in the workplace. And it will again be on the street, of course, and through strikes, demonstrations and occupations that the oppressed will change the relationship of forces and will write – as

they have done until now – their Constitution, and sketch the profile of the society of tomorrow, a society where work will be a fundamental right and the band of thieves will have no place.

USA

Budget Woes, Class Wars

AGAINST THE CURRENT ·

In an act of symbolic vandalism, Maine's governor proposes has removed the mural depicting the state's labor history and will purge the name of Frances Perkins, Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal-era Secretary of Labor, from the state's labor department building. In Wisconsin and Michigan, neo-McCarthyite rightwingers are demanding "Freedom of Information" mass disclosures of pro-labor university faculty's email messages.

Some state struggles are covered in this issue of *Against the Current*, and Kim Moody's essay "Wisconsin and Beyond" sets out the background. Even a brief summary is impossible to give here. In our home state of Michigan alone, 40 anti-labor laws have been enacted or are pending. Those already passed through the Republican-dominated legislature and signed by governor Rick "smart nerd" Snyder include "Emergency Manager" statutes giving state-appointed managers license to eliminate union contracts and even dissolve the elected governing bodies of financially distressed school districts and entire municipalities.

Republican domination of state legislatures also gives the right wing power over Congressional redistricting following the 2010 census, and control of the means of electoral fraud and vote suppression — a potentially critical factor in the 2012 elections, as illustrated by the events of Florida in 2000 and Ohio in 2004. In Wisconsin's just-completed Supreme Court election, the post-count "discovery" of thousands of votes to overturn the result is a sign of what to expect.

The scale of the empowered right wing's war on labor and the poor, always under the lying pretext that "the state is broke," provokes several questions

for consideration. We can't necessarily give definitive answers, but we'll offer some ideas in hopes of provoking discussion.

- Why are Republicans, when they achieve a majority, ready to move immediately on a tax-cutting, budget-slashing, labor-smashing agenda, whereas Democrats in power typically dither and dather and blither and blather until their momentum vanishes and their mandate runs out?
- Will the rightwing assault smash through the opposition and permanently change the social and political landscape, or run aground on its internal contradictions and the mass outrage generated by its arrogant overreach?
- Following the mass mobilization and occupation of the state capitol in Wisconsin and demonstrations in other states, can resistance actually turn back the attacks?

Serving Their Masters

Let's look first at the behavior of the two parties. The Republicans on the whole serve a single master — corporate capital. In some cases, as in the notorious case of Wisconsin governor Walker, they even work directly for billionaire fractions of the ruling class like the infamous Koch brothers, cutting through the normal mediations and compromises of bourgeois politics. Union-busting legislation is literally drawn up in the offices of rightwing think tanks funded by these super-rich sponsors.

In any case, the program of cutting taxes for the affluent while slashing benefits and services for the population, eliminating union protection and business regulation, privatizing schools and hospitals and prisons and everything else up to and including Social Security — even if it's not only socially de-

structive but ruinously expensive to do so — fully responds to the wish list of corporate America.

Taken together, these measures will accelerate the already rapid social decline of the United States — a society that becomes poorer, more profoundly unequal, more insecure and repressive and a great deal less democratic — to say nothing of paving global civilization's road to irreversible environmental catastrophe. On the way to the bottom, however, the Republicans offer a wild ideological celebration of the return of the greatness of America to win the votes of millions of people whose jobs, pensions and kids' access to education are vanishing.

The Democrats, on the other hand, can only win politically by serving two masters, though by no means equally. The party's overriding loyalty is to corporate capital, especially its largest donors from Wall Street and the hedge funds — and to the capitalist system. The higher up the party leadership, the stronger the discipline imposed by capital. Yet the Democrats can succeed only by delivering benefits to their key voting base — labor, the African-American and other communities of color, women seeking gender equality and reproductive rights.

There are occasions, although much less frequent than during the height of the Civil Rights or anti-war struggles, when Democrats at lower levels act honorably, especially in response to the pressure of mass movements — and the fact that the destruction of public sector unions threatens the party's funding base. The 14 Wisconsin state Senate Democrats who left the state, blocking the quorum necessary to pass Governor Walker's union-smashing law, showed real courage and fighting spirit. (At the same time, the Democratic leadership was attempting to end the mass occupation of the Capitol.)

The record of the Democrats in power, however, is appalling and demoralizing to their support base — as the now well-known record of the Obama administration and Democratic-controlled Congress from 2008-10 illustrates. When it comes to broken

promises, you only have to say "Guantanamo." But the biggest lessons about politics, of course, are EFCA — the Employee Free Choice Act, dumped in an unmarked grave without even a decent burial — and Health Care Reform.

The Republicans only had to respond to the wishes of the vampire health insurance industry, hence scream about "Obamacare" and invent lies about "death panels" to block meaningful discussion of the health care crisis in America. The Democrats, on the other hand, attempted to satisfy at the same time their voters' demand for health care and the demands of the insurance lobby. The result was the 2200-page bill that no one understands, which contains a number of absurdities unrelated to health care at all (like the incomprehensible requirement for businesses to file 1099 forms for almost every vendor), and which the ascendant Republicans will work to defund so that most of its benefits never reach ordinary people who most need them.

In a period of capitalist decline and crisis — as opposed to the boom times of growth and prosperity — it's really true that "you can't serve two masters" with fundamentally opposed class interests, and so this is a game that Democrats will usually lose. But movements that attach themselves to the Democrats at such a time will always lose. Even while the intensity and pure viciousness of the rightwing assault on labor creates almost unbearable pressures to back the Democrats as "the only alternative," the real-life need for independent politics is greater than ever.

What Next for the Right Wing?

The game-of-chicken over a government shutdown around the federal budget ended, for the moment, with a highly praised "bipartisan compromise" that hacks away billions from medical programs for children and the poor — those who need them most. It's a taste of what's to come in the next war over raising the federal debt ceiling.

Can the right wing sustain its momentum, or will it crash on its own overreach? Backed by ideological

centers like the Peterson Institute and Cato Institute, the right wing is preparing a frontal assault on Social Security, on the pretext that "the next generation can't afford the burden of Baby Boom retirees," that "only the truly poor really need Social Security" and all the rest of it. As we go to press Obama and the Democrats, again trying to serve two masters, are getting ready to offer "reforms" that will further weaken working people's confidence that Social Security will be there for them in the long run.

Social Security is neither in "crisis" nor the cause of the deficit. It has produced consistent surpluses for decades, which are used to subsidize U.S. capitalism's assorted wars, tax reductions for corporations and the rich, etc. Far from a "failed government program," it is the most successful one ever, and can be funded permanently by lifting the artificial ceiling on incomes taxed to finance it — which is precisely why it's now in the reactionaries' crosshairs.

The attack on Social Security is a quite deliberate, frontal assault on the notion that society's members bear any kind of collective, organized responsibility for each other. "Your Health Care, Your Problem" was a sign seen at Tea Party rallies trashing the health care reform. It's an ideology with some appeal to relatively better-off, mostly white working people — until the attack directly hits them.

Today's young workers are being told that today's retirees are enjoying generous benefits at their expense — but the right wingers don't mention that if Social Security is gutted, those same young workers who are struggling on inadequate wages will wind up bearing the whole burden of caring for their own aging parents.

The right wing offensive faces contradictions, however. The Republican sweep of the House of Representatives in November, 2010 occurred before the party was quite "ready for prime time." The Tea Party fringe, with its insistence on lunatic cuts that even the Republican leadership knows would be ruinous, presents a challenge to party discipline.

Some of these same elements' fanatical commitment to cutting things like Planned Parenthood and public broadcasting — ideologically driven crusades which really have nothing to do with the budget at all — may generate a big public backlash.

The bigger contradiction is that the savagery of the state-level assaults on public sector workers has stirred up, at long last, a massive labor response. Workers whose livelihoods and dignity are on the line, and union officials who see their organizations' financing about to be gutted with the abolition of dues checkoff, had no choice but to mobilize for their very survival. The Governor Walkers and their Crack Brothers backers who masterminded the assault didn't quite anticipate what they were unleashing.

Can the Resistance Win?

The question remains, of course, whether this resistance can roll back the reactionary legislative tide. The fact is that the new laws are now on state statute books, aside from the legal challenge in Wisconsin over the blatant way the Republicans rammed it through. There are recall initiatives in Wisconsin and perhaps elsewhere against some of these legislators, and that's entirely to the good. It's still to be seen whether these recall drives can retain their momentum and unseat the reactionaries — and if they do, whether the next set of elected politicians will aggressively repeal the union-busting laws or set about "negotiating" over them.

Again, this attack demands radical, new independent politics, not a recycling of the same old lesser-evil corporate politics. But there's an even more immediate necessity — and a precondition for viable political action. Today's battle isn't one that the unions can win on their own, especially in the shriveled state of organized labor. A new, massive worker-led popular movement is the need of the hour.

Saving public education, for example, requires deeply rooted teacher-parent-community alliances; it can't be done by the teacher unions alone. The

"emergency managers" menace looming over Michigan municipalities and schools can only be defeated by full-scale community defiance and non-cooperation. Where public employees' strikes are met with firings and jail sentences, the entire labor movement and communities will need to rally behind them.

The stark reality is that the present political and legal climate — and the state of unions themselves in both public and private sectors — leaves workers with few effective tools to defeat the rightwing as-

sault. New tools for resistance will have to be creatively forged in the midst of struggle itself, always a difficult problem. The first steps have been taken, however: Millions of people, including many who actually voted for these Republican governors, now see through the lying propaganda of the fanatical privateers and budget-slashing "free-market" fundamentalists. It's not just that class war is back — it's that more and more people can see and feel it.

ATC 152, May-June 2011 <http://www.solidarity-us.org/curren...>

SYRIA

Repression and defiance in Assad's Syria

YUSEF KHALIL ·

Braving a heavy security presence and roadblocks leading into cities and towns, tens of thousands of Syrians took to the streets across the country following prayers in both mosques and churches on "Great Friday"—as Good Friday is known in Arabic—in the latest popular challenge to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and his regime.

But protesters were met once again with deadly violence—in spite of the long-awaited lifting of the country's half-century-old Emergency Law the day before and a series of other reforms. More than 100 unarmed peaceful demonstrators were reportedly killed by the Assad government's security forces in the bloodiest crackdown yet.

As a follow-up, in the early hours of April 24, security forces burst into the homes of opposition activists [<http://english.aljazeera.net/news/m...>], arresting an unknown number. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a London-based group, dozens have been arrested.

The mass protests in Syria began in early March in the city of Daraa after police arrested and tortured teenagers and boys for writing anti-regime graffiti based on slogans from the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions.

At first, it appeared as if the protests would be contained. However, other cities and towns joined in, and the protests gathered support across ethnic and religious lines. A huge mobilization on Friday, April 15, rocked the regime after it thought it had regained the upper hand through a combination of repression and promises of reform.

The following week, in the capital city of Damascus, a massive security deployment started as early as

Thursday in preparation for what has become a common feature of the Arab revolutions: the ever-growing mobilization after noon prayers on Friday.

On the day itself, any protest—or even a beginning of a gathering—was swiftly attacked with tear gas and live ammunition. Nevertheless, thousands of people were still able to come out in Damascus and the surrounding towns.

Demonstrations continued in the southern city of Daraa, the site of the arrest and torture of the teenage boys in March. Nearby villages of Houran also saw significant protests and a security crackdown—most notably in Izraa, where at least 10 people were killed, including a 7-year-old child.

The city of Homs saw some of the angriest demonstrations in response to a regime assault with live ammunition last Tuesday against a peaceful sit-in at what is now called Freedom Square. Adding insult to injury, the Syrian government and official news agency justified the murders by characterizing the demonstrators as Salafists—members of a fundamentalist current in Islam known for their intolerance towards more moderate Muslims, as well as non-Muslims.

According to some sources, citizens formed committees to defend their neighborhoods from attacks by regime forces, but that didn't prevent the killing of at least eight people. In an alarming development, eyewitnesses have reported seeing security forces posing as Salafists, sent out to tarnish the image of the protesters by carrying out looting and provoking state security forces.

North of Homs, the women and children of ar-Rastan came out in solidarity with the nearby city of Talbiseh which has been under siege, without electricity, water, or communications for several days.

But not all protests were met with repression. In some areas, like the coastal cities of Tartous and Baniyas, people were able to march and demonstrate without interference from the regime. In Qamishli, around 6,000 marched together under the banner "Arabs, Assyrians and Kurds Against Corruption"—an important statement that captures the spirit of unity and solidarity that has characterized the struggle in Syria.

However, in a cycle that has now become familiar to many, security forces opened fire the next day killing at least a dozen people who were mourning Friday's victims.

The intensity of the crackdown last weekend [<http://www.forbes.com/feeds/ap/2011...>] —with 120 killed in two days—led to the first resignations from the Assad regime when two members of parliament from Daraa stepped down. "If I cannot protect the chests of my people from these treacherous strikes, then there is no meaning for me to stay in the People's Assembly," one of the members of parliament, Nasser Hariri, told Al Jazeera.

ASSAD AND his regime are attempting to survive the tide of revolt by carrying out terrible violence, while also promising to make changes.

The most anticipated reform came April 21, with the lifting of the Emergency Law, which grants the government temporary powers during a "state of emergency." This "temporary" law has been in effect for the last five decades. It gives the state far-reaching powers to detain citizens, ban demonstrations, control the media, eavesdrop on private communications and interrogate people.

But the regime's move is highly conditional. First of all, though the State of Emergency has been lifted, the Emergency Law is still on the books and can always be activated again.

And in its place, a new permanent law went into effect that severely restricts demonstrations. Although formally recognizing the right to protest, the new law requires demonstrators to apply for

permission from the Interior Ministry at least five days in advance. The ministry then has the power to deny the request, or change the date, time, location, duration and course of the demonstration.

Further articles in the new law seem to imply that any demonstration or gathering—even if it is peaceful—that is not pre-approved by the authorities may be considered a "riot." In an ominous sign, the first applicant for a license to demonstrate was detained for several hours.

In anticipation of the Friday protests, the Syrian Local Coordination Committee, a network of groups organizing the protests, issued its first statement to clarify the demands it has united around.

The committee called for an end to the killings, torture, arrest and violence against peaceful demonstrators, as well as the release of all political prisoners and prisoners of conscience from Syria's jails. It also demanded constitutional changes that would limit presidential terms, increase the power of parliament and repeal Article 8 of the constitution, which recognizes the Baath Party as the one and only ruling party in Syria.

Judged by these demands—which are far from radical on their face, though they are profoundly so in the context of a 50-year-old dictatorship—the regime has shown itself incapable of any meaningful reform, and very capable of killing its own citizens. The non-concessions offered so far by the government are adding fuel to the fire of the pro-democracy movement.

The regime's arrogance has led to an escalation in the demands of the protesters, which started with appeals for small-scale reforms and more freedoms. There is a shift in consciousness underway in Syria towards revolutionary conclusions. It has yet to reach the tipping point achieved by Tunisians and Egyptians, but the trajectory is unmistakable. In city after city, in town after town, the protesters are calling for the downfall of the regime.

Socialist Worker

PAKISTAN

Feelings of revenge will not end with Osama's death – The Left view from Pakistan

FAROOQ TARIQ ·

Surprisingly, not much happened in Khaiber Pakhtoonkhawa, where Osama was killed. Similarly Baluchistan responded meekly against the killings. However the reaction against the attack on the compound in Abbot Abad is growing wider and it will spread to other areas. Many religious fundamentalists fled Afghanistan and took refuge in Baluchistan and Khaiber Pakhtoonkhawa. They ruled those provinces from 2002 to 2008.

This fundamentalist rule occurred while General Musharraf was playing a binary game with American imperialism. On one hand, he joined the "war on terror" coalition while on the other he depended on the fundamentalist's growth to receive more for military and economic support from the American imperialism on the name of fighting the fundamentalists. During this period, Osama Bin Laden must have crossed into Pakistan.

The May 2011 attack took everybody by surprise; people were bewildered and speechless. No one expected such a brazen act so soon after the release of David Ramond, the CIA operative who killed two Pakistanis in broad day light earlier this year in Lahore. In contrast to the mild reaction to Osama's assassination, the mass reaction to David Ramond's murders was so strong it put the government in a defensive position. With this attack it seems that American imperialism has advanced its conquest of Pakistan.

Religious political parties like Jamaat Islami and Jamiat Ulemai Islam are silent about the killings and atrocities committed by Al-Qaida, but they slam Americans for their "violation of Pakistan sovereignty." Hard liner Jamat Dawa of Hafiz Saeed is

the most active religious fundamentalist consoling Asama Bin Laden and offering Nama Jenaza, (the prayer upon death of a Muslim) in some areas. It will not be long before these parties organize the sympathy toward Osama and take the streets against the attack.

Bourgeoisie parties like the Pakistan People's Party, Pakistan Muslim League Q and Pakistan Muslim League N support the American action, seeing it as a great victory against the rise of religious fundamentalism. The government has not yet come up with a coherent explanation. Instead, various officials make contradictory statements.

Pakistan and U.S. Governmental Alliance

Over the last year the Pakistan and U.S. government have cemented their relationship. This can be seen through more exchange visits among intelligent officials and in the number of visas provided to CIA agents. The government also gave Washington a free hand for launching drone attacks, abandoning the pretense of condemnation that was practiced during the initial phase of the attacks. It seems that Washington has known Osama Bin Laden was in Pakistan.

All along the U.S. government has provided political backing to a very fragile PPP government. Without hesitation the government acted on the advice of American imperialism, the IMF and the World Bank. The U.S. government could not have a better partner than this government, which is led by the most corrupt and anti-people elements. Further, Washington seems to have blessed bringing the Muslim League Q – which shared power with General Musharraf – into the government. On the very day Osama was killed, 14 ministers from

the PMLQ took their oath and joined what one newly inducted federal minister called a "drowning boat."

The open violation of Pakistan sovereignty by sending the U.S. Navy SEALs to take out Osama Bin Laden will not worsen the relationship between the two ruling classes. Notice that Obama and his aides have not uttered a single word against the Pakistani government. On the contrary, they have praised the mutual sharing of intelligence.

A Joint effort

The attack on the Osama group has been a joint effort of Pakistan and American intelligence agencies. General Kiani, who has headed the army since Musharraf was president, is the former head of ISI. He has a long history of working closely with American imperialism. Back in 2007, he was the one who began negotiations with Benazir Bhutto for sharing power with Musharraf. As Benazir put pressure on General Musharraf to resign his position with the military, General Kiani took over. Under his watch, the Pakistani military establishment began to break their traditional links with the religious fanatics, launching military operations against them. The fanatics fought back, targeting military headquarters and killing top military officers.

Polarization in Army ranks

As a result, there is a polarization in the military between the officers and the ranks. Top military officers have formed close relationships with their American counterparts. They are in control of vast assets and maintain a more liberal way of life. But the lower ranks are still religious, sympathetic to fundamentalism and the religious parties and still hold to anti-Indian and anti-Western feelings. Because of this polarization, Washington hesitates trusting the ability of the army and intelligence agencies to carry out vigorous prosecution of its war on terrorism.

Religious terrorism will not end

Despite the big blow of Bin Laden's death, Al-Qaida and other religious extremist terrorist groups will grow. In his excellent pamphlet, "Why Marxists oppose individual terrorism," Leon Trotsky remarked, "The most important psychological source of terrorism is always the feeling of revenge in search of an outlet." The feeling of revenge does not end by with Osama's death. Both his murder and the throwing of Osama's body into the Arabian Sea will not put an end to terrorism. In fact, religious terrorism will grow as a result of American imperialism's actions. A certain portion of Muslim youth who are looking for ways to oppose American imperialism may be attracted to terrorism. New terrorist groups will form.

This does not mean that the religious fanatics can capture power in Pakistan. The Pakistan military is a brutal force and they have demonstrated several times how much violence they will use once their power is threatened. The Pakistan army will work hand in glove with Americans to ensure that the fanatics do not take over Islamabad nor get their hands on the country's nuclear technology.

The threat of individual terrorism by fanatics with a world view is not confined to one country. They are not so much like IRA who fought in the name of national liberation but more like the Red Brigade, who fought an ideological war but was successfully crushed because it had a very narrow social base.

Al-Qaida and others religious fanatics are exploiting the religious feelings of millions of Muslims. Although these fanatics represent several different trends and sects within Islam, nonetheless they have been able to lay down a mass social base in several countries.

Al-Qaida is no doubt one of the most successful terrorist organizations the world has ever seen. They have survived over two decades and successfully planned and struck targets several times. They have a brigade of suicidal missionaries who are ready to go heaven by killing themselves and others. Despite

their main leader's murder, there are no sign of their demise. However acts of individual terrorism have their own limits.

The limitations of individual terrorism

State terrorism cannot be separated from individual terrorism. Both have the same nature and direction; both give rise the same consequences. However, the act of state terrorism can have lasting positions and takes refuge on several issues.

The Al-Qaida most successful act of terrorism on 9/11 has not benefited Muslims and the lives of the millions of Muslims one of absolute misery and sadness. It has satisfied the soul of the few fanatics like Osama but damaged the souls of the millions. Imperialism responded to the attack with barbaric fury.

Commenting on the situation in Russia after the killing of a minister in 1911, Leon Trotsky, one of the main architecture of the Soviet Revolution wrote the following,

"Whether a terrorist attempt, even a 'successful' one throws the ruling class into confusion depends on the concrete political circumstances. In any case the confusion can only be short-lived; the capitalist state does not base itself on government ministers and cannot be eliminated with them. The classes it serves will always find new people; the mechanism remains intact and continues to function."

"The more 'effective' the terrorist acts, the greater their impact, the more they reduce the interest of the masses in self-organisation and self-education. But the smoke from the confusion clears away, the panic disappears, the successor of the murdered minister makes his appearance, life again settles into the old rut, the wheel of capitalist exploitation turns as before; only the police repression grows more savage and brazen. And as a result, in place of the kindled hopes and artificially aroused excitement comes disillusionment and apathy. (Leon Trotsky, November 1911)

Would the killing end religious fundamentalism?

Examine the following 2009 quote from U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, about Washington's past support to the Mujahidin in Afghanistan:

"Let's deal with the ISI [Pakistani Intelligence Agency] and the Pakistan military and let's go recruit these mujahedeen.... it wasn't a bad investment to end the Soviet Union but let's be careful with what we sow... Because we will harvest," Hillary Clinton, 23 April 2009

Over the last 10 years, both Washington and the fanatics are harvesting what they have sowed. One act of revenge leads to another.

Religious fundamentalism cannot be defeated by force. The war and occupational policies of American imperialism present examples of failure, not success. The lesson is clear: "You cannot kill ideas." Instead there must be a political fight to expose the real meaning of religious fundamentalism to the lives of ordinary people.

The rise of political Islam

The rise of political Islam is linked to the growing weakness of left parties in the Muslim world. On the one hand, during the 1990s, after the fall of Soviet Union, Socialism seemed to have failed. On the other hand, populist, anti-imperialist, mass-based parties such Bhutto's Popular Party also loss credibility. Religion seemed to be the only available anti-imperialist platform. In reality religious extremists such as the Taliban and Al-Qaida in no way represented an alternative against imperialism. They themselves exploit, oppress, and kill those who do not share their beliefs. They believe in the physical elimination of political opponents. They are not a progressive force fighting against imperialist hegemony but an extremely right-wing reaction. They want to forcibly turn the clock of the history backward. Religious fanatics are the new fascists.

Religious fanatics and the imperialist powers provide each other with justification for escalating violence. This is a never-ending cycle.

The growth of religious fundamentalism is also a response to the complete failure of the civilian and military governments in Pakistan to solve any of the basic problems of the working class and peasants. Successive regimes have been unable to end the grip of feudalism, the repressive and exploitive nature of Pakistani capitalists and their humiliating treatment of workers, the repression of the country's smaller nationalities and exploitation of their natural resources.

The failure of the civilian government

The Pakistani ruling class has failed miserably to bring about any democratic norms. As a result, when civilian regimes have been overthrown by military dictatorships, the vast majority of the masses did not offer resistance. Today the policies of the civilian government are dominated by American imperialism and institutions such as the IMF and World Bank that dictate misery for the people of Pakistan. War and economy misery along with daily suicidal attacks have left the population in a fearful state. The general psyche has become one of an uncertain future. Hope vanishes. Clearly the Pakistani government must change its political and economic priorities. It must end corruption and cut its ties that bind it to American imperialism.

The confusion among the Left was at its height after 9/11. There were those advocating cooperation with NATO forces against the religious fanatics, saying there was no need to build an alternative. "Religious fanatics are fascists and NATO is powerful enough to eliminate them" was the argument put forward. "NATO is doing our job. A military solution is the only alternative; we must keep quiet, close our eyes and cooperate with the Americans. There is no need to build the antiwar movement involving the masses" was the line of argumentation. On the other side, to reinforce the central paradigms of the dominant actors of the conflict, the

problem was presented as "Us vs. Them," "The Battle of Good Against Evil," "Crusades against Islamic terrorism," "Civilization versus Chaos." The state, the media and liberals, hand in hand with some progressives, were able to dominate the discussion.

What should we do?

The killing of Osama by the Americans opens a new era of conflict. The groups and individuals linked to Al-Qaida as well as other terrorist religious fundamentalists will use the incident to mobilize people in support of their reactionary agenda.

We have to oppose U.S. imperialism, the fundamentalists and the complicity of the Pakistani government with both of these forces. In this debate, we have come forward with our own position on imperialism, the capitalist state and religious fundamentalism. We have to expose their propaganda and dead-end solutions.

- We call for a comprehensive and wide-ranging political and economic strategy to fight the fanatics. The Pakistani state must end its all forms of support to religious madrassas. At least 10 percent of the national budget should be spent on education; education must be free [through] university level for all Pakistanis. The state must delink itself from religious practices and provide an institutional alternative to madrassas.
- We call for an end to subservience to the economic policies of the IMF and World Bank. The government must serve the interests of workers and peasants.
- We call for an end the ties to U.S. imperialism and the war machine.

The rise of religious fundamentalism is a direct result of governmental policies of a ruling elite and its dependence on American and other imperialist forces. A fight against imperialism and colonization and neo-colonization must have the main priority of all our propaganda, with no concession to the fanatics.

An alternative has now been presented by the great Arab Spring. The era of suicidal attacks, bomb blasts drone attacks and other violent means are far less effective than the mass upsurge of the great Arab people against dictators, and dictatorial

regimes. The Arab way of fighting back will ultimately start brings a confidence among the masses to go all the way from changing regimes to a Socialist alternative.

6 May 2011

ECONOMIC CRISIS

Toxic Aid: on the European Bill of Fare

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT ·

The EFSF is part of a broader aid programme, which also includes IMF financing for several hundreds billion euros under the same conditions, in keeping with the IMF Structural Adjustment Policies that have been imposed to developing countries and to countries that used to belong to the Soviet bloc since the 1980s. On the other hand the ECB decided to buy debt securities issued by countries that are meeting hard times but, and this is crucial, it does so with private banks on the secondary market. Instead of directly lending to Eurozone member states, the ECB thus lends capital at a 1.25% rate to private banks which then, with this money, buy securities from States in difficulty at two or three times the rate for short term borrowing (if they are 10-year bonds the rates can reach 10 to 13% in the cases of Greece, Ireland or Portugal).

Next the ECB buys the securities issued by States [To make sure that institutional investors still get their return and that the ECB can buy as a last resort.] it had refused to grant direct loans to, from the same private banks! It seems entirely logical to think the ECB should lend the needed amounts directly at 1.25% interest instead of lending it to banks that make juicy profits and take unconscionable risks in their lending policies, which States will eventually have to cover up in case of bankruptcy. But we shouldn't just demand that the ECB lend directly to States, we must first and foremost have the illegitimate part of the public debt cancelled and the remainder significantly reduced. [See Eric Toussaint, Eight key proposals for another Europe, proposal 1, <http://www.cadtm.org/Eight-key-proposals-for->

another] If we do not give priority to this demand, the noose of the debt will hardly be loosened and these countries' people will have to pay for the crisis for decades.

Several provisions in the treaties governing the EU, the Eurozone and the ECB must be repealed, for instance, articles 63 and 125 of the Lisbon Treaty that prohibit all restrictions on movements of capital and any help to member states meeting difficult times. We must also move out of the Stability and Growth Pact. Moreover, the current treaties must be replaced by new ones in a truly democratic constituent process, concluding with a solidarity pact among peoples to promote employment and protect the environment. We must thoroughly revise the current monetary policy as well as the status and practice of the European Central Bank.

Issuing Eurobonds

Faced with the depth of the crisis, European leaders decided to create and issue European bonds (Eurobonds) to partly finance the Fund established to provide loans to the most indebted countries. This new mechanism makes it possible for countries with AAA rating (as was the case for France and Germany in 2010) to borrow on the capital markets in the most favourable conditions. Again the process involves borrowing on the markets, i.e. with private banks or other investment bodies instead of directly financing the needs of public bodies with money from the ECB or the member states' central banks.

Prospect of a Brady plan for the most indebted European countries

During 2010 European leaders realized that Greece, Ireland, Portugal and probably other countries as well would have to face even more difficult

times in the coming years since a snowball effect has been triggered. While these governments repay their debts, their amounts steadily increase because of interest costs and weak economic growth. The debt repayment burden will soon become unbearable for some of them. This is why at the end of 2010 European leaders announced that from 2013 onward, new rules would be applied for issuing debt securities so as to make it possible to restructure the debt and reduce its amount. From June 2013 all securities issued by European member states will include a "collective action clause" mentioning that if a defaulting country cannot repay its debt, all investors will have to come together and indicate how debts can be restructured and possibly reduced. This kind of mechanism had already been discussed within the IMF in the early 2000s, in the wake of Russia and Argentina suspending their repayments in 1998 and 2001.

In short, in the years following 2013 private creditors must expect a restructuring of the debts of debtor countries, which means a reduction of their amounts after imposed negotiations. But we are not too concerned about the dividends of major shareholders in creditor private institutions: meanwhile, creditors will have received considerable amounts while reducing their exposure to countries at risk, because the IMF, the ECB and the European Commission are taking over. Patrick Artus, chief economist at Natixis, has the same analysis: At the beginning of the coming decade virtually all the debt owed to private creditors will have been repaid while virtually all the public debt owed by countries at risk will be to public creditors (European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF), European

Union, IMF...) (Flash Economie, 24 March 2011, <http://gesd.free.fr/flas1218.pdf>, our translation).

This actually recalls the management of the debt crisis in developing countries in the 1980s with the Brady Plan [See Éric Toussaint, *The World Bank: a Critical Primer* (2008), Pluto, London, chapter 15.] Indeed at the beginning of the 1982 crisis the IMF and the governments of the United States, the UK, and other major powers bailed out private bankers in the North that had taken huge risks when lending without restraint to countries of the South, particularly in Latin America (in a somewhat similar way to what happened with subprime mortgages or with countries such as Greece, Eastern European countries, Ireland, Portugal, Spain). When developing countries, starting with Mexico, were on the brink of defaulting, the IMF and member countries of the Paris Club granted them loans on condition that they carry out repaying private banks and that they implement austerity plans (the notorious Structural Adjustment Policies).

Next, as the South was getting more and more into debt through a snowball effect, they set up the Brady Plan (Brady was the US Treasury Secretary at the time) that involved restructuring the debt of major indebted countries through an exchange of securities. In some cases the amount of the debt was reduced by 30% and the new securities (Brady bonds) guaranteed a fixed interest rate of about 6%, which was quite favourable to bankers. This also insured that the same austerity policies would be carried out under control of the IMF and the WB. Today, under different latitudes, the same logic results in the same disasters.

Translated by Christine Pagnouille in collaboration with Marie Lagatta.

ARAB REVOLUTIONS

The heartbeat of the Arab revolutions

ESTHER VIVAS ·

The first important question we face is precisely that of the return of the idea of revolution. "Always anachronistic, outdated, untimely, the revolution comes from the 'no longer' and the 'not yet', never to the point, never timely. Punctuality is not its forte. It likes improvisation and surprises. It can only happen, and this is not its least paradox, if unexpected ", said Daniel Bensaïd. The unforeseen events in Tunisia and Egypt are situated in the collective imagination of the idea that collective action is useful, that you can achieve things through social mobilization and broaden the horizon of the possible. That their impact on the minds of European workers is limited is clear, because of the political and cultural distance. But, even so, they are a counter-example to the everyday experience of social struggles in our country. A message of hope before resignation and discouragement after decades of setbacks and defeats.

The developments in the Maghreb and the Arab world must serve us, also, in combating a rising xenophobia, the association between immigration of Muslim origin and religious fundamentalism. The protests and the revolutions in motion in favour of democracy, social justice, the improvement of the status of women and so on highlight the fallacy of the "clash of civilizations" and cultural prejudices

The political ferment in the region also causes a growing politicization of the immigrant population, creating a better scenario for the confluence between it and the "native" left. A strategic gain in

dealing with neo-liberalism and the attempts to make all of us pay for the crisis.

Strengthened international solidarity with the process under way should be a priority for the social movements here. To do that we need to focus on what is happening. First, we should ignore the conspiracy theories that see the hand of the CIA behind the revolts. No doubt conspiracies exist, but we cannot interpret history in terms of conspiracy. It seems that the very notion of revolution has weakened so much that it is not just believed and non-existent plots are seen where there are only explosions of anger and rage against injustice!

Second, there should be no confusion in the Libyan case. The defence of Gaddafi in the name of anti-imperialism mounted by some sectors of the left, in particular under the leadership of Hugo Chavez, is a serious mistake which only serves to mislead the international solidarity movement. In Libya, however, another (complex) dilemma is posed where the European left must not fail: the need to oppose the military intervention of NATO which, far from defending the democratic aspirations of the Libyan people, aims to control the post-Gaddafi stage and the exploitation of oil. International political and economic isolation of the regime and the unconditional provision of weapons to the rebels are an internationalist and solidarity-based alternative to military intervention.

Despite all the difficulties, the rise of protests in countries such as Syria shows that the dynamic initiated in Tunisia has not vanished. We should not romantically beautify the processes underway or ignore their shortcomings, nor should we dismiss them because they are not yet "true revolutions" that have managed to overturn the economic and social order. The great political, organizational and

cultural weakness of the left in the region is one of their Achilles heels. These first "revolutions of the 21st century" are contradictory and limited, do not follow a predetermined model and their result is open and uncertain. The challenge is to precisely go all the way with all the consequences of that, so that the hope for change does not remain frustrated

and, finally, "everything changes so that things remain the same".

The strength of the unexpected winds blowing in the Maghreb and the Arab world in the past few months not only electrify the region but give new hope to the social movements here, rich in losses and disappointments but lacking in victories.

(Article published in "Público", 03/05/2011).

ECONOMY

China's rise amidst the crisis

JEAN SANUK ·

Chinese workers don't accept being over-exploited any longer. A wave of strikes spread during the summer of 2010. Workers were fighting for wages increases, improvement of working conditions and the right to organize and bargain. Inflation, especially of food products, which accelerated since the middle of 2010, is adding a new problem for workers and a concern for the government which fears a wave of discontent. On top of that, the government is doing its best to prevent any contagion from the democratic revolutions in Arabic countries. Although the overall situation in China is completely different, these democratic revolutions show to Chinese workers that it is indeed possible to topple even the worst and powerful dictatorships.

China's resilience to the international crisis

The impact of the crisis on China and Asia has been limited so far (Sanuk, 2008). Asian banks were not particularly engaged in subprime loans and toxic products unlike European banks. With the exception of South Korea, Asian countries did not rely on short-term capital and banks loans for financing their economies. They were not caught in a debt trap like Eastern European countries or Greece. Most of them, and in particular China, had accumulated huge amount of currencies reserves and were able to cope with capital flights that occurred at the end of 2008. Asian countries were primarily hit by the fall of their exports because of the slump in demand in North America and Europe.

As a general rule, the recessive impact has been stronger in the most open Asian countries whose

exports were concentrated in manufacturing and when the USA was an important customer. For instance, exports of manufactured products represent around 70% in Malaysia, more than 40% in Thailand and Cambodia, around 30% in China, South Korea, Philippines and Vietnam, but less than 10% in India and Pakistan. These characteristics explain that the three biggest and most populated countries in Asia, China, India and Indonesia have not experienced a single quarter of recession between 2008 and 2009. The resilience of these three countries and most of all, China, which is among the biggest, or the biggest trade partner of Asian countries, led to a quick rebound in the second quarter of 2009 and a much stronger "V" shape recovery than in the rest of the world.

Several factors explain the resistance to the crisis of Asian countries and the speed of the recovery.

First, to absorb the shock of the fall in exports, Asian countries have launched an unprecedented rescue plan in the region to the contrary of the "Asian crisis" of 1997-1999 when IMF sponsored structural adjustment plans had worsened the crisis. The Chinese rescue plan is noteworthy in its magnitude: US\$ 585 billion amounting to 13.3% of GDP to be spent on a two-year span. On average, the rescue plans announced by Asian countries amounted to 7.5% of GDP against 2.8% of GDP for the G7 countries. More, Asian rescue plans were more focused on public expenses than tax cuts. On average, Asian countries dedicated 80% to increases in public spending to be compared with 60% on average in G20 countries. The only exception is Indonesia where tax cuts dominate. Those public expenses were accompanied by expansionary monetary policy.

The median interest rate of Asian central banks has decreased by 2.25 points which is five times more

than during the previous crisis. As the banking system continued to work, this had a positive impact on growth. In countries like Viet Nam and China the expansionary monetary policy played a dominant role. In China, public spending has increased by a modest 26% in 2008 up from 23% in 2007, but it fell back to 21% in 2009 and even 17% in 2010 when the rescue plan officially ended. On the whole, public expenses did not play a crucial role in absorbing the shock. It is in fact the expansion of credit which took the lead in 2009 with a spectacular increase of 31% (see figure 2). It too fell back in 2010 to -4% when the Chinese government decided to cool down the economy because easy money induced a new speculative bubble (more on this point below).

Second, households' consumption kept steady as employment did not collapse during the crisis. In times of crisis, there are usually no strong increases in the unemployment rate in Asian countries, for there are no unemployment benefits except in a few countries. Workers who lose their jobs in industry try to find one in services or work as self-workers or return to the family farm whenever it is possible and when there is still one. It is especially the case in China, where hundreds of thousands migrant workers went back to the interior in the winter of 2008 or stayed there after the end of the new year in February 2009. But because the economy recovered in spring 2009, a lot of them returned to the cities to find an urban job, which pays more.

Third, defying many sombre prognostics, Chinese exports did fall from September 2008 to February 2009 but did not collapse and soon recuperated thanks to recovery in world trade. Given the high import content component of Chinese exports (about 50%), imports fell in the same proportion so that the current account stayed almost always positive although by a smaller magnitude (see figure 3). This reveals both the resilience of China to external shocks and its weakness at the same time. For it is the processing trade which makes up for the bulk of the Chinese trade account surplus. Classical trade

activities are chronically in deficit due to their high-import content of primary products.

To keep processing trade competitive, the Chinese government has decided to peg the exchange rate of the renminbi to the dollar and to avoid excessive wage increases. This is the reason why new labour laws, which were announced in 2007, have been suspended at the employers' request. Another difficulty with the fixed exchange rate is that the price increases of commodities are fully transferred to the Chinese economy. As we will see, these two contradictions weigh heavily in the room of manoeuvre of the Chinese government.

The consequences of the rescue plan: a worsening of previous contradictions

Expansionary budget and monetary policies cannot be extended indefinitely. Officially the Chinese central government is not heavily indebted: its debt to GDP ratio is a modest 19% of GDP. It means that the central government has ample leeway to expand public spending. In fact, the central government made a different choice. Of the RMB 4000 billion public spending programme announced for the years 2008-2009, 1180 billion were actually financed by the central budget, the rest being carried by local authorities. These have competed to make the most spectacular announcements of investment projects for an astonishing cumulated total of RMB 20 000 billion. Most of these announcements have been realised thanks to the expansionary monetary policy. Local authorities have been encouraged to take debt indirectly because they are not officially allowed to take debt directly. Special financial vehicles have been created at the local level to bypass this prohibition.

Local authorities pump capital in the financial vehicle which then uses it as collateral to take loans from banks. Different kind of capital have been brought by local authorities: land; cash obtained by the sale of financial assets sold by investment funds controlled by local banks; disguised short-term loans which are then used to get a bigger and medium-term loan which serves to reimburse the first

ones. These fragile financial set-ups have multiplied in 2009. Local authorities had on average 2 to 4 special vehicle funds before 2008. In 2009 after the launch of the rescue plan, they controlled 10 on average. Most of the investment projects financed in this way were in real estate and in infrastructure and operated by state companies. This had several perverse effects.

First, it has fuelled speculation in real estate and housing. One quarter of investment growth in 2009 comes from investment in real estate where prices have soared by 24% in 2009 and 11% in the first five months of 2011.

Second, it has created a vast amount of potential non-performing loans since many projects are not profitable. Banks, which finance 90% of investment, are becoming fragile - not for the first time. In 1999, non-performing loans had reached 36% of total loans. Four asset management companies had been formed by the state to buy them from banks in order to clean their balance sheets. At the end of 2007, non-performing loans still accounted for 6.7% of the total. The monetary authorities would like to avoid a repetition of the same story.

Third, it has increased public debt. According to Victor Shih (2010), the consolidation of local authorities' debt into the national public debt led to a debt-to-GDP ratio of 71% in 2009 compared with a ratio of 19% for the sole central government. It is still manageable but it means that either local or national taxes will have to increase.

The problem is that once a speculative bubble has formed it is very difficult to deflate it without damage. Local authorities depend on real estate for around 20% of their fiscal revenues. The value of the land they expropriate from farmers to use as collateral or to sell to developers depends on real estate market prices hence to speculation on this market. Raising the interest rate of the Bank of China is a powerful instrument to reduce bank loans and cool down the economy, in a country where local politicians and powerful leaders of the Communist Parties do not always agree with the

central power. But it would reveal a lot of non-performing loans and put local finances at risk.

Most of all, in a country where investment is the major component of growth, raising interest rates too much could have a too strong recessionary impact. Instead of raising interest rates, the Bank of China has preferred to increase the reserve obligations that banks must maintain at the central bank. Between January 2010 and January 2011, the Central Bank increased the reserve obligations seven times while interest rates were raised modestly in October and December 2010 only. The monetary authority has also re-established a quota system for credit. The problem is that banks have to find ways to circumvent the quota by multiplying off-sheet balance operations.

On the whole, it seems that bank loans have maintained the same pace in 2010 in comparison with 2009 - which was a record year. The difficulty in controlling bank credit is compounded by the exchange rate policy. China decided in July 2008 to re-establish a fixed exchange rate between the Yuan and the US dollar. But because the trade account is always in surplus, the Bank of China has to buy dollars with Yuans. This pumps more Yuan into circulation in the Chinese economy that the Bank of China tries to take out by issuing bonds. This so-called sterilisation is proving even more difficult due to the huge amounts involved. The result is that there is more money in circulation which adds another source of speculation and inflation. Investors have in particular speculated in the market for food products contributing to push food prices up these last months.

Inflation has turned into a political problem because the population is complaining about the cost of living and starts to protest. Having in mind that the democratic revolutions in Arabic countries have started as a protest against food price hikes, the Chinese government is sensitive on the subject. In November 2010, the State Affairs Council has published a series of measures aimed at stabilising the prices of food products. If these measures are not sufficient, the government will have to resort to a

more significant interest rate increase in order to cool down the economy, and it is reluctant to do for the reasons outlined above.

Whether it will do it or not and to what extent will depend much on the political situation and the intensity of workers protests. This may be the reason why the government has tolerated the wave of workers strikes in the summer of 2008, first in Honda and Excon and then in tens of other, mostly foreign companies. Workers were demanding wages increases, an improvement of their working conditions, respect for basic rights and the right to bargain. The government, which is usually quick in repressing workers, especially when they claim the right to self-organise, decided to let the workers strike. It tried to distract workers from the real problems by underlining that most of the companies were foreign so titillating the nationalist nerves of the population. As if workers were better treated and paid in Chinese firms, a tale that nobody believes. A more serious reason is that it was a way to loosen the social pressure mounting around the question of inflation and to pave the way for a rebalancing of growth in favour of the domestic market in a context of uncertain foreign demand for Chinese products.

Rebalancing growth in favour of the domestic market

Rebalancing growth is a recurrent topic in most East Asian countries which tied their fate to an export-promotion strategy. After the Asian crisis of 1997-1999, there were already discussions about the necessity to reduce the dependence of growth on massive exports to western countries. But the export-led recovery of the most stricken countries (Thailand, Malaysia, South Korea, and Indonesia) plus the success of Chinese products on foreign markets in the 2000 decade put an end to the debate. It is now coming back because there is a consensus that the recovery from the crisis in the US, Europe and Japan will be slow and tentative.

There will be a prolonged period of reduced demand for Asian export products. As a consequence East and Southeast Asia is now more seriously con-

fronted with the necessity to reorient its growth strategy towards its domestic market. Western countries are in favour of this reorientation because they would benefit from it. They hope to export more to Asian markets. This is why they insist so much on the necessity for China to revalue the Yuan. This would give a boost to western exports to China and would reduce the price competitiveness of Chinese exports. This is why many official reports from the World Bank, the IMF and the Asian Development Bank are discussing the best way to rebalance growth by boosting internal demand and reducing the importance of exports.

Due to the importance of its domestic market, but also because China is the biggest trade partner of many Asian countries and the central hub of international and regional production networks, China is the country where rebalancing growth is of the utmost importance. It is true that China combines the most blatant imbalances. It is the country where trade surplus and its corollary, foreign reserves are massive, where savings as a proportion of GDP are the highest and households' consumption the lowest. In 2007, last year before the crisis, the share of households' consumption in the GDP had reached an historical low point with 35%, the share of investment was very high with 40% of the GDP and the current account surplus registered a record level of 10% of GDP (see figure 4).

Rebalancing growth obviously means reducing the importance of investment and of the current account surplus, and increasing households' consumption. The crux of the matter is how? The economic proposals made, under their false appearance of technical neutrality, have social and political consequences.

For instance, abandoning the peg of the Yuan to the dollar to revalue the exchange rate of the Yuan would benefit more the Chinese bourgeoisie and the middle class which has the purchasing power to buy imported consumption goods at a lower cost, while the vast majority of Chinese workers cannot have access to them because it is too expensive. Another topic which is at the centre of the debate is

the question of the high savings rate in China. Reducing savings is considered by many mainstream economists as the best way to increase consumption. Behind this simple and apparently neutral proposal lie social and political stakes. The first question is to determine who saves most in China.

The most frequent explanation is that the high saving rate of households is the main cause of the high saving rates in general (Blanchard and Giavazzi 2005; Modigliani and Cao 2004). Some economists add the importance of the saving rate of the state (Wiemer, 2009), while others insist on the importance of corporate savings and of the state (Prasad, Eswar 2009), (Jha, Prasad and Terada-Hagiwara, 2009) (Hofman, and Kuijs 2008), or even the sole importance of corporate savings (Anderson, Jonathan 2009). More generally, the growing importance of corporate savings would not be a unique feature of Chinese capitalism but a common feature of many East Asian countries (Chandra, Sonali, Nabar Malhar, and Porter Nathan 2010).

Those who stress the importance of households' savings conclude that it is necessary to create or strengthen a "social safety net". Chinese households save too much for precautionary reasons: they have to save to pay for their health expenses, for the education of their children, to buy a house or a flat and because of the absence of a significant pension system. They pledge more public spending in education, health, social housing and pension. For instance, a permanent increase of one percentage point of public spending equally shared between education, health and pension would lead to an increase of households' consumption by 1.25 percentage point of GDP (Baldacchi et al., 2010). According to the same authors, a one percentage point increase of public spending in pension only would have a higher impact on consumption, 1.6 point because the reduction of precautionary savings would be higher. These proposals go in the right direction because there is an urgent need for a better education and health system and because the majority of Chinese do not have pension benefit.

But what is proposed is a "social safety net" not the creation of a full social security system whereby citizens are guaranteed social rights. Furthermore, it does not say anything about the kind of institutions to be created. To give just one example, the creation of pension funds could be proposed as the best solution. This is what the World Bank has proposed or imposed in many countries. It would increase the power of finance in China, where it is still not dominant as in advanced capitalist countries.

What is at stake are the final steps in the complete conversion of China to capitalism. Those studies do not explain too how these social spending would be financed. If the bulk is financed by households' income tax increases, the positive effect on consumption will be diminished.

The Chinese government announced a "social plan" in January 2009 to complete the stimulus plan. Education, health and pensions are supposed to be improved or established with a special focus on rural population. But it remains to be seen how comprehensive these measures will be. The budget dedicated to these measures is small in proportion and the government has not explained how they will be financed. Its impact on consumption is uncertain. In any case, it will take time. Chinese people will have to experience themselves the reality of these announcements before starting to change their behaviour, save less and consume more.

Regarding corporate savings, the social and political issues are also very important. Corporate savings are in fact non-reinvested profits. The fact that corporate savings are high in China means that a high share of labour-value does not accrue to workers in terms of higher wages but goes to profit which is invested only in part. The fact that this feature is encountered not only in China but also in many Asian countries tells a lot about the overexploitation of Asian workers. One simple way to increase consumption and rebalance growth is to reduce excessive corporate savings by increasing wages. But it is not the proposal made by many economists, in particular those of the World Bank

(Chandra, Nabar and Porter, 2010). They propose instead to develop and improve financial markets so that more companies would get listed on the stock markets. The Chinese government could change the law to improve corporate governance so that firms would pay dividends to their share owners which is not the case yet. Finally, workers would become shareowners of their firms' capital and receive dividends instead of wage increases. The conversion to Anglo-Saxon capitalism would be complete.

We believe that these proposals are not serious and credible. Wage increases are a much simple, more equitable and a more certain way to boost consumption, in particular in China where the income labour share has decreased these last years as in many countries (IMF 2007), (Ellis and Smith 2007), (European Commission 2007). In the Chinese case, the labour income share of GDP has lowered to 57.5% in 2007 down from 69.2% in 1992 (see above figure 4).

This fall of 11.7 points has benefited firms whose profit has increased to 18.4% in 2007 up from 11.5% in 1992 and to the state whose revenues has increased to 24.1% up from 18.4%. The impact of this negative evolution of the labour income share is often neglected in the debate on rebalancing growth in China and in Asia in general. In the case of China, following a simple calculation made by Aziz and Cui (2007), one can show that if the

labour income share of households had stayed at the level reached in 1992 during the whole period of 1992-2007, and if households' savings had followed the same evolution as the one actually observed, the consumption would have stayed constant at around 46% of GDP in 2007 (see figure 5). Instead, the consumption has lost nearly 10 percentage points and reached 36.4% in 2007, which is very low by international standards. One may conclude that the fall of the labour income share and the corollary profit increase is a much more serious factor in explaining the fall of households' consumption than the increase of households' savings.

Conclusion

Rebalancing Asian growth can only be achieved by a concerted wage increase and the establishment of a social security system in Asian countries, although China is powerful enough to do it on its own. This would pave the way for a more self-centred economy at the regional level which would be less dependent on export and therefore less sensitive to international crises. It would also be a measure of social justice for Chinese and Asian workers have suffered for decades from low wages, dirty and dangerous jobs for the sake of exports competitiveness. The recent wave of strikes in China, but also Vietnam, Bangladesh and Pakistan show that there are social forces available even in countries where the political context looks at first unfavourable. This is an element of hope.

PAKISTAN

World March of Women May Day march

BUSHRA KHALIQ ·

Dozens of women activists, workers from different sectors and representatives of civil society joined the demo and rally. The demonstrators were holding banners and placards, inscribed with demands to show solidarity with the excluded workers of the informal economy, especially the home-based women workers, domestic workers and peasant women workers. They were shouting slogans against the IMF, WB and IFIs dictated anti-worker policies of the government, fanaticism and rising religious extremism. Among the main slogans were; stop domestic violence; stop economic exploitation of the women workers; end discriminatory laws against women; down with imperialism, down with IFIs and neoliberalism.

The demonstrators also marched on the Mall and expressed solidarity with passing processions of workers and laborers. At the end of the march, WMW national coordinator, Bushra Khaliq addressed the demonstrators. Highlighting the issues of the women workers, she said women's labor rights particularly in the informal sector have long been neglected in Pakistan and almost remained invisible, having no access to labor rights or other social security schemes while private investors are only interested in doubling profits at the cost of these workers.

She said Pakistan is one of those developing countries where a large number of women are engaged in home-based informal work due to poverty and to supplement family income. Over 20 million women

in Pakistan are engaged in home-based work. She urged the women to forge unity for organized struggle for their rights.

Talking about the plight of the informal sector workers, she said though their contribution to economy is about 60 percent, still informal women workers are the most unprivileged part of the society, but have no right to claim themselves as workers. Their daily incomes range between Rs 10 to Rs 50 (less than one dollar) despite the fact that they worked between 12 to 16 hours a day. They have no social and legal recognition of their work. Working in isolation, they have no rights as workers by law. This teeming labor force is at the mercy of contractors, sub-contractors and middle men.

Rabbiya Bajwa, a Supreme Court advocate and social activist, speaking on the occasion criticized the government for the anti-workers policies. She said women unity is key to resolve their problems. She said every year on May Day, these women workers take to roads across the country to tell the decision-makers that they are workers, count them and give them their rights. They are in no mood to disappear and fade away. They will keep on their struggle till their demands are met.

Rukhsana Naz, women rights activist, said women workers do not want charity like the one being doled out under Benazir Income Support Program. They want to be recognized as workers under labor laws. Recognize them. She demanded of the government to ensure implementation of labor laws, just wages that comply with the minimum wage regulations and lowering of prices. She also talked about the tough challenges being faced by the workers communities in Pakistan.