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Global Justice

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

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The future of the Arab spring and the Indignados and Occupy Wall Street movements is very difficult to foresee. The Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings are likely to lead to a transition similar to those that ensued in Latin America, the Philippines and Korea with the end of dictatorships in the 1980s, or in South Africa in the 1990s and in several sub-Saharan African States: with the stabilization of a neo-liberal bourgeois regime. Today is a different era, the Muslim world presents very specific characteristics, and the geo-strategic stakes are significant (especially as regards Egypt and the Middle East, less so Tunisia): history is an open process. The capacity of the oppressed to organize will be decisive.

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

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

Italian social movements played a decisive role in the early 2000s during the rise of the anti-globalization movement and the European and World Social Forum. This was followed by a certain ebb, by a period of adaptation to the social liberal policy of Romano Prodi's government and of demoralization following the return of Silvio Berlusconi. What will happen with the big-business government of Mario Monti and the partial placing under guardianship of Italy by the European Commission and the IMF? Will the Indignados movement take on a specifically Italian colouration in 2012, or will resistance be mainly pursued through other channels? As for France, which saw a powerful social movement in 2010 for the defence of pension rights and which remained on the fringe of the Indignados movement in 2011, will this movement finally take root when the new austerity measures come into full force, whether under Nicolas Sarkozy or François Hollande? And what of the United Kingdom, Germany and Belgium, for instance? If the private banking crisis brings new bankruptcies in the wake of the collapse of the Franco-Belgian Dexia in October 2011, what will be the effect on the populations concerned?

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

One thing is certain: the issue of the debt will increasingly be the cornerstone of the fight to resist austerity programmes and the wanton destruction of social benefits. Repayment of the public debt is both a pretext for imposing austerity measures and a powerful mechanism for the transfer of revenues from those low down on the scale to those at the top (from the 99% to the 1%). The fight to break the infernal cycle of debt is a vital one. If it is not energetically pursued, there is little chance of overcoming the next neo-liberal offensive. In addition, in countries like

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Spain and Ireland where the bursting of the real estate bubble affected hundreds of thousands of families, cancellation of the mortgage debt and the guarantee of a right to decent housing are becoming key issues.

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

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