



## IV430 - November 2010

# The Consequences of 60 Years of Nation-State Building

30 November 2010, by **Zhang Kai**

### Completion of capitalist restoration

China “has completely transformed from a highly centralized planned economy system to a market economy of socialism. The percentage of state-owned economic sector in the economy has decreased from 77.6% of 1978 to 29.5% of 2007. The prices of over 98% of commodities and over 95% of production materials are controlled by market, but not by the government.”(1)

Chinese Community Party claimed that it was market economy of socialism with Chinese characteristics, although it was practically capitalist market economy. One of CCP’s justifications was that state-owned economic entities were still dominating China’s economy which was under the national “Five-Year-Plan”. However, several years ago, the usual phase of “Five-Year-Plan” was changed to “Five-Year-Schedule”, showing that national “Plan” could not control market economy any more. In reality, the state-owned economic entities are gradually marginalized, while 70% of private entities make huge profits and exploit workers. Once the official claimed that China’s planned economy was replaced by market economy, implying that capitalism has been already revived in China.

Today’s China economy is characterized with the nature of capitalism: unplanned production, anarchic status, and over production. Chinese government once again tackled the daunting problem of over production. According to Wen Wei Po, dated 19 October 2009, recently, ten official departments, such as the National Department and Reform Commission, have jointly declared that they would regulate the over-productions and redundancies of constructions in some industries through policies like project approvals and loan credits. The highlighted industries in the list of regulation not only included traditional industries like steel, cement and coal, but also new industries like silicon and wind-power.

China’s economy is integrated into global capital economic system. In 2008, due to financial crisis, 8 of 9 national enterprises had negative growth, among which shipping industry lost RMB 28.2 billion. (2) Moreover, Gao Hucheng, the vice deputy of Ministry of Commerce stated that according to the statistics of General Administration of Customs, from January to July 2009, the total cost of export and import was RMB 1150 billion, that decreased 22.7% when compared with the last year, and the export decreased 22% during that period. (3)

### A high cost

According to the special issue on 60th Anniversary of China of Wen Wei Po, Zhong Wei, Professor of Beijing Normal University, pointed out, “China’s economy is ranked no. 3 in the world, but it is only 6.4% of the world economy, or one-fourth of USA, and GDP of per person is out of top 100. The utmost important fact is that despite the rapid economic growth, China has to pay the costs of exploiting resources and environment, as well as the cost of the ever widening of income distribution.” (4) Willy Lam, a Hong Kong critic, provided some statistics about the situation of “rich government and poor people”, for example, national revenues increased from RMB 2000 billions of 2003 to over RMB 6000 billions in 2008. However, the percentage of income of both the city and the countryside in GDP has been decreasing. It decreased from 53% of 1999 to 41.4% of 2006, 15% less than the developed countries. Sun Liping, Professor of Sociology of Tsinghua University, stated that the gap of living standard between the city and the countryside was 6 times, but the world standard was only 1.5 times. Worse still, millions of peasant workers create a lot of wealth for the whole country but they suffer serious diseases, due to polluted working

conditions and lack of labor insurance. It is estimated that 200 millions of workers suffer from different kinds of occupational diseases. (5)

After being affected by the world financial crisis, China's market economy confronts problems such as an escalating inflation. The prices of staple food and commodities, particularly property estate, have largely increased. Ordinary people suffer seriously. According to the global Forbes index, the tax burden of the working people in China is ranked no.2 in the world. (6)

One of the characteristics and setbacks of capitalism is the widening gap between the rich and the poor. According to the news report from the website of People, Zeng Xiangquan, the Dean of the School of Labor and Human Resources of Renmin University, quoted the latest research of the Ministry of Finance and pointed out that the national income distribution has been "in extremely imbalance", 10% of the richest families occupies 45% of the property of the whole urban population, in contrast, 10% of the poorest families occupies only 1.4% of the property of national population. Nowadays, in the income structure, the lowest and the lower middle classes together are composed of 64.3% of the whole population. (7)

China's government has implemented a series of policies, valued of RMB 4000 billions, more or less encountered the global financial crisis and saved the descending economic growth, but it worsened the balance of economic structure. This year the government has invested in the state-owned enterprises, composed of 95% of GDP growth. The phenomenons of redundancy and over-production have appeared again, in that the enterprises of "highly consumed energy and highly polluted" have rekindled, that seriously affect the transformation of mode of economic development.

This kind of governmental investment has led to a loosely currency policy, that has increased the bubble economy of financial property as well as has worsened the inflation.

In order to stimulate national consumption for economic growth, the government carried out various policies such as "electronic appliances

are being sent to the countryside", "cars are being sent to the countryside", and the exchange of the newly appliances, etc. The policy of stimulating internal consumption of 2002 has still remained only at the stage of crying the slogans. Percentage of consumption in the economic growth has gradually decreased. In accordance with the perfect model of economic growth, consumption need is the engine of economy. Experts in Beijing analyze of three main obstacles:

First of all, local officials are indifferent as they are only concerned about pushing GDP up for an appraisal by the central government.

Secondly, there is an imbalance of income distribution. Due to low income, it directly affects people's capability of consumption. China's financial revenue has annually increased 20.4%, but the working class merely 15.7%, which is obviously against the general will of consumption.

Thirdly, social security like education and health system are lagging behind. Health problem of family members and children's education have become the main "consumption needs", so it hinders the mode of consumption behaviors. (8)

Those are the consequences of China's implementation of capitalism. Even though the government has conferences on economic policies every year, it cannot reverse the worsening of the situation.

Political cost

Since 1949, China is under the dictatorship of CCP. People do not have human rights. Particularly during Mao Zedong's period, many intellectuals were suppressed. Great Leap Forward and People Commune movement led to three-year great hunger. The Cultural Revolution was a disaster and the Democratic movement of 1989 was violently suppressed. Wang Dan, the former student leader of Democratic Movement of 1989, claimed that people died in those movements exceeded 80 millions, much more than the death toll records of the second Sino-Japanese War. (9)

Many officials of CCP enjoy political privileges and become corrupted. This led to widespread discontentment among people, particularly the

marginalized and suppressed peasants. Some leaders of the ruling class attempted to make concessions to grassroots people. Nevertheless, it was oppressed by the interested groups and the privileged bureaucracy. Although the national leaders claim that it should be "people-oriented", there is no change at the ground level. Dissents like Liu Xiaobo and legal-right protectionists like Tan Zuoren (a lawyer), Huang Qi and Guo Quan were all oppressed and sent to prisons. This violates the constitutional laws and the conventional human rights.

For example, a number of journalists were arrested, prosecuted, and was penalized. Guangzhou Daily reported that journalism has become one the top ten risky careers. Insurance companies in Guangzhou refuse to provide insurance for war journalists and even increase the insurance cost of accidents. (10) In October 2009, Reporters Without Borders declared that China was ranked the last eighth place, in the list of press freedom of 168 countries. The Committee to Protect Journalists in USA, announced that within the consecutive 10 years, China had sent the largest number of reporters to prisons in the world. Now 28 reporters are imprisoned and among of which 24 are internet reporters. (11)

### Critical class struggle

People are greatly discontented with the reality. Two years ago, the author provided facts and data in his article, "People's Widespread Discontents", in October Review, no.213 of 2007. The more developed capitalism in China, the more people suffered. This led to social conflicts and mass disturbances. According to Ming Po, dated 15 March 2008, the statistics of Labor Dispute Mediation Committee of All-China Federation of Trade Unions showed that there were 406 thousands of cases of labor disputes in 2007, not to mention the statistics of Ministry of Labor and Social Security and juridical systems. Zhang Mingqi, the vice deputy of All-China Federation of Trade Unions, disclosed that, in recent years, the labor disputes have sharply increased, with an increasing rate of 20% every year (for the details, please see this issue no.224). And according to China Labor Bulletin, in 2008, there

were 127,467 cases of mass disturbances in China.

The struggle of the largest state-owned enterprise in Jilin Province, Tonghua Iron and Steel Group (TISG), is the most significant class struggle of 2009. At the end of 2005, Jianlong Steel Group (JSG), a Beijing private enterprise, became a shareholder of TISG which has a history of 50 years old. JSG intentionally planned to annex the state-owned enterprise. In 2007, TISG lost over RMB 10 billion and faced bankruptcy. In early 2009, JSG declared to retreat its shareholdings from TISG. Then in March, workers complained about salary cut and then went on demonstrations. In June, as soon as TISG gained a profit of RMB 80 millions, JSG became again the shareholder of TISG. In July, 30 thousands of workers demonstrated on the street and had conflicts with the police. Chen Guojun, the new chief manager, requested workers to resume work but later he was beaten to death.

As local people narrated, in April 2009, TISG broke out a strike, opposing JSG's shareholding. Chen came back again to declare the policy of restructuring by the new management that became the proximate cause. The workers complained that they normally had a

salary of RMB 1800-2000, but after JSG became the shareholder, they only had a salary of RMB 600. Worse still, some of them had only a salary of RMB 200-300. On the contrary, the chief manager had an annual salary of RMB 3 millions, and other managers around RMB 1 million. Some informants disclosed that the location of TISG was originally an agricultural area, and most of workers were local peasants. For over 40 years, several generations of local people have worked for TISG. It was definitely a disaster for the landless peasants when they suddenly became unemployed. This was the main cause of the conflict. (12)

### **The lessons of the struggle of TISG workers**

First of all, a capitalist became a shareholder of state-owned enterprise in that both common property and workers were exploited. Once the state-owned enterprise gained profits, the capitalist became the shareholder again. The workers were forced to resist the repeated exploitation. This proved the shortcomings of transforming a state-owned enterprise into a stock corporation, which were deprived of economic development and workers' rights. It was also an outcome of capitalist production.

Secondly, a state-owned enterprise

became a stock corporation that carried out the super-exploitation of capitalism which led to a critical class struggle. This was the common phenomenon in capitalist society. Nowadays China has already become a capitalist society in that the exploited workers beat the capitalist to death. This showed that the working class was extremely angry with capitalist system!

13 December 2009

Notes:

(1) Wen Wei Po (Hong Kong), 27 September 2009.

(2) Wen Wei Po, (Hong Kong), 11 October 2009.

(3) Wen Wei Po (Hong Kong), 8 September 2009.

(4) The special issue on 60th Anniversary of China of Wen Wei Po (Hong Kong), p.12 and 13.

(5) Willy Lam's column on Apple Daily, 20 July 2009.

(6) (7) Wen Wei Po (Hong Kong), 11 December 2009.

(8) Wen Wei Po (Hong Kong), 12 December 2009.

(9) Quoted from Wang Dan's column on Ming Po, 2 October 2009.

(10) Quoted from Apple Daily dated 9 November 2009.

(11) Apple Daily, 9 November 2009.

(12) Wen Wei Po (Hong Kong), 29 July 2009.

## **A dangerous and contradictory document**

**30 November 2010, by Guillermo Almeyra**

### **Subordination of the party to the state**

First of all, I consider that to follow with attention and passion what is happening and what could happen in Cuba is not only a right but a duty of every socialist and every Latin American who fights for the independence of our countries and for the national and social liberation of

the continent. Because what happens in Cuba is too important and too serious for the discussion to be confined to Cubans.

Secondly, it seems to me that if a congress is convened in April 2011, which is supposed to be the forum for consultation and decision, it is not possible to start already to apply fundamental and irreversible measures in many areas of economic activity, placing everyone before a fait accompli and the congress itself in the dubious role of approving and

legitimizing resolutions adopted by some members of the state apparatus. The unfortunate merger of the Communist Party and the state subordinates the former to the latter and makes it adopt the logic of the necessities of state, thus nullifying its role of critic and guardian, let alone its indirect role as spokesperson for workers, expressing their views and their needs.

For, as Lenin pointed out, the state is, even after the revolution, a class instrument, the expression of the

continuing influence of the capitalist world market, the values and the methods of bourgeois domination. This means a party (and unions) to defend the special rights of workers including against "their" state and, therefore, not submitting to it. The fact that the economic and social programme that we are examining is exclusively a bureaucratic-state document, that its proclaimed goal is to strengthen institutionalization and the reform of state and government, once again underlines subordination of the party to the state. If institutionalization is understood as the limitation of arbitrariness and voluntarism, which disrupt the economy and cause waste, mismanagement and loss of control, facilitating corruption and bureaucracy, we cannot forget that the state is not only a bureaucratic-administrative or repressive apparatus, but also a social relationship. Therefore, a reform of the state must give more weight to the organs of direct democracy, to workers who are at the same time consumers, producers and builders of socialism, in other words they are not just subjects or passive objects of resolutions imposed from above. Moreover, by definition, a revolutionary process is not synonymous with institutionalization but implies renovation and profound democratization of power structures, to allow the expression of the divergence that still exists within this ever-present dual power between the revolution (the workers, in the widest sense of the term) and the significant expressions of capitalism (such as the state apparatus, which aims to exert control in the old way).

The fact that the document for the next congress of the PCC, although it is centred on economic restructuring, does not mention the workers (or even the unions which are, in the bureaucratic state apparatus, its transmission belt to the workers) seems to me to be very serious. Moreover, in the 32 pages of the document, the term "socialist" only appears three times, there is no mention of the bureaucracy, of its extension or its divisions (which every Cuban sees as a serious problem), nor of producers' democracy ... It does not even explain who will choose the producers who will be declared

"available", whereas no less than 20 per cent of the workforce is concerned. As for the popular, democratic organisms of control and planning, they shine only by their absence.

It is just as serious that this document is not accompanied by a document of the party on the current phase of the world economy, on Cuban society, on the social and political perils of a much greater opening of the free market on the island and on the opening of Cuba to the world market. It would be useful to go over the reasons that have imposed such radical and drastic measures (including, among other things, in a self-critical way, the errors of the party and government, between two congresses, over the last 40 years) and to prepare the party and the workers to cope with dangers that will come from the strengthening of bourgeois sectors and capitalist values, to define perspectives for them - which has not been done. It is undeniable that the brutality of capitalist attacks and the global crisis may make it necessary to abandon conquests and to retreat. But there is no need to conceal such retreats or even less, to present as if they had been negative the egalitarian gains that we are forced to abandon because of the oppression of the world market.

## **A break... in the bureaucratic continuity**

What does the document presented to the Sixth Congress of the PCC say? I will try to briefly summarize the 32 pages of text.

Point 17 states that they will try and get rid of the rigid economic functioning governed by the budget. Point 19, that the incomes of workers in the state sector will depend on the results obtained by their respective companies (or on the ability or inability of the respective leaders and Ministries and on the profitability of their business from the point of view of the market).

Point 23 stipulates that each

enterprise will set the prices for its products and services and will be able to offer discounts (which opens the road to fierce competition between enterprises and between regions and every sort of favouritism and cronyism); point 35 announces the municipal decentralization of production, which will now be subject to municipal administrative councils (but it does not say who will select and monitor them). Point 44 states that it will be necessary to reduce the expansion of services, which will now depend on the general functioning of the economy; point 45, that it will be necessary to reduce imports of production goods and products for industry and that imports will depend on the availability of foreign exchange.

Among the principal economic decisions, the document says that the problem of the circulation of two currencies (the Cuban peso and the CUC) will have to be studied and that the decision will be made when the state of the economy makes it possible (let us remember that the Cuban economy has been in crisis for thirty years). It is also said that subsidies and free services as the norm will be eliminated (or it will be a question of eliminating policies that support the consumption of the poorest sectors, those who do not receive dollars from abroad and or cannot obtain them in any other way in Cuba, legally or illegally).

In very vague terms the document formulates the necessity and the hope of facilitating access to bank loans and savings, as well as the objective of obtaining from countries that receive solidarity aid from Cuba at least the equivalent of the cost of this aid (which not only transforms solidarity into service provision but also runs counter to the ability of those countries which, like Haiti, suffer from large scale natural or health disasters). Special Development Zones will also be created (we can only assume that those who set up businesses there will benefit from tax reductions or exemptions and other privileges).

Paragraph 65 says that the country will pay its debts promptly (in order to win the confidence of investors and obtain new loans, which suggests that

this will be the priority of state finances - not the support of the domestic economy and the standard of living of Cubans). In this context, it is a question of reducing "excessive charges" in the official sphere (leaving the definition of what is "excessive" to the discretion of functionaries).

Furthermore, the number of academics will be determined by the performance of the economy and the universities should prepare especially technicians and professionals for the productive sectors of the economy, in relation with the market. Point 142 stipulates that the conditions for workers to study "should take into account the worker's free time and be based on his or her personal effort" (i.e., without grants or scholarships, time off, incentives and facilities).

Point 158 decides to develop services provided by self-employed economic actors - "working on their own account" (without specifying how to help prepare these self-employed workers, how they can obtain premises, something which the housing crisis makes problematic, or how they will be supplied with tools and material to work with). Point 159 adds that "we will develop processes to make people available for work" (that is to say, radical reductions of personnel). Although this document does not state it, additional resolutions on this subject say that a worker with 30 years seniority in a company will receive 60 per cent of their wages for 5 months after being laid off and that those with seniority less will receive less. Point 161 speaks of the need to reduce "unwarranted free goods and services and excessive personal allowances" (who will decide what is unwarranted or excessive?).

Point 162 refers to the "orderly elimination" of the ration book (which, according to the document, is also used by those who do not require it and thus "promotes the black market"). Point 164 establishes that workers' canteens will from now on operate with non-subsidized prices (with no extra pay in compensation). Point 169 frees the various forms of (agricultural) cooperatives from state mediation and control. Point 177 specifies that the pricing of most products will depend on supply and demand. Point 184 says that investments will be concentrated "on

the most efficient producers" (and not on the sectors that are most socially useful). Point 230 announces that electricity tariffs will be revised upward. Neither self-employed - "on their own account" - workers nor cooperatives will be subsidized. Point 248 calls for measures to reduce the consumption of water by tourists because of the drought (which, incidentally, contrasts with the promotion of tourism - the tourists use the swimming pools, they want the gardens to be watered, they counter the heat by taking frequent showers - and with the decision to establish big 18-hole golf courses, which are voracious consumers of water).

None of the articles mentions the reduction of the costs of the armed forces or those of the top bureaucracy. Ecological projects (organic farming, development of alternative energy sources) depend on the sole responsibility of the state (popular participation in land use is not foreseen and, moreover, there is no question of going beyond the consumption pattern established by capitalism, in other words of using the crisis as an opportunity to experiment with alternative production and consumption).

I think the document I have just summarized speaks for itself. So I will confine myself to counterposing to it an alternative that is democratic and socialist, possible and realistic.

## **An outline of an alternative**

It is certain that this document attempts to "restart" the Cuban economy by eliminating the charges that, in the current situation, have become unbearable, and by correcting the serious voluntaristic errors of the past. But it does it with a conception that is narrowly local, nationalist, abandoning any perspective in world politics. And it does it in a way that is brutal, bureaucratic and undemocratic, abrupt and terribly late, under the pressure of the crisis and not voluntarily, in an arrogant way and without the slightest self-criticism. The document also ignores the social, political and legal

consequences of the measures proposed and the need for them to be understood and explained so that people become aware of them. Moreover, such measures strengthen bureaucratic privileges and prepare the conditions for rapid social polarization and the transformation of part of the Cuban bureaucracy into the seeds of a local bourgeoisie, and even the conditions for an interlocking of this bourgeoisie with the world market (and imperialism). Furthermore, the document does not refer in any way to the repressive apparatus and the partisan press, so poor and remote from reality, in other words, to the main instruments of domination.

To live (and to survive the blockade) for twenty years, Cuba spent more than it produced and survived because it was drip-fed by the Soviet economy, which compensated for what was missing. Fidel and Raul Castro, as well as the vast majority of the leaders, made a virtue of necessity because they were convinced that the Stalinized Soviet Union would last forever. The moral and political cost was immense. Cuba supported the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968; Fidel praised Brezhnev as a great Marxist. Imports from the Soviet Union were not limited to weapons and technology but were extended to the training of cadres, in imitation of the ideology, way of life and way of solving problems of inefficient, authoritarian and corrupt bureaucrats that led the "socialist countries" to their ruin and discredited socialism. The country was able to raise to a very considerable degree its level of culture and health, but because of this dependency, it did not create an industrial base or the most advanced technology, with the exception of the medical sector. And voluntarism caused endless waste. It created a simulation of full employment, hiding the existence of a vast layer of unproductive workers and the devaluation of real wages and of labour power, which remains a commodity. Now, when they are forced to confront the reality of the economy, those who are themselves responsible for the disaster not only do not make any self-criticism, but cling to the helm, leaving the victims of the shipwreck to fend for



themselves "on their own account."

What prevents labour collectives themselves reducing production costs, rationalizing and deciding for themselves where to reduce staff and what cuts in wages to make? Why let the market decide wages, according to the profit earned by economic activity, so that, for example, a hotel employee earns much more than a nurse or a teacher, because these essential services are by definition rights and non-profit making activities? Why not reduce the salaries and privileges of the top levels of the state apparatus, civilian and military? If it is not possible to maintain the wages (which are, moreover, ridiculous, not giving access to a decent level of consumption) of millions of people, unproductive or not very productive, it should also be applicable to the top bureaucracy, so luxuriant and so unproductive. Why not allow local neighbourhood committees, street committees, to have control over privileges, corruption, waste, and smuggling? Why not open up the press to the denunciation of bureaucratic abuses and inefficiencies and to a discussion on how to make less costly and more efficient the distribution of goods of which there is insufficient quantity?

Popular participation is essential, because while the majority of the Cuban bourgeoisie has already left the country, as the Miami rapper sings in El Mariel, now with the new measures there will arise what Lenin called during the NEP "sovietbourgs" which,

like the Venezuelan "bolibourgeoisie" will be like radishes, red on the outside and white inside, with their substance well hidden underground. Only rank-and-file committees, organizations of popular control, workers' councils, generalized social self-management, are capable of effectively combating the crisis and the development of social inequalities. Because these inequalities will be reinforced by the inevitable strengthening of authoritarianism, which is certainly the product of the imperialist blockade of Cuba, but also of the need to compensate for the loss of consensus which is affecting the government, with the loss of people's hope in the construction of socialism, which could mobilize youth.

Those who oppose democracy do not aspire to socialism, because socialism is impossible without democracy. Those who dismiss self-management and workers' and social democracy, popular control, favour the demoralizing and destructive power of bureaucracy and technocracy, a power founded on the values of capitalism and not socialism. The nationalization of small shops and the artisan sector was a very serious mistake. This can be remedied, even though it is already very late, by fostering the creation of cooperatives with the assistance of credit and technical facilities. But in order to have an alliance of the state sector with the sector of small production, directed by and towards the market, and to prevent the resurgence of the bourgeoisie within it, the state must offer technical

support, a campaign of cultural solidarity, strengthen direct democracy directly, eliminating or minimizing as far as possible the apparatuses and the bosses.

The Cuban people will save itself. It does not need a supreme saviour, on earth or in heaven. What the Sixth Congress of the PCC should develop is a broad debate in all sectors, on the problems, emergencies, priorities, available resources and possible solutions in the framework of democracy and socialism. Without Cubans being fully aware of the role of Cuba in the world and what are the immediate perspectives, without a self-critical assessment of their own past and of "real socialism" and without complete freedom of opinion and criticism, it will not be possible to rebuild the economy or restore public confidence.

\* Guillermo Almeyra, columnist for the principal Mexican left-wing daily, *La Jornada*, and professor of political science at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, is an Argentinean revolutionary Marxist, a political exile, first in Italy and then in Mexico. His publications include, *Ética y Rebelión* (Ethics and rebellion, 1998), *Che Guevara: el pensamiento rebelde* (Che Guevara: the rebellious thought, 1992, reissued by *Ediciones Continente*, 2004) and *Polonia: Obreros, Bureaucratas, Socialismo* (Poland : workers, bureaucrats, socialism, 1981). We reproduce here an article he wrote in three installments in *La Jornada*.

# The biggest general strike ever

29 November 2010, by **Luis Branco**

In short, this was a strike that involved both public and private sectors, and almost all professional categories, in a country with one million precarious workers, threatened of losing the job if joining the strike.

The political moment of the strike is

also very important. We are in the eve of the 2011 budget vote in parliament (Nov 26th), that goes deeper in cutting social expenses like the support for the unemployed and the families with small children, that cuts salaries in public sector and adds recession to an economy already in

crisis. The budget will pass with the votes of both central parties (PS and PSD) with the support of Cavaco Silva, already in campaign for his presidential reelection in January 23rd.

For the left, this was an opportunity to make the workers show their voice to

the omnipresent speech in the media that promotes "budget austerity" and "making sacrifices" as the inevitable

answers for "chilling down the markets". In this struggle against the politics of fear, the workers are still on

the defensive, but the general strike helped to get more confidence and combativity.

## After the Floods, the IMF

15 November 2010, by **Adaner Usmani**

Almost without exception, of course, this attention has been framed by the idioms of the Great War on Terror – a narrative which pivots on breathless, asinine panic at beards and burkhas in a nuclear state.

The result of this confusion is that often even the Left has difficulties making sense of Pakistan as it might strive to understand other countries – as a society rent into competing classes, racked by ongoing conflicts over production and distribution. If we understand, however, that the first requirement for any response to the iniquities of the right-wing and the State is the revival of class politics, a familiarity with a few of the key structural and political questions in Pakistan is indispensable to solidarity.

The recent floods, in particular, have laid bare a sordid history of State incapacity and ruling-class rapaciousness. What's more, an ongoing austerity program, under the aegis of the International Monetary Fund, ominously threatens more of the same.

### Neoliberalism and the IMF

Neoliberalism has a storied history in Pakistan. Since 1988, the country's economic policies have evolved in close consultation with the IMF. More than a dozen programs of varying scope and significance were in place through the 1990s and early 2000s.(1)

The majority of the central agreements were scandalously anti-democratic in their implementation. The first set, a Structural Adjustment Facility (SAF) and Stand-by Arrangement (SBA) in 1988, was decided upon by a caretaker government the day before the accession of the already-elected Prime

Minister, Benazir Bhutto. She had little choice but to ratify them upon her arrival in office. The second, an Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility and SBA in 1993-1994, was the handiwork of another interim government, headed by an ex-World Bank staff member, Moeen Qureshi. (Zaidi, 337-338)

The plans embodied all the orthodoxies of the day: the fiscal deficit was to be cut, the public sector was to be downsized, subsidies removed, trade liberalized, the tax structure reformed, etc. The results were predictably devastating. The overall growth rate of the economy "fell well below trend levels, and appreciably below the average of the 1980s...." (Zaidi, 444)

The rate of growth of manufacturing plummeted, falling to 4.9% from an average of 9.1% between 1980-1988.(2) Public sector employment halved, from 1991 to 1998(3) – a trend which took a grave toll on the trade union movement.(4) And the percentage of the population living under the poverty line more-or-less doubled, between 1988 and 1999.(5)

In effect, the neoliberalism of the 1990s finished what the militarism of the '80s had started. Zia ul-Haq's coup had, after all, marked the beginning of a transition away from a development model headed by an activist State. While the pace of this change was slower than many had expected at the time of the takeover, its general trajectory was unmistakable.

In the verdict of one economist, "[t]he major contribution by the Zia government in the early years was to give a – clear signal to the private

sector that the government expected future growth to come from its increased participation in industrial activity.'" Both of Zia's predecessors – Ayub Khan (1958-1969) and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (1971-1977) – had represented (in different ways) an economic "illiberalism" that now had little place in the shifting climate of the 1980s.

With the advent of the IMF program in 1988, development expenditure, which had already begun to make way for defence and debt in the federal budget,(6) bore the brunt of hawkishness on the fiscal deficit. From a high of 10% of GDP in 1976-77 (Hasan, 251), it had collapsed to 2.1% by 2000-01. Spending on health and education stagnated; the former averaged 0.7% of GDP in the 1990s and 0.6% in the 2000s, while the highest estimates of the latter put it at a woeful 2.1% of total GDP in the 1990s and 2000s.(7)

Because these programs make the provision of loans conditional on policies that over and over again have been shown to impair the economic health of the country undergoing adjustment, by the end of the decade Pakistan found itself in the throes of a devastating debt crisis. Despite having paid \$36.611 billion to foreign creditors in the '90s, Pakistan added \$15.541 billion to its debt stock, bringing its total outstanding external debt to over \$32 billion in 2000.(8) (The present decade has proceeded along similar lines: Despite paying US \$45.6 billion in servicing on its external debt between 2000 and 2010, Pakistan has added roughly \$20 billion to its debt burden.)

### Natural Defenses Degraded

It is in the context of this history, then,

that the floods must be understood. About the scale of the devastation that the waters have wrought, of course, little needs to be said. The lives of more than twenty million of Pakistan's poorest people were totally uprooted. At its peak, one-fifth of the country had been submerged, devastating a staggering number of schools, hospitals, bridges, roads, homes, and more.

Estimates of total reconstruction costs vary widely – the most-often quoted estimate of \$15 billion dwarfs the amount of aid offered by the international community thus far (even as it represents less than half of the money Obama has committed to fund the surge in Afghanistan).

In the aftermath of the disaster, several reports have called attention to underlying structural problems that greatly exacerbated the toll exacted by the floods. Danish Mustafa, an economic geographer, has been vocal in highlighting longstanding flaws in the planning infrastructure, which relate to the fact that the river has been adversely walled-in by the canal and dam network, causing it to silt up.(9)

Mustafa and other analysts have also rightly decried the degradation of Pakistan's natural defenses, exploited by big farmers and industrialists, and/or mismanaged by local authorities. In 2005, for example, the World Bank reported that 66% of Pakistan's wetlands were facing medium- or high-level threats, many due to the unregulated dumping of sewage and industrial waste.(10)

An additional, arguably more basic structural cause of the disaster, however, lies in the aforementioned pillaging of State capacity in Pakistan over the course of the neoliberal era. A 2006 World Bank report on the condition of the irrigation infrastructure chronicles colossal neglect:

[On the basis of international standards,... Punjab should be investing an average of about US\$0.3 billion a year in replacement and a similar amount in maintenance. In fact there is no budget for replacement, and the Government of Punjab's

budget for maintenance is about 1.2 billion rupees, or about 6.5 percent of the above benchmark estimate of the cost of maintenance.(11)

Certainly a sustainable, ecologically-sensible solution will demand more than dramatically elevated levels of government spending. But there is no denying that the shortage of funds has been a leading reason behind the devastation. Moreover, this state of affairs also raises serious doubts about the ability of the government to lead rehabilitation efforts of the scale and scope necessary in the years ahead.

#### The IMF's Austerity Program

What's more, the deficit hawks today find themselves in charge of the country's economy. All indications are that Pakistan will re-enact the two central trends of the "lost decade" of the 1990s: a drive to austerity justified by the reigning and misguided policy orthodoxy, and precipitous increases in the debt burden as a result of international loans.

In view of the devastation wrought by the flooding, of course, it bears emphasizing that it is absolute madness to launch an austerity program. What Pakistan needs is a massive, internationally-assisted, State-led reconstruction plan, which can rebuild and upgrade infrastructure, lead a recovery in the industrial and agricultural sectors, and put people to work in the process.

But thanks to our high priests in Washington and Islamabad, what the country can expect instead is retrenchment, inflation and stagnation. The funds that will be made available for reconstruction are going to be cut from the development budget, which was ordered frozen at last year's level.(12) Recent indications are that it will actually be cut, rather than simply frozen.(13)

After the SBA was signed in November 2008, the IMF had ordered fiscal and monetary tightening in the name of fighting runaway inflation – in other words, lower government deficits and higher interest rates. The former will be done mainly by slashing subsidies on food, fuel and electricity.

The fiscal deficit, which was 7.6% of GDP in FY 2007/2008,(14) was to be reduced by one-half as of this year (the target was made moot by the floods). This, of course, has meant that Pakistan's poor have borne the brunt of the country's fiscal adjustment, without any serious efforts to compensate for these increased costs elsewhere.

At the time of writing, the plan was in abeyance after the Pakistani government dallied on reforming its anemic tax structure, one of the agreement's central conditions.

At first glance, the importance the IMF accords to this goal is difficult to fault: tax revenues in the 1980s and '90s only averaged around 13-14% of GDP (Zaidi, 212), and have come down to an exceedingly paltry 8.9% in the aftermath of this most recent economic crisis.

But the reform counseled by the IMF is utter lunacy, and demonstrates well the class character of their project. The instructions to the government are to implement a broad-based Value-Added Tax (VAT) by November.(15) VATs, of course, are basically anti-poor sales taxes, as the burden they impose is borne by consumers.

This will only exacerbate a taxation structure that is already highly regressive: in 2008-2009, roughly 62% of all tax revenues came from indirect taxes (sales, excise, and custom duties).(16) According to one recent estimate, when it is finally implemented, the Reformed General Services Tax (as the VAT has been re-christened) is expected to result in price hikes in the region of 15-17%.(17) This, remember, comes on the heels of more than two years of unprecedented inflation.

Absent from the discussion, of course, is the necessity of expanding the number of people who pay income tax (a woeful 1.6 million, or 1% of the population), and the urgency of imposing varying forms of progressive taxes on a miserly elite. By one (possibly fanciful) estimate, the tax-to-GDP ratio could double if the government found the political will to tax speculative transactions in real estate and on the stock market.(18)



Another issue, unaddressed by the RGST, centers on the generosity shown towards politically influential agricultural elites, whose income is ineligible for taxation. According to the Federal Bureau of Statistics, despite the sector contributing 22% to GDP, taxes specifically levied on agricultural activity generate only 1% of total taxation revenue.(19)

All the while, indirect taxes “not considered in this figure” do apply, so that overall taxation on the rural population is extra-regressive in nature. The floundering on these issues only clarifies that the problems of the taxation structure are not amenable to technical or administrative solutions, but demand urgently the pressure and direction of a popular movement.

The plan also threatens to rekindle a debt crisis on both the internal and external fronts. The Government was directed by the IMF to eliminate dependence on credit from the State Bank, and as a result borrowed heavily from commercial banks to fund its deficit in the last fiscal year.(20) The decision to raise interest rates this summer (which means that government securities pay higher returns) thus meant even rosier balance statements for Pakistan’s banks “not soon after the flood crisis began, it was reported that banks’ profits were up 33% as compared to the year before.(21)

This trend (which, let’s remind ourselves, amounts to redistribution from the poor to the rich) has contributed to an ominous re-accumulation of domestic debt. In the current fiscal year, a full 23% of the federal budget has been allocated to the servicing on these obligations alone. If you include payments on the external debt and the defense budget, you have accounted for at least half of all federal expenditure.(22)

What’s more, this figure does not take into account recent ad hoc amendments to the budget: specifically, the aforementioned announcement that development spending may be cut by anywhere from 30 to 50%.(23) and the as-yet unexplained memorandum (released only to the IMF) that the defense

budget had been increased by an astonishing Rs. 110 billion. This last figure itself is about 73% of the amount the government hopes to collect by implementing the RGST.

The ongoing arrangement with the IMF is slated to end by December. While it’s always difficult to predict next steps in Pakistan, the condition of the economy and the government’s finances are such that a second agreement is very possible, if not likely.

#### The Left and the Way Forward

All this leaves the Pakistani Left with a challenge of historic proportions. It is worth nothing that it has mobilized: Sizeable protests have been held in two of the country’s largest cities, around demands relating to debt cancellation, war spending (both U.S. and Pakistani), climate reparations and land reforms. This comes on the heels of some of the country’s most trenchant strikes in years, this summer, which hopefully portend a revival of the labor movement after decades of decline.

Yet it pays to be realistic, too. The current balance of forces is such that, despite widespread dissatisfaction in the country, the near future promises little respite “given the venality of the ruling class and the hawkishness of its international allies, austerity and retrenchment are here to stay. As an all-too-similar policy cocktail makes its way around Europe and the United States, our immediate task is to build solidarity on the basis of these real, shared grievances. The challenges that confront working people across the world are the same, even if the remedy is today out of reach.

#### Notes

1.Akbar Zaidi, *Issues in Pakistan’s Economy* (2005), 337.

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2.This failure to increase output or produce job growth hardly vindicated the government’s decision to shift the burden of investment to the private sector (“private sector fixed investment in real terms almost doubled over 1988-1996 and provided more than two-thirds of the total expansion in fixed investment.” Parvez

Hasan, *Pakistan’s Economy at the Crossroads* (1998), 274.

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3.Asad Sayeed and Ayesha Ibrahim, “Country Background Report: Trade Unions in Pakistan” (2006), 9.

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[http://www.researchcollective.org/Documents/trade\\_unions\\_exec\\_summary.pdf](http://www.researchcollective.org/Documents/trade_unions_exec_summary.pdf).

4.Aasim Sajjad Akhtar, “Privatization at Gunpoint,” *Monthly Review* (Oct. 2005)

<http://www.monthlyreview.org/1005akhtar.htm>.

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5.Tarique Niazi, “Rural Poverty and the Green Revolution: Lessons from Pakistan,” *Journal of Peasant Studies* 31, No. 2 (2004), 253.

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6.“At the beginning of Zia’s rule, public sector development spending had been nearly double the level of defence outlays. A decade later, development spending had come down to the same level as defence.” Repayments of government debt, too, were “the fastest growing element in government expenditures during 1977-1988,” most of this comprised of increased interest payments on domestic debt. Parvez Hasan, *Pakistan’s Economy at the Crossroads* (1998), 252.

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7.“Economic and Social Indicators,” *Pakistan Economic Survey 2009-2010*.

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8.An outflow of \$36.611 billion, inflow of \$15.451 billion (Zaidi, 250).

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9.Interview with Daanish Mustafa (August 18, 2010)

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/news/2010/08/100818\\_mustafa\\_wt\\_sl.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/news/2010/08/100818_mustafa_wt_sl.shtml).

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10.John Briscoe and Usman Qamar, *Pakistan’s Water Economy: Running Dry* (World Bank/OUP 2006), 71-72.

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11.World Bank 2006, 60-61.

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12. "The government has decided to freeze federal and provincial public sector development programmes (PSDPs) at last year's position to create fiscal space to cover the requirements of the current crisis." <http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/the-newspaper/front-page/imf-begins-macroeconomic-review-pakistan-seeks-three-waivers-480>.  
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13. "The cost of immediate flood relief will delay those efforts, said Hoti. "We have compromised on our annual development plan and yesterday I suspended the entire new portfolio for our development plan for this province worth about 17 billion rupees (about \$200 million) because of the floods," he said." <http://in.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-51037420100824>.  
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14. Explained in large part by aforementioned subsidies on food and fuel, which had alone amounted to 3.9% of GDP that year, when oil prices were at their peak (World Bank, "Pakistan-Country Partnership Strategy for the period FY 2010-2013," (July 2010, <http://go.worldbank.org/JWQ7GXDYR0>, 5).  
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15. "The reform was supposed to have been completed by July, but has been held up by a disagreement between the provinces and the Center over who can collect taxes on services." <http://brecorder.com/index.php?id=1059675&currPageNo=1&query=&search=&term=&supDate=>.  
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16. World Bank 2010, 57.  
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17. <http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/the-newspaper/front-page/reformed-gst-to-cause-price-hike-of-1517pc-090>.  
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18. Huzaima Bukhari and Dr. Ikramul Haq, "Tax-to-GDP ratio: FBR's Waterloo," The News (August 2010) <http://www.jang.com.pk/thenews/aug2010-weekly/nos-01-08-2010/pol1.htm#8>.  
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19. Economic Survey 2009-2010, 56.  
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20. See <http://brecorder.com.pk/index.php?id=1097873&currPageNo=1&query=&search=&term=&supDate=>. It should be noted that, particularly since the floods, the Government has returned

to the State Bank, borrowing Rs. 220 billion since July 1 (twice as much as it borrowed in the same period, last year). This, however, hasn't necessarily signaled the end of borrowing from the commercial sector, who have few alternatives in an insecure economy: as DAWN reports, "rising NPLs and relatively low private sector credit demand may provide incentive to the already risk-shy banks to meet government's borrowing requirements at the cost of private investment in the economy." <http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/news/business/44-pakistan-central-bank-rate-fa-06>.  
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21. <http://brecorder.com.pk/index.php?id=1097873&currPageNo=1&query=&search=&term=&supDate=>.  
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22. <http://tribune.com.pk/story/19101/half-of-the-budget-allocated-to-defence-debt-servicing>.  
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23. <http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/news/business/psdp-may-be-cut-by-30-to-50-na-informed-jd-01>.  
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ATC 149, November-December 2010

## A Time for Freedom

### 9 November 2010, by Angana Chatterji

In the administration of brutality, India, the postcolony, has proven itself coequal to its former colonial masters. Governing Kashmir is about India's coming of age as a power, its ability to disburse violence, to manipulate and dominate. Kashmir is about nostalgia, about resources, and buffer zones. The possession of Kashmir by India renders an imaginary past real, emblematic of India's triumphal unification as a nation-state.

Controlling Kashmir requires that Kashmiri demands for justice be

depicted as threatening to India's integrity. India's contrived enemy in Kashmir is a plausible one "the Muslim "Other," India's historically manufactured nemesis.

#### What Is at Stake?

Between June 11 and September 22 of 2010, Kashmir witnessed the execution of 109 youth, men, and women by India's police, paramilitary and military. Indian forces opened fire on crowds, tortured children, detained elders without explanation, and coerced false confessions. Since June

7, there have been 73 days of curfew and 75 days of strikes and agitation. On September 11, the day of Eid-ul-Fitr celebrating the end of Ramadan, the violence continued. The paramilitary and police verbally abused and physically attacked civil society dissenters.

Summer 2010 was not unprecedented. Kashmir has been subjected to much, much worse. The use of public and summary execution for civic torture has been held necessary to Kashmir's subjugation by the Indian state.

Militarization has asserted vigilante jurisdiction over space and politics. The violence is staged, ritualistic, and performative, used to re-assert India's power over Kashmir's body.

The military's fabrications "fake encounters, escalating perceptions of cross-border threat" function as the truth-making apparatus of the nation. We are witness to the paradox of history, as calibrated punishment "the lynching of the Muslim body, the object of criminality" enforces submission of a stateless nation (Kashmir) to the once-subaltern postcolony (India).

Kashmir is about the spectacle. The Indian state's violence functions as an intervention, to discipline and punish, to provoke and dominate. The summer of 2010 evidenced India's maneuvering against Kashmir's determination to decide its future. The use of violence by the Indian forces was deliberate, their tactics cruel and precise, amidst the groundswell of public dissent in this third summer, since 2008, of indefatigable civil society uprisings for "Azaadi" (freedom).

What is the Indian state hoping to achieve? One, that Kashmiris would submit to domination, forsaking their claim to separation from India (to be an independent state or, for some, to be assimilated with Pakistan), or their demand for full autonomy. Or, that provoked, grief-stricken and weary, Kashmiris would take up arms once again, giving India the opportunity to fortify its propaganda that Kashmiri civil society dissent against Indian rule is nurtured and endorsed today by external forces and groups in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

If the latter transpires, India will manipulate this to neutralize Kashmiri demands for de-militarization and conflict resolution, to extend its annexation of Kashmir, and further normalize civic and legal "states of exception" (i.e. repression). If India succeeds in both provoking local armed struggle and linking Kashmiri resistance to foreign terror, it will acquire international sanction to continue its government of Kashmir on grounds of "national security," and "have proof" that Kashmiris are not

authentically debating India's government of them, but are pressured into it by external forces.

India can then reinforce its armed forces in Kashmir, presently 671,000 strong, to prolong the killing spree. Such provocation as policy is a mistake. Such legitimization of military rule will produce intractable conflict and violence. All indications are that Kashmiri civil society dissent will not abate: It is not externally motivated, but historically compelled.

Dominant nation-states overlook that freedom struggles are not adherent to the moralities of violence versus nonviolence, but reflect a desire to be free. Dominant nation-states forget that the greater the oppression, the more fervent is resistance. The greater the violence, the more likely is the provocation to counter-violence.

Whether dissent in Kashmir turns into organized armed struggle or continues as mass-based peaceful resistance is dependent upon India's political decisions. If India's subjugation persists, it is conceivable that the movement for nonviolent dissent, mobilized since 2004, will erode. Signs indicate that it is already slightly threadbare. It is conceivable that India's brutality will induce Kashmiri youth to close the distance between stones and petrol bombs, or more.

If India fails to act, if Pakistan acts only in its self-interest, and if the international community does not insist on an equitable resolution to the Kashmir dispute, it is conceivable, that, forsaken by the world, Kashmiris will be compelled to take up arms again.

Misogynist groups such as the Lashkar-e-Toiba [fundamentalist Pakistani group "ed.], al-Qaeda or the Taliban are mercenaries looking for takers in Kashmir. By the Indian state's record, there are between 500-700 militants in the Kashmir Valley today. These groups have not been successful because Kashmiris have been disinterested in alliances with them, not because the Indian army is successful in controlling them. This time, an armed mobilization by Kashmiris would include an even stronger mass movement than that

which occurred between 1990 and 2004/2007, led by youth whose lives have been shaped by the two-decade long violence of militarization.

Who wants that? Can the South Asian Subcontinent, already nuclearized, survive that? India is accountable to keep this from happening "not through the use of unmitigated force, but through listening to the demands for change made by Kashmiris.

#### Will to Power

This summer, India's violence on Kashmir was threaded through with strategic calculation. The police, military and paramilitary, without provocation, brutalized widespread peaceable protests across Kashmir that were opposing the suppression of civil society. Hostile Indian forces acted with the knowledge and sanction of the government of India and the government of Jammu and Kashmir.

The repeated repression by state forces provoked civilians, whose political means of expression and demands have been systematically denied, to engage in stone pelting. The conditions of militarization prompted them to be in non-compliance with declared, undeclared, and unremitting curfews. In instances, civilians engaged in acts of violence, including arson.

Each instance of civilian violence was provoked by the unmitigated and first use of force on civilians and/or extrajudicial killings on the part of Indian forces. Peaceable civilian demonstrations by women and men protested the actions of Indian forces. Individuals caught in the midst of the unrest, or mourning the death of a civilian, were fired upon by Indian forces, leading to other killings by Indian forces, more civilian protests, greater use of force by the police and paramilitary, use of torture in certain instances by Indian forces, more killings by Indian forces, larger, even violent, civilian protests, and further state repression.

In Summer 2010, dominant discourse focused on the use of stone pelting and on the instances of violence by youth in Kashmir as the reason for armed action on the part of the state.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh focused on the need for efficient tactics in "crowd control." India's elite intelligentsia, inculcated into "rational" conduct, and no longer outraged by suffering, assessed the costs and benefits of militaristic violence.

Civil society demonstrations in Kashmir are not a law-and-order problem, as they have been reported. Stone pelting, and incidents of arson and violence, are not causal to the violence that is routine in Kashmir today. Stone pelting does not seek to kill, and has not resulted in death. Pro-freedom leaders (termed "separatists" by the Indian state) have emphasized nonviolent civil disobedience, and have appealed to civil society not to engage in violent protests in reaction to the violence and killings by Indian forces.

Indian rulers disregard that suppression acts to catalyze the resistance movement in Kashmir. The Government of India continues to monitor the resistance movement, shifting the boundaries of acceptable practice of civil liberties. Kashmiris are allowed to protest in New Delhi, while in Kashmir sloganeering ("Go, India, Go Back," "Indian Dogs Go Home," "Quit Kashmir") is met with force. When Masarat Alam Bhat, a rising pro-freedom leader, issued an appeal to Indian soldiers in July to "Quit Kashmir," Indian authorities banned its circulation.

Acts of violence by protesting civilians increased as military violence continued into September. On September 13, crowds in Kashmir torched a Christian missionary school and some government offices while protesting the call to desecrate the Qur'an by Florida Pastor Terry Jones. On September 13, 18 civilians were killed by the Indian forces in Kashmir (a police officer also died).

Provocation is easy in a context of sustained brutality. Provoking Kashmiri dissenters to violence serves to confirm the dominant story of Muslims as "violent." Yet again, several pro-freedom leaders condemned the attack on the Christian school and renewed their call for nonviolent dissent.

On September 13, the Government of India stated its willingness to engage with Kashmiri groups that reject violence. New Delhi did not apply the same precondition to itself. Nor did it acknowledge that pro-freedom groups have repeatedly opposed the use of violence in recent years.

The Kashmiri Muslim is caricatured as violent by India's dominant political and media apparatus. There is a refusal to recognize the inequitable historical-political power relations at play between Muslim-prevalent Kashmir's governance by Hindu-dominant India. The racialization of the Muslim, as "Other" and barbaric, reveals the xenophobia of the Indian state. Distinctions in method and power, between stone pelter and armed soldier, between "terrorist" and "freedom fighter," are inconvenient.

The Indian state's discourse is animated by the prejudice that Kashmiri inclinations to violence are subsidized by Pakistan. Such misconceptions ignore that while Kashmiris did travel to Pakistan to seek arms training, such activity was largely confined to the early days of the armed militancy, circa late 1980s through the mid-1990s. Pathologies of "violent Muslims" legitimate the discursive and physical violence of the Indian "security" forces, which is presented as necessary protection for the maintenance of the Hindu majoritarian Indian nation.

#### Witnessing

I have spent considerable time between July 2006 and July 2010 learning about Kashmir, working in Kashmir. In undertaking the work of the International People's Tribunal on Human Rights and Justice in Indian-administered Kashmir, I have travelled across Kashmir's cities and countryside, from Srinagar to Kupwara, through Shopian and Islamabad (Anantnag), with Parvez Imroz, Zahir-Ud-Din, and Khurram Parvez.

I have witnessed the violence that is perpetrated on Kashmiris by India's military, paramilitary and police. I have walked through the graveyards that hold Kashmir's dead, and have met with grieving families. I have sat with witnesses, young men, who

described how Indian forces chased down and executed their friends for participating in civil disobedience. I have met women whose sons were disappeared. I have met with "half-widows" [women whose husbands have been "disappeared" – ed.]

I have spoken with youth, women and men, who are enraged. I have also spoken with persons who were violated by militants in the 1990s. People's experiences with the reprehensible atrocities of militancy do not imply the abdication of their desires for self-determination. The Indian state deliberately conflates militancy with the people's mass movement for liberation.

I have met with torture survivors, non-militants and former militants, who testified to the sadism of the forces. Men who had petrol injected through the anus. Water-boarding, mutilation, being paraded naked; rape of women, children and men; starvation, humiliation, psychological torture. An eagle tattoo on the arm of a man was reportedly identified by an army officer as a symbol of Pakistan-held Azad Kashmir, even as the man clarified the tattoo was from his childhood. The skin containing it was burned. The officer said, the man recalled: "When you look at this, think of Azaadi."

A mother, reportedly asked to watch her daughter's rape by army personnel, pleaded for her release. They refused. She then pleaded that she could not watch, asking to be sent out of the room or be killed. The soldier pointed a gun to her forehead, stating he would grant her wish, and shot her dead before they proceeded to rape the daughter.

Who are the Indian forces? Disenfranchised caste and other groups, Assamese, Nagas, Sikhs, Dalits (erstwhile "untouchable" peoples), and Muslims from Kashmir, are being used to combat Kashmiris. Why did 34 soldiers commit suicide in Kashmir in 2008, and 52 fratricidal killings take place between January 21, 2004 and July 14, 2009? Why did 16 soldiers commit suicide and two die in fratricidal killings between January and early August in 2010?

Laws authorize soldiers to question, raid houses, detain and arrest without bringing charges, and to prolong incarceration without due process. They blur distinctions between military/paramilitary, "legality"/"illegality." Citing "national security," Indian forces in Kashmir shoot and kill on uncorroborated suspicion, with impunity from prosecution.

Yet revoking the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, for example, will not stop the horror in Kashmir. India's laws are not the primary contention. India's political and military existence in Kashmir is the issue. Legal impunity is the cover for the moral impunity of Indian rule. Human rights violations in Kashmir will not stop without removing the military. The military cannot be removed without surgically rupturing India's will to power over Kashmir.

Is the military willing to withdraw from Kashmir? Since 2002, the Government of India has procured five billion U.S. dollars in weaponry from the Israeli state — a colossal sum for India, where 38% of the world's poor reside and where eight of the country's poorest states are more impoverished than the 26 poorest countries of the African continent. Five billion dollars, in addition to the other monies and resources invested in the militarization of Kashmir, do not evidence an intent to withdraw.

#### Inflexible Diplomacy

Yet India needs to make the "Kashmir problem" disappear. India's diplomacy is directed toward assuming a role as a world power, a world market, and a world negotiator in global politics. India is also seeking a seat on the United Nations Security Council.

What constitutes India's dialogue with Kashmiris in conditions of extreme subjugation? The Government of India has scheduled a hurried time frame in propelling Track II diplomacy into success, to secure a proposal for resolution that is acceptable to India and Pakistan and, ostensibly, to Kashmiris. The terms of reference set by New Delhi exclude discussions of self-determination or heightened autonomy, boundary negotiations, the Siachen glacier and critical water

resources, and renegotiations of the Line of Control.

New Delhi and Islamabad appear to be in collusion. If Pakistan overlooks India's annexation of Jammu and Kashmir, India would be willing to forget Pakistan's occupation of another fragment of Kashmir. For the Government of Pakistan, however, Afghanistan is the current priority, not Kashmir. Conversations on the phased withdrawal of troops by India and Pakistan at the border, local self-government, and the creation of a joint supervision mechanism in Jammu and Kashmir, involving India, Pakistan and Kashmir, are at an impasse.

The Government in New Delhi is looking to neutralize Kashmir's demand for self-determination or unabridged autonomy, pushing forward a diluted "autonomy," seeking to assimilate Kashmir with finality into the Indian nation-state. New Delhi is seeking buy-in, which it hopes to push through using the collaborator coterie in Srinagar. Local self-government would be New Delhi's compromise — a weak autonomy — with a joint supervisory apparatus constituted of India, Pakistan, and Kashmir.

New Delhi hopes that the Kashmiri leadership, including pro-freedom groups, can be restrained for a price, and weakened through infighting. Certain segments of the pro-freedom leadership, throughout history, have lacked vision, honesty, and the ability to prioritize collaboration for justice and peace in Kashmir. Certain segments of the religious and political leadership have been unable to collaborate meaningfully with civil society, with observant Muslims and those irreligious, and with non-Muslims.

The spiritual commitment to justice in Islamic tradition has receded as religious determinations embrace instrumental political rationality. The determination of what "freedom" is has been deferred since 1931; instead there has been a focus on immediate and small political gains. This has plagued and rendered ineffectual segments of the complex Hurriyat (Freedom) alliance in the present, which is often unable to capitalize on the exuberant people's movement on

the streets and pathways of Kashmir.

Segments of the pro-freedom leadership have focused on New Delhi rather than Kashmir civil society. New Delhi has fixated on enabling this dynamic, using vast resources to create a collaborator class in Srinagar that undermines the will of the Kashmiri people. And while Pakistan's politicians have pointed to India's injustices, they have not reciprocally addressed issues in the management of Pakistan-held Kashmir, including the deflation of movements for the unification of Kashmir.

The crisis of state in Pakistan, and the role of its ruling elite in vitiating people's democratic processes, remains a pitfall for regional security. The logic that Muslim-prevalent Kashmir must either stay with secular India or join Muslim-dominated Pakistan is configured by India's and Pakistan's internal ideological needs and identitarian politics. Neither is inevitable. Neither speak to the foremost aspiration of Kashmiris.

The Government of India's "inclusive dialogue" this summer has systematically disregarded Kashmiri civil society demands, thrusting a violent peace brokered by New Delhi's agents of change. New Delhi has invited various Kashmiri stakeholders from civil society as well. Their articulations, however, have not shifted the agenda, even as bringing people to the table is used to legitimate India's visage of inclusivity.

#### What Kashmiris Want

What do a majority of Kashmiris want? First, to secure a good-faith agreement with New Delhi and Islamabad regarding the right of Kashmiris to determine the course of their future, set a time frame, and define the interim conditions necessary to proceed.

Following this, civil society and political leaders would put in motion processes to educate, debate and consult with society, including minority groups, in sketching the terms of reference for a resolution, prior to negotiations with India and Pakistan.

Significantly, pro-freedom leader



Syed Ali Geelani's statement of August 31 sought to shift the terms of engagement, not requiring the precondition of self-determination or the engagement of Pakistan. Unless New Delhi responds, the protests in Kashmir will continue. Geelani's statement, supported by the All Parties Hurriyat Conference leader Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, testifies to this. The mood in the streets testifies to this.

New Delhi's current approach repudiates what Kashmiris want. The Government of India's "inclusive dialogue" this summer does not recognize Kashmir as an international dispute. Nor does it include: an immediate halt to, and moratorium on, extrajudicial killings by the Indian military, paramilitary and police; an immediate halt to, and moratorium on, the use of torture, kidnapping, enforced disappearance and gendered violence by the Indian military, paramilitary, and police; a plan for the release of political prisoners, the return of those exiled, and contending with the issue of displacement; agreements on an immediate "soft border" policy between Kashmir, India and Pakistan, to enable the resurgence of Kashmir's economy; agreements to non-interference in the exercise of civil liberties of Kashmiris, including the right to civil disobedience, and freedom of speech, assembly, religion, movement and travel.

New Delhi has refused to acknowledge the extent of human rights violations, and how they are integral to maintaining dominion. New Delhi has not explained why militarization in Kashmir has been disproportionately used to brutalize Kashmiris, when ostensibly the Indian forces are in Kashmir to secure the border zones.

India's "inclusive dialogue" does not include a plan for the proactive demilitarization and the immediate revocation of all authoritarian laws. Nor does it include: a plan for the transparent identification and dismantling of detention and torture centers, including in army camps; a plan for installing a Truth and Justice Commission for calculating loss and for political and psychosocial reparation; a plan for international

and transparent investigations into unknown and mass graves constituting crimes against humanity committed by the Indian military, paramilitary and police. Such omissions are a travesty of any process promising "resolution."

#### Islamophobia and India's Crisis

Kashmir's claims are historically unique and bona fide. But history â€" the United Nations Resolutions of 1948, the promise by India's first Prime Minister Nehru for a plebiscite (to rethink the temporary Accession of Jammu and Kashmir to India by the Hindu-descent Maharaja, Hari Singh), Article 370 of the Indian Constitution [which gave Kashmir the right to live under its own laws â€" ed.] has been jettisoned by an amnesic India. Its official nationalism seeks to rewrite history, affixing Kashmir to India, to overwrite memory. Within the battlefields of knowledge/power, official "truth" becomes the contagion sustaining cultures of repression and mass atrocity, creating cultures of grief.

New Delhi has been the self-appointed arbitrator in determining the justifications of Kashmir's claims to freedom. The Indian state is apprehensive that any change in the status quo in Kashmir would foster internal crises of gigantic proportion in India. Across the nation there is considerable discontent, as dreams and difference are mortgaged to the idea of India fabricated by the elite. Kashmir cannot remain India's excuse to avoid dealing with its own internal matters.

Adivasis (indigenous peoples), Dalits, disenfranchised caste groups, women, religious, ethnic and gender minorities are fatigued by the nation's deferred promises. Forty-four million Adivasis have been displaced since 1947. Central India is torn asunder, and as Maoists are designated as the latest "national threat," national memory forgets the systematic brutalization of peoples in the tribal belt that led to a call to arms. Then there is the Northeast, Punjab, the massacre of Muslims in Gujarat, riots against Christians in Orissa, farmer suicides, the plight of peasants and Adivasis of the Narmada Valley where dams are not the "temples of India," but its

burial grounds.

Indian civil society decries that Kashmir is not deserving of autonomy or separation, as it, as an assumed Islamist state, would be a threat to India's democracy. Dominant Indian (left-oriented) civil society must rethink its characterization of Kashmiri civil society as prevalently "Jamaati." Jamaat is Arabic for assembly. "Jamaati" is used by Indian civil society to imply Islamist or fundamentalist. The reference can often be translated as Muslim = Jamaati, and Muslim-observant = fundamentalist.

To assume that a Muslim-majority state in Kashmir will be ruled by Islamist extremists in support of global terror reflects majoritarian India's racism. Indians of Hindu descent too easily overlook that India's democracy is infused with Hindu cultural dominance. Indian civil society assumes that Islam and democracy are incompatible, supported by the inflamed Islamophobia in the politics of the West. Importantly, India forgets that in its own history with the British, freedom fighters had noted that the oppressor cannot adjudge when a stateless people are "deserving" of freedom.

Freedom is fundamentally an experiment with risk that Kashmiris must be willing to take. The global community must support them in making such risk ethical. Jammu and Kashmir is a Muslim majority space. The population of India-held Kashmir was recorded at approximately 6,900,000 in 2008, of which Muslims are approximately 95%. Kashmir's future as a democratic, inclusive and pro-secular space is linked to what happens within India and Pakistan.

Kashmiris who wish to be separate from India and Pakistan must assess the difficult alliances yet to be built among Kashmir, Jammu and Ladakh, and among Muslims and Hindu Pandits, Dogra Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Christians, indigenous groups and others. Then there is the question of what lies ahead between Indian-held Kashmir and Pakistan-held Kashmir. Minority groups, such as Kashmiri Pandits, must refuse the

Indian state's hyper-nationalist strategy in using the Pandit community to create opposition between Muslims and Hindus in Kashmir, as part of its strategy to religionize the issue and govern through communalization.

Where is the international community on the issue of Kashmir? In present history, Palestine, Ireland, Tibet and Kashmir share common features. In Tibet, 1.2 million died (1949-1979), and 320,000 were made refugees. In Ireland, 3,710 have died (1969-2010). For Israel, the occupation of Palestine has resulted in 10,193 dead (1987-2010), with 4.7 million refugees registered with the United Nations (1947-2010). In Kashmir, 70,000 are dead, over 8,000 have been disappeared, and 250,000 have been displaced (1989-2010).

During British Prime Minister David Cameron's recent visit to India, he was asked to refrain from bringing up the "K" word. United States President Barack Obama's proposed visit to New Delhi in November is already laden with prohibitions, India's rule in Kashmir and its larger human rights record among them. As well, right-wing Hindu advocacy groups have been successful in securing the silence of many on Capitol Hill on the issue of Kashmir.

The Kashmiri diaspora has been partly effective in bringing visibility to the issue, even as the community remains ideologically and politically fragmented. International advocates have propagated an "economic" approach to "normalcy." This avoids the fact that militarization impacts every facet of life, making economic development outside of political change impossible.

Kashmiris are caught amidst world events, regional machinations, and the unresolved histories of the Subcontinent. In 2010, as of

September 23, 351 soldiers from the United States have died in Afghanistan, while the United Kingdom sustained 92 fatalities. Of paramount concern for both is bringing their forces home without compromising the principles of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) operations in the region. To accomplish this would require that Pakistan move sizeable forces from the Indo-Kashmir-Pak border to the Af-Pak frontier. This cannot be done, however, without cessation in Indo-Pak hostilities, which requires resolution of the Kashmir dispute.

Kashmir's resolution, however, cannot mean a sanction to Pakistan's encroachment on Afghanistan, which, given the political situation in the region, remains a highly likely possibility. For the United States and India, the containment of China is another issue, also linked to Kashmir.

The Indian state's military governance penetrates every facet of life. The sounds of war haunt mohallas [neighborhoods] ed]. The hyper-presence of militarization forms a graphic shroud over Kashmir: Detention and interrogation centers, army cantonments, abandoned buildings, bullet holes, bunkers and watchtowers, detour signs, deserted public squares, armed personnel, counter-insurgents, and vehicular and electronic espionage. Armed control regulates and governs bodies.

It has been reported that, since 1990, Kashmir's economy has incurred a loss of more than 1,880,000 million Indian Rupees (\$40.4 billion U.S.). The immensity of psychosocial losses is impossible to calculate. The conditions of everyday life are in peril. They elicit suffocating anger and despair, telling a story of the web of violence in which civil society in Kashmir is interned.

For India, constituting a coherent

national collective has required multiple wars on difference. National governance determines territory and belonging, disenfranchising subaltern claims. Local struggles for self-determination are brutalized to reproduce obedient national collectives. Systemic acts of oppression chart a history, as relations of power are choreographed by nation-states in the suppression of others. Massacre, gendercide, genocide, occupation, function within a continuum of tactics in negation/annihilation.

India's relation to Kashmir is not about Kashmir. Kashmir's aversion to being subsumed by the Indian state is not reducible to history. If violence breaks lives, Kashmir is quite broken. If oppression produces resistance, Kashmir is profusely resilient. From Michel Foucault to the African thinker Achille Mbembe [who coined the term "postcolony," ed.] and so much in between, we are reminded of the myriad techniques in governance that seek to subjugate, while naming subjugation as subject formation, as protection, "security," law and order, and progress.

Realpolitik triumphs against a backdrop of persistent refusal. Through summer heat and winter snow, across interminable stretches of concertina wire, broken windowpanes, walls, barricades, and checkpoints, the dust settles to rise again. The agony of loss. The desecration of life. Kashmir's spiritual fatalities are staggering. The dead are not forgotten. Remembrance and mourning are habitual practises of dissent.

"We are not free. But we know freedom," KP tells me. "The movement is our freedom. Our dreams are our freedom. The Indian state cannot take that away. Our resistance will live."

ATC 149, November-December 2010

## Merapi disaster appeal!

## 8 November 2010, by **Zoe Safia Kenny**

A spokesperson from the ARM Yayak Aslihul said "The situation in Yogyakarta is quickly becoming a humanitarian disaster. As well as the death of toll of more than 100 people, more than 75,000 people have been evacuated from their homes with more than 30,000 people taking shelter in the Maguwoharip Soccer Stadium and thousands more are sheltering in universities throughout Yogyakarta. As well as the trauma of being evacuated from their homes the refugees are suffering from shortages of food, water and sanitary facilities and the local government's emergency funds are quickly running out".

"The humanitarian disaster caused by Merapi is a result of a failure by the national and local governments to take natural disaster management seriously. Authorities have long known that Merapi poses a serious threat to people living nearby, but the government has failed to adequately prepare in the event of an eruption. There has been no clear evacuation plan and steps have only been taken after each eruption, which is why more than 100 people have already died. Nor has the government provided adequate shelters instead waiting until tens of thousands of people were in desperate need of accomadation, they are now forced to sleep in the Maguwoharip Soccer Stadium which the government only chose after Merapi began erupting".

And while the local and national governments are clearly failing to deal with the disaster adequately the national government of Susilo Bambang Yudhono is still refusing to accept foreign aid. So far the Australian government has offered \$1 million, the US government US\$2 million and the European Commission 1.5 million euros. A spokesperson from the Foreign Ministry claims that the government still needs to assess the situation and will only accept the aid "If the damage requires large scale assistance and we cannot handle it on our own" showing that it is more

concerned about presenting a false image of self-sufficiency in order to reassure foreign investors that Indonesia is a stable place for business than looking after the people affected by the disaster.

And while the government has agreed to channel any international donations to other organizations such as Indonesia's biggest Islamic organisation, Muhammadiyah and the Indonesian Red Cross, endemic corruption means that it is extremely unlikely that the funds will actually reach people in need. Governmental corruption and incompetency extends from the national to the local level "in Boyolali district, where 20,000 people have been evacuated and are living in temporary shelters, two senior officials have gone to Bali to "study electronic voting systems".

The member organizations of the ARM are centrally involved in numerous struggles and campaigns in the Yogyakarta region. One organization the ARMP (Alliance of People's Struggles - Parangtritis) has been campaigning to stop the forced eviction of thousands of people from their homes in the nearby beach town of Parangtritis to make way for a huge new tourism resort. The ARMP has been struggling to stop the evictions since 2007, organizing regular demonstrations, public meetings and blockades. Another organization Security Guards Union - United Struggle of Labour Indonesia (SPK-PPBI) has been campaigning to reinstate more than 40 security guards who were unilaterally dismissed from their positions at Sapphir Square Mall. Recently after a series of demonstrations the campaign was successful in securing all the withheld wages. Many members of SPK-PPBI are currently helping to establish refugee camps for some of the thousands of people fleeing from the village of Cangkringan and two members of SPK-PPBI had had their homes destroyed by the Merapi eruptions.

In relation to the ARM's role in helping the victims of Merapi, Yayak, who is also a member of the Political Committee of the Poor - People's Democratic Party (KPRM-PRD) said, "While it is the government's responsibility to look after the victims of Merapi, it is clearly failing to do its job, so the people must act. The ARM has two main goals; first is to help distribute essential items to priority groups including children, pregnant women and the elderly. Secondly, to establish a monitoring and advocacy centre to ensure that government aid is reaching those in need as well as helping people to receive adequate compensation for reconstructing their homes and buying new livestock for their farms. The ARM is also campaigning for the government to provide free education and healthcare for the victims of Merapi. The ARM will also be organizing demonstrations to demand that the government fulfill its responsibility to the victims now and into the future".

Please send messages of solidarity to:

Mobile: Yayak Aslihul +62-817460268  
begin\_of\_the\_skype\_highlighting  
+ 6 2 - 8 1 7 4 6 0 2 6 8  
end\_of\_the\_skype\_highlighting,

Zoe Kenny +62-85743214559  
begin\_of\_the\_skype\_highlighting  
+ 6 2 - 8 5 7 4 3 2 1 4 5 5 9  
end\_of\_the\_skype\_highlighting

E mail:  
aliansi.rakyat.menggugat@gmail.com

Donations can be made to:

Mandiri Bank Rekening.  
144-000-5472-979 Aslihul

Material donations of essential items, including milk, nappies, sanitary supplies, can be sent to:

Sekretariat Posko ARM: Asrama IKPM-Sumsel, JL. Bausasran, DN. 3 No. 595, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Saturday, 06 November 2010

# Is change possible in Burma?

8 November 2010, by **Danielle Sabai**

Burma: is change possible?  
Danielle Sabai.

In Burma, more than twenty years have passed since the last election on May 27, 1990. The military junta refused to recognize the outcome of the elections, won overwhelmingly by the National League for Democracy (NLD) party formed two years earlier by the Burmese oppositionist Aung San Suu Kyi.

The people of Burma suffer from its strategic position - between China and India, between the Indian Ocean, the Malacca Straits and the China Sea - and its abundance of natural resources: gas, oil, rare wood, precious jewels and so on. These riches are coveted by neighbouring countries with few scruples (China, Thailand and India in particular) who do not hesitate to do business with the junta, helping to limit the effects of international pressure and allowing the military to maintain power through coercion and repression with their main aim being their personal enrichment.

It is in this context that the military junta will organise new parliamentary elections on November 7, 2010. The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC-official name of the junta) will organize the fifth stage of the "roadmap to democracy" of which the seventh and final step is to "build a modern, developed and democratic nation".

Behind the facade of this discourse, the military seek to perpetuate their power through parliamentary elections and the establishment of a civilian government. There is no doubt that their goal is not to give power to civilians but to change their green khaki clothes for civilian garb. In a remodelling of an unprecedented scale, in late August most senior officers left the army in order to stand in the elections. They will be

candidates alongside 26 members of the government.

These elections are held in the wake of two major political crises during which the regime of the Burmese generals has persisted despite international pressure and condemnations: the "Saffron Revolution" led by Buddhist monks in September and October 2007 [1] and the holding of the referendum on the new constitution even though the Irrawaddy delta was devastated by cyclone Nargis in May 2008 [2]. More than ever, the junta seems to control the Burmese political landscape.

The November 7 elections are thus a major political event. The majority of voters are aged under 38 and have never been involved in an election (just three in 50 years). The question is raging among oppositionists and activists in Burma and among exiles as to what extent they could provide opportunities for change. These elections being neither free nor fair, the question arises of whether to participate in the electoral framework proposed by the Burmese junta or to boycott it.

Without trying to resolve this debate, this article tries to give an overview before the vote and describe the issues at stake.

## Transfer of power?

Begun in 2003 and relaunched in 1993, the "roadmap to democracy" fuelled fears in the ranks of the military junta that power might escape them during the process of transfer to a civilian Government. [3]. The junta has therefore done everything to conserve power, and in particular in May 2008 it forced through the adoption of a preliminary draft of a new customized constitution.

Among the most prominent elements

of the constitution which should take effect after the elections, 25% of the seats in the two national parliaments (upper and lower chambers) will be filled by soldiers nominated by the Commander in Chief of the armed forces. The assemblies will appoint a President who must "have military experience" and does not have children of foreign nationality (which excludes the possible candidacy of Aung San Suu Kyi). The ministers for Defence, the Interior and Foreign Affairs will be appointed by the President from a list submitted by... the Commander in Chief of the armed forces. The constitution provides no right of scrutiny over military affairs or control over their expenditure. The amendment of the constitution will require a vote of 75% by members followed by a referendum validated by at least 50% of people of voting age. In other words with 25% of designated military members in both houses, it will be impossible to amend the constitution against their wishes. The Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces is empowered to declare a state of emergency if they perceive a threat of "disintegration of national solidarity". As for the military junta, article 445 guarantees that no legal action can be taken against members of the SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council) and SPDC, the two successive names taken by the junta since it took power in 1988 [4]. Finally, sub section (a) of article 121 of the constitution stipulates that persons who have been imprisoned or convicted are not entitled to stand in the elections. This article excludes from the outset more than 2,171 political prisoners including the main oppositionists and ethnic leaders (379 members of the National League for Democracy (NLD) including Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest since 2003; 40 members of the 88 Generation Students including Min Ko Naing, Ko Ko Gyi and Nilar Thein; 200 ethnic leaders and activists



including the spokesperson Hkun Htun Oo and secretary Sai Nyunt Lwin of the League of Shan Nationalities For Democracy imprisoned since 2005 for respectively 93 and 85 years) [5].

The actions taken leave little doubt as to the role that the military intend to play in the future civilian disposition. Unfortunately, these elections do not set Burma on the road to democracy.

## A controlled process

The electoral process is itself closely controlled by the junta which does not want to see a new major setback as in 1990. The stakes are high: 1,157 seats are to be filled with 326 for the People's Assembly (lower house), 168 for the National Assembly (upper house) and 663 for representatives of the 7 regions (Sagaing, Magwe, Mandalay, Pegu, Irrawaddy, Rangoon and Tenasserim) and 7 States (Kachin, Chin, Shan, Arakan, Karen, Karenni and My) distributed between the people's assemblies and the regional or state assemblies [6].

Out of 47 requests, 37 parties obtained permission to run in the elections. Existing parties, including the NLD, which did not apply for registration were dissolved by the electoral commission. In fact, only the two parties close to the Government, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) led by Prime Minister Thein Sein and the National Unity Party (NUP-formerly the Burma Socialist Programme Party founded by dictator Ne Win in 1974) will be able to compete on a national scale. These two parties will present three times more candidates than the other 35 parties put together. In many constituencies with a Burmese majority, there will only be USDP and NUP candidates. But in nearly 20 constituencies, including Rangoon, a number of opposition candidates will be in competition [7]. This should provide the two pro-government parties with a large majority in the upper and lower chambers as well as in the regional parliaments, the seven regions being populated predominantly by Burmese. According

to this one round electoral system already in place in 1990, the winner is the candidate who gets the most votes irrespective of turnout. Finally, in contests where there is only one candidate, the latter is declared elected without an election being held.

Among the opposition parties, only three have the means to run in a significant number of constituencies: the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP-157 candidates), the Democratic Party led by the oppositionist Thu Wai (DP- 49 candidates) and the National Democratic Force (NDF-163 candidates) led by former NLD leaders. The barriers are financial and organizational. In this country where a third of the population lives below the poverty level and where an employee earns \$50 per month, each candidate must, in order to stand in the election, pay the sum of 500,000 kyats which is equivalent to approximately \$500, non-recoverable. No opposition party has \$580,000 for the financing of candidates at the national level, without counting the cost of the campaign.

At the organizational level, the Burmese opposition is weak and divided. The national council of the NLD, the main opposition force, met on March 29 and unanimously decided to boycott the elections. But in practice, a part of its leadership has formed a new party, the NDF. For them, the absence of NLD candidates leaves no obvious anti-governmental choice for voters. Many parties have been constituted for the elections, their electoral base is weak, or indeed not yet established. The SPDC has wished to see a multiplicity of political parties in order to reduce the votes for the opposition parties. It is possible that for tactical reasons or through political weakness a number of these small parties will not differentiate themselves from the military junta. With the approach of the elections the latter seems to be manoeuvring: funding of the NDF by somebody close to the junta has destabilized the alliance of 6 [8] opposition parties formed in October to oppose the pro-government candidates and work together inside the future parliament. These manoeuvres cast doubt on the independence of the different

candidates and political parties and the risk is great of increasing abstention or the division of the vote among several opposition parties.

## Neither just nor fair elections

To say that these elections are neither fair nor fair is not mere verbiage. The rules laid down by the electoral commission drastically restrict freedom of expression, assembly and organization of political parties. The publications of parties are subject to censorship and election material must not oppose the regime or the army. The organisation of public meetings is not free either. An application must be filed one week in advance specifying the number of participants expected. Finally, in this country where there is no independent press, opposition parties suffer a serious disability.

The restrictive measures do not equally apply to all parties. The USDP represents the transformation into a political party of the powerful USDA (Union Solidarity Development Association), a mass association formed in 1993 one year after the inauguration of General Than Shwe as head of state. The USDA has since fulfilled the function of control of society and repression of social mobilization. Members of the USDA attacked the convoy of Aung San Suu Kyi in 2003 near Depayin with the objective of killing her, and they attacked the monks during the demonstrations of autumn 2007. The USDP therefore receives the political support of the USDA and its financial resources. It also enjoys support from the government and army of whom most high placed members are among the USDP candidates. Its transformation into a political party has not changed its methods. There are accounts of intimidation by USDP members against opposition candidates and voters [9]. The NUP represents the old guard of dictator Ne Win, the head of the State in 1988. The party also has powerful support and financial resources.



# The ethnic question, a central question

No democratic Burmese State will emerge without taking into account the demands of ethnic minorities which represent nearly one-third of the population [10]. Prior to independence in 1948, the Panglong Agreement (February 12, 1947) drew the contours of the rights of ethnic minorities. The guarantees granted were never really respected and shortly after independence the first armed conflicts broke out with the government, with some persisting today. In 1989, a year after taking power, the junta began negotiations with the ethnic groups at war so as to agree a cease-fire. Most groups signed and the junta pursued a war without mercy against the other groups.

The armies of Wa and Kokang, serving until 1987 the Burmese Communist Party, were among the first signatories. In exchange for a cease-fire, they were allowed to cultivate opium and trade "without interference". Entire border areas [11] were thus left under the control of armed ethnic militias. The junta exploited the divisions that resulted between different ethnic groups, with some organizations such as the Karen National Union and Kachin Organization for Independence objecting strongly to the cultivation and sale of drugs.

In April 2009 the junta decided to retrieve the territories in the hands of the armed ethnic groups. It ordered that the groups that had signed cease-fire agreements should be transformed into a new border force guard under the authority of the government. Most armed groups agreed but the most important including the United Wa State Army (UWSA), the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) refused. In August 2009, the situation deteriorated when the Tatmadaw (Burmese regular army) launched an attack against the army of the National Democratic Alliance of Myanmar in Kokang territory. More than 30,000 people took refuge in

China. A serious subject of discontent for Beijing whose main objective is the maintenance of stability of 2,192 miles of common border. On his trip to Burma last June, Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao let it be known that he wanted to see a broad participation of ethnic groups in the electoral process in order to increase its credibility and reduce the risk of tensions on the borders.

The participation of ethnic groups in the elections was however not agreed. To participate in the elections could mean that the ethnic groups recognize the validity of the constitution of 2008 that denies the right of self-determination and renders armed militias illegal. Participation would also recognize the future organization of the country under the control of a centralized executive against their demand for a Union or a federal state [12]. Since August the UWSA has made it known that it rejected the elections and will not allow their conduct in the territory it controls. During September, as a reprisal for the refusal to integrate into the border guard force, the election commission refused to register three Kachin parties as well as all the independent candidates for members of these organizations, depriving the Kachin of independent political representation. On September 16, the commission announced that the elections would not be held in 3,401 villages in Kachin, Karen, Karenni, Mon and Shan states because it was not possible "to ensure free and fair elections"(sic!). This decision deprives about 1.5 million voters in the regions which do not have a Burmese majority [13]. "An implicit confession of the failure of regime to impose its candidates and elections in the regions inhabited by ethnic minorities" [14]. One of the first consequences of the elections could be the return of war with the various ethnic groups [15]

## To participate or not in the elections?

There is little doubt that the conditions in which the November 7 elections take place leave little room

for a (happy) surprise as was the case in 1990. The government has done everything to ensure that pro-government parties, primarily the USDP, win the elections, including in the ethnic areas controlled by armed groups. Parliament will consist mainly of pro-government members and appointed soldiers. The share of progressive deputies and independent representatives of ethnic groups in comparison will be relatively very low. An unknown is the balance of power between USDP elected officials and those belonging to the NUP. This latter party is composed of members loyal to the dictator Ne Win, deposed in 1988 and replaced by the current junta. Some believe that its members are relatively independent of the government and may in the context of a parliamentary process gain in autonomy. It remains to be seen to what extent this party is supported by the military.

It remains nonetheless that these elections represent a major political event for an entire generation of Burmese. Any activist involved in Burma political life, in the country or outside, must decide on the ultimate issue; whether or not to participate in the elections.

Although the electoral process is not democratic, a significant number of parties have decided to participate in the elections. The decision to boycott the elections by the NLD and several ethnic parties has been very controversial. The boycott of the election could undermine its credibility if it was accompanied by a very low participation. In this case, the international community would be very much obliged to denounce the masquerade. But the experience of the referendum in 2008 proves that the junta is quite able to falsify the results. The critics believe that not participating in the elections reinforces automatically the number of pro-government deputies having regard to the electoral system in place. In this perspective, for many parties, these elections represent "the only valid option". And participating does not imply accepting them, but considering them as inevitable. Groups and associations activist in Burma have also argued that it is dangerous to rely on the international

community whose divisions over the past 20 years have not allowed the imposition of any change to the current regime.

A number of groups within Burmese civil society think that "elections represent the first opportunity in 20 years to be able to mobilize communities on the issue of their democratic rights". This is a "chance to develop the political consciousness of the people, particularly among young people who have not had the opportunity to vote before" [16]. They believe that the elections will bring a bit of democracy and freedom in the country. The establishment of a Parliament could offer the possibility to express opposition. Knowing that the elections are legislative and won't bring a change of regime in the immediate future, their stated goal is to work for the mobilization of a base which could lead to new elections by 2015. This position is also defended by "think tanks" and major international non-governmental organisations who see the possibility of a major political transformation with the emergence of new political parties and new leaders [17]. One of the arguments put forward by these groups is "the

absence of any results brought about by sanctions" [18]. Instead of continuing on this path, they propose Burma be reintegrated into the international community, which the electoral process could allow, if it is not decried by the international community.

## Provisional conclusion

Nobody seriously thinks that elections will bring significant changes in the coming months. The military junta will continue to run the economy for its own benefit and to the detriment of the Burmese people as a whole even after the establishment of a "civilian" Government

It is hard to see too much which could prevent it. Inside Burma it does not feel threatened by a weak and divided opposition. At the international level, economic sanctions imposed by the United States and Europe have fizzled out, especially because states such as France and Germany oppose any sanctions relating to strategic sectors which bring money to the junta and

help keep it in power because these sanctions threaten their own interests in Burma [19]. Calls for the immediate release of Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners do not obscure the cynicism and the lack of political will of the Western and Asian states to fight against the military junta.

The Burmese generals do not need to hold fair and democratic elections since other states and international organizations are willing to settle for a parody of democratic elections. Some states wish it to be believed (or want to believe) that supporting the electoral process is equivalent to supporting incremental change towards democracy. In fact, they are looking to the end of sanctions and the opportunity to invest in the country. More and more articles explain that the path of democracy in Burma lies through development (and therefore investments).

The latest victim is the Burmese pro-democracy movement, deeply divided by the difficult question of whether or not to boycott or participate in elections while there is no doubt that the big winner will be once more the ruling junta.

# Women workers help line

**7 November 2010, by Bushra Khaliq**

Bushra Khaliq: I have been involved with the World Social Forum since 2004, when I got the opportunity to attend the WSF at Mumbai, India. Then I attended the WSF in Nairobi, Kenya (2007) and Belem, Brazil (2009). I was also involved in organizing the social forum in Karachi, Pakistan (2006).

In Detroit, I have seen more young people taking a very active part in this year's social forum. Their enthusiasm and activism with so many innovative ideas were expressed during the opening march and demonstrations. I'm seeing more and more young people becoming involved and

understanding the need to take to the streets.

Their concern with issues of war, the environment and jobs are very important for us in Pakistan. We are facing a deepening economic crisis over the next decade. It's a great opportunity for the social movement activists to connect with each other and exchange views on particular issues.

If the number of registrations at the U.S. Social Forum is around 15,000, that shows good participation and a qualitative as well as quantitative growth. I have seen this in the Social Forum and particularly in the Peoples

Movement Assemblies. We have also heard that at the G-20 meeting in Toronto (occurring at the same time) there have been at least 600 protesters arrested so far. All this is a positive sign for the possibility of doing something effective and productive in the next period.

We believe in strong networking with like-minded organizations building workers' and women's solidarity. The struggles of the workers and women in all areas confront the same repressive forces trying to push them back. Solidarity and the ISO invited me to come to Portland and San Francisco as well as socialist

conferences in Chicago and Oakland.

The Women Workers' Help Line

ATC: Please describe the project you work on.

BK: The Women Workers Help Line was founded in 2000, with technical and moral support from Labour Party Pakistan (LPP). Since then we have made tremendous efforts to build the women's movement in Pakistan, and raise the class question as well.

We organize women at the grassroots level with special attention to the informal sector and home-based workers, who are critical to our economy yet very much neglected and low-paid.

Women in Pakistan are supposed to bear full responsibility for managing the household. Due to the religious influence, women's mobility has always been restricted "which the factory owners really love, because they can keep the women workers in their homes and the women bear the double burden of low wages and domestic responsibilities.

Their wages are 1500-2000 rupees (about \$23; \$1 = 85 PKRs) per month; unfortunately the labor laws do not cover this category of workers; the government doesn't have the statistics for this sector and is reluctant to ratify the International Labor Organization Convention 177 (on home work, adopted by the ILO in 1996). All tools for home workers are their own responsibility.

Women's rights and workers' rights are not the priority of the government, and it is worse when the military is in power (as it has been for 33 of the 62 years of Pakistan's independence). The official minimum wage is 7000 rupees (\$83), but we are demanding a minimum of 15,000 (about \$178) per month. We also demand the legal recognition of these workers so their contributions can be acknowledged and they get the right to be "mainstreamed" within the labor movement. Then they would come under social security protection as well.

Bricklaying, farm workers and fishery workers are also unregistered, along

with home-based workers, and aren't covered even under the health and safety law. We have almost 72 labor laws, but none of these workers are covered by them.

WWHL doesn't operate as a "hot line." It's a support network. We have a longterm vision, especially for working women who are unregistered, but also about women workers in the political process.

In the political parties women's participation is very low, particularly in the upper structures of the parties where very few women participate. Women make up 17% of the National Assembly, but they are the sisters and wives of the ex-politicians and generals, none of whom represent working-class women. So working-class women's issues are not properly discussed.

There is a legal quota for women representatives, but when a party takes a large number of seats most of the women are not directly elected (from a district) but from an at-large list. Only 16 out of 76 women in the National Assembly have won office through constituency elections. The at-large women tend to be political patronage and family appointments.

Building Women's Leadership

ATC: What is WWHL's relationship to the LPP? Can you tell us something about its structures and how women become leaders?

BK: WWHL is politically affiliated with the LPP but with its own, independent structures. We don't have male members and all the officers are women. When we talk about the political orientation of the WWHL, we are very close to the social movements. If it's a question of the bricklayers or the industrial workers' movements, we are very close to them; but our struggles are all women.

Leadership development comes from the grassroots. Membership of the WWHL is open to all working-class women. At the same time we have supported the formation of home-based workers' unions. We have around 5000 WWHL members, then a general leadership body of 21 women

and a seven-member executive council.

That leadership is representative of grassroots structures; one of our executive council members, for example, is from the slumdwellers' movement. During the past five years we've been working very closely with the slumdwellers' movement in Lahore.

In the struggle of the lawyers' movement which forced (military dictator) Musharraf to step down in 2007-08, the role of women in the lawyers' movement was very important. We produced a whole book to document "Women in the Lawyers' Movement." Women in Pakistan tend to be excluded, but women played a huge role in the forefront of this political and social upheaval.

There are brilliant examples of women who were initially reluctant to step out and speak with us. But we have gone door-to-door in their communities. We encourage the formation of a group of women, bringing them together as a unit to talk about the issues facing them.

If they are housewives, we discuss their educational and health issues. If we go to the factory areas, we talk about the factory laws and their rights as workers. We investigate where the factory laws are being broken, and we can call them into our offices for training. If they have the potential to become local political leaders, we can give them special training in that area.

We offer literacy training, but the second purpose of the school is to discuss the economic and social issues occurring around them, and finally involving them in marches and demonstrations. This is our strength "women led their own Women's Day and Labor Day marches. In April 2009, over 20,000 participated in a mass Punjab Tenants Association rally at the Okara military farm (part of an ongoing struggle against the military seizure of farmers' land).

WWHL members are not all members of Labour Party Pakistan, but we actively encourage them not to go to the religious parties. We encourage them to go to the parties that support

socialism â€” there are seven left parties, with the LPP the most vibrant and active in building the social movements. Socialism is the only alternative for Pakistan.

The Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) was the party of the masses, but after so many years its spirit has declined and the leadership is more the Bhutto family business. They are primarily concerned with following the course of the former Musharraf regime and privatization of state assets.

Our youth group call themselves “progressive young workers,” age 16-24. This is the next layer of our leaders.

ATC: Can you outline the basic social conditions in Pakistan and the demands of the LPP?

BK: Twenty thousand children die of diarrhea every year. There are eight million children not going to school. Education is supposed to be universal â€” Pakistan signed all the international conventions, but they aren’t met. Girls become home-based workers, staying at home with their mothers. This is more visible in the suburbs of the big cities, while in the countryside agricultural child labor is more prevalent.

Only 10% of Pakistan’s budget is for social welfare â€” 0.5% for health, 2% for education â€” compared to 30% for debt service and 60% for the military.

Industry is in decline as all the nationalized industries have been privatized; even telecommunications have been sold to an Arab consortium. The assets sold off include railways, banks and the postal service. We still have a public school system and hospitals, poorly administered â€” in some hospitals medicines are free of charge but others charge high prices. Water and electricity have mostly

been privatized.

These are our basic demands:

â€¢ Legal recognition for workers in the informal sector

â€¢ At least 10% of the budget for education and 5% for health care

â€¢ Uniform basic standards of education for all children (there are currently 28,000 unregistered, unregulated madrassas out of 40,000), and removal of hatred from the textbooks

â€¢ A 15,000 rupee monthly minimum wage

â€¢ End of the U.S. occupation of Afghanistan and the drone attacks. U.S. intervention must be opposed not only by the countries affected, but also by the U.S. population.

â€¢ End the privatization agenda.

Postscript: ATC: How has WWHL’s work changed since the flood?

BK: Initially we were involved in providing relief items. On September 1 I visited Kot Addu and a few of the 300 camps in the Lakhay area and wrote up a report. The women and their families were facing the huge challenge of restarting life from scratch. The women I talked to were very worried about not having cash or in-kind goods to purchase clothes for their family, particularly their children, for the Eid-ul-Fitr [celebrating the end of Ramadan â€” ed.]. Winter will be approaching and they did not have warm clothes, blankets and quilts.

As the floodwaters receded, people were beginning to shift from temporary camps back to their villages. They were walking, riding cycles, tractor trolleys or donkey

carts, and loaded down with usable items whether empty water cans, boxes, rations or animals â€” often goats and poultry.

Broken roads, caved-in bridges, tilted railway tracks, ravaged crops and the rotten smell of stagnant water presented a sad picture of the land, which was lush green with standing crops only a month before.

Some families returned to their ravaged villages only to find their houses have collapsed, either partially or completely. The majority in these villages are sick, suffering from fever and malaria. So the women not only take up reconstruction work without waiting for outside help, but they are also looking after sick family members.

Since most of the relief operations are limited to the camps, there is a real fear is that those returning to their villages will be forgotten. Being in their own devastated and destroyed houses does not mean they are safe and out of the misery.

Now we are more focused on following the rights-based campaigns:

â€¢ Gender-based discrimination/violence

â€¢ Women’s representation and effective role in decision-making for reconstruction

â€¢ Post-disaster situation of women

â€¢ Impact of the environmental changes on working-class women

â€¢ Demanding cancellation of the foreign debt, and more of the budget in the social sector to include women’s development.

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## The Revolutionary Workers’ Party-Mindanao



# **(RPM-M) and the Left in the Philippines**

**5 November 2010, by Pierre Rousset**



The armament of a combatant of the RPM/RPA who is protecting the delegates to the congress: a grenade launcher attached to an assault rifle.

The RPM held last August its second congress. Implanted above all in a zone where the “three peoples” of Mindanao cohabit, it occupies an original place in the Filipino Left - a radical Left where the question of unity remains unresolved. The Revolutionary Workers’ Party (Mindanao) - or RPM-M to use its Tagalog initials - held its congress in the Philippines, in a guerrilla camp, under the protection of a few dozen combatants. Not out of old-fashioned romanticism, but of necessity: its members are threatened by many armed groups. It is impossible under these conditions to meet like anyone else in a city, even in a discreet meeting-room; the danger is too great.

Nine years after its foundation in 2001, the RPM-M thus held its Second Congress, in the mountains of Mindanao, a big island of in the south of the Filipino archipelago. As its name indicates, it is indeed above all a “Mindanaoan” party: it acts in the most militarized region of the country, marked in particular by a very long conflict between the government and the militant organizations that are implanted in the Muslim populations, the “Moros”. Rather than go back over the congress itself - for that I would refer readers to the above-mentioned report already published on this subject -, I would like to try to explain what makes the originality of the RPM-M within the Filipino left.

## **The rebellious**

## **offspring of the CPP**

The first element of explanation is to be found in the contradictory heritage of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). This party, Maoist, was in the 1970s the only party capable of organizing resistance to the dictatorial regime of President Ferdinand Marcos. Because of this it profoundly marked a whole generation of activists. However it proved unable, at the beginning of the 1980s, to understand that the dictatorship would be overthrown by a new combination of majority mass mobilization and minority military rebellion, and not as a result of an offensive of the guerrilla forces, as envisaged by the leadership of the party.

The heritage of the CPP is deeply ambivalent. It incarnated a great revolutionary and militant tradition, but also very bureaucratic orientations and practices. It experienced terrible internal purges, fed by a paranoiac fear of infiltration. Whereas a full-scale revaluation of its references was becoming urgent, its leadership refused to organize a debate in the party by holding a congress, causing many people to leave the party and leading to several splits in the 1980s and 1990s. Since then, the party has embarked on an ultra-sectarian trajectory, going so far as to assassinate cadres of other movements on the left.

The majority of the present-day currents of the radical Left in the Philippines, including the RPM-M, come from the Communist Party. All of them have been confronted with the same challenge: to preserve the revolutionary traditions of the past while profoundly modifying the political and programmatic conceptions inherited from the CPP.

Some of them have taken up this challenge with more success than others. The RPM-M is one of the organizations which have best succeeded.

## **A new pluralist Left**

The second element of explanation lies in the form taken by the crisis of Filipino Maoism. Initially, a space emerged which allowed very minority components of the Filipino Marxist Left, non-Maoist, to establish their existence outside its ranks and to enlarge their audience. Ten years later, ruptures occurred within the CPP. However, in a clandestine party and in the absence of debate organized on a national level, the splits took place in a disorganized fashion. In addition to the individual departure of many members, various structures of the CPP declared their independence. This was the case of commissions (united front...) and secretariats (peasant...), but also of important territorial, regional organizations, in the North, the centre and the South of the archipelago.

The crisis of the CPP thus gave rise to several revolutionary organizations, often coming from a regional history. Since then there have been attempts at regroupment (some are underway at present), but still today, to understand what are the various components of the radical Left in the Philippines, you have to know where they come from: from what region? from what sector of activity?

The RPM-M comes from the regional organization that was responsible for the party’s work in the centre of Mindanao (thus its name, at the time: Central Mindanao Region or CMR). This region broke en bloc, in 1993, with the leadership of the CPP, taking with it all the structures that were



under its responsibility: the underground party, the guerrilla forces (which took the name of Revolutionary People's Army, RPA), mass work, legal organizations... The essential characteristic of the CMR was that it had the responsibility for the "link" between the "three peoples" of Mindanao: the "majority nationality" in the Philippines ("Christians" for short), the Moros (Muslims) and the Lumads (mountain tribes), the latter still constituting one of the principal social bases of the RPM-M, which is quite original.

## **A new generation of activists**

The third element of explanation is the question of the transition between generations of activists. Even more than in many other countries, this constitutes a challenge in the Philippines. The "historic" cadres of the revolutionary Left fought under the Marcos dictatorship, overthrown in 1986, a situation that the majority of today's activists never experienced. The congress of the RPM-M showed that this transition between generations was well underway: the majority of the members of the new national leadership are "young" (in the sense of "post-dictatorship").

Between the period of the CPP and today, the current which constituted the RPM-M has undergone a profound political evolution. Internationalist and in search of an alternative to Maoism, it joined the Fourth International where it is playing a growing role. New sectors of activity have been developed, such as the electoral field. The conception of the armed struggle has changed. The "democratic question" has become a central preoccupation in the functioning of the party, in relations with the social movements and in the recognition of the right to self-determination of the tribal communities...

However, the RPM-M cannot escape the constraints imposed by the situation in Mindanao. The peace talks with the government have not been fruitful. The party must always protect itself from many armed threats. So even though stress is laid on legal mass activity, there remains a

clandestine party equipped with a guerrilla force with a "defensive" role.

## **An uncertain situation on the left**

The fourth element of explanation relates to the difficulty of constituting a party on the level of the whole archipelago. Most of the Filipino organizations are mainly implanted in a limited number of provinces and social sectors, according to their origins, even if they have broadened their political networks. The RPM-M is conscious of the problem and impelled a regroupment with other regional structures coming from the CPP. But this fusion was a painful failure. It is now the turn of the Party of the Force of the Masses (PLM) to attempt a regroupment, in the region of Manila. The question of unity is posed and will be posed in the future with other formations of the radical Left, such as the Workers' Party (PM), again in Manila, or the Marxist-Leninist Party of the Philippines (MLPP), originating in Central Luzon.

Akbayan - the Party of Citizens' Action -, a legal formation, has become one of the main components of the Filipino Left. The influence of currents which were never in the Communist Party, like Bisig, is dominant there, even though it also includes former members of the CPP. At the time of the recent presidential elections, Akbayan supported the candidature of "Noynoy" Aquino, who won. Some of its cadres today have semi-governmental responsibilities, while knowing that the new regime will not break with the elites. This "cohabitation" should in theory finish fairly quickly, once the experience has been gone through, with the risk, if not of opening a crisis within the party, of weakening the militant Left as a whole.

The radical Left of the Philippines remains the most important in South-east Asia, but it has lost the political initiative over the last twenty years - due to a considerable extent to the ultra-sectarian course of the CPP. No one organization can respond to this situation on its own and the question

of unity remains sharply posed.

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## **Simplified outline of the Filipino political left**

The Filipino Left includes a large number of organizations and currents. To simplify things, let us regroup them in three "families".

### **The Communist Party.**

Although weakened, it remains the main underground organization, and the best armed. It embarked after the splits in 1993 on an ultra-sectarian course. It leads the New People's Army (NPA), the National Democratic Front (NDF) and an important "bloc" of legal forces called "reaffirmist" (RA), because they "reaffirmed" the validity of the orientations laid down in 1968 and in the principal programmatic documents of the CPP. The "reaffirmists" have elected members of Parliament.

### **The "Rejectionists" (RJ).**

These are the currents, within the CPP, who "rejected" the line of 1968 and demanded a re-evaluation of the party's orientation. They split in 1993 and often combine an underground party and a legal electoral party (or front). In the region of the capital, the splits gave rise in particular to the Party of the Force of the Masses (PLM) and the Workers' Party (PM); in the Visayas to the Revolutionary Workers' Party-Philippines (RPM-P); in the central region of Mindanao to the Revolutionary Workers' Party-Mindanao (RPM-M). The Marxist-Leninist Party of the Philippines (MLPP) comes from a later split in central Luzon. There exist other smaller organizations that we cannot mention here.

### **The "independent" Marxist and socialist Left.**

Various Marxist currents never belonged to the Communist Party.

They came together for the most part in 1985-1986 to give rise to the socialist organization Bisig. Today this organization plays a big role in the legal "citizens' action" party Akbayan! some of whose components also come from the CPP. Akbayan! has elected members of Parliament.

A unitary framework brings together all the organizations apart from the CPP and the "reaffirmists": Struggle of the Masses (LnM), but this coalition at present lacks dynamism.

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## Asian links

Today links are being strengthened between radical parties in Asia - and the network of Asian contacts from which the NPA in France benefits is broadening accordingly.

### IIRE-Manila.

The experience of the very young International Institute of Research and Education in Manila is from this point of view very interesting. The parent institute opened its doors in 1982 in Amsterdam, organizing educational courses intended for activists from all continents. It has just seen the birth of two offspring in Asia: firstly in Manila (Philippines) and then, even more recently, in Islamabad (Pakistan). Last August, IIRE-Manila held its second educational course. We lived, ate and met on the rather cramped premises of the Institute, even though it meant removing tables and chairs, then putting pouffes on the floor to make

room for the 22 participants and lecturers (some of whom were not able to remain for the whole three weeks of political exchanges). Even though some Europeans were there (Dutch and French), most of those present came from eight countries of Asia, which were, in addition to the Philippines: Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Run by activists who are close to the Fourth International, IIRE-Manila is open to the different components of the Asian Left. The organizations present were of varied origins, including four Filipino currents who were invited to provide participants or lecturers. IIRE-Manila thus contributes to the development of regional links between a growing number of parties. A relatively long educational course ensures a quality of exchange that short conferences do not permit. Thanks to such activities, some organizations which have known each other for a long time are starting to collaborate, more closely than in the past, in a common political project. The sessions also make it possible to invite other organizations with which relations have remained tenuous (this was the case for Indonesia) or even to invite organizations in countries where until very recently there was no contact (this was the case for Bangladesh).

### Regional network of parties.

Thanks to an initiative taken on this occasion by the Socialist Party of Malaysia (PSM) - the only significant far-left organization in that country -, a new regional network of radical parties is gradually coming into existence. It benefits from the previous experience of the Asia-Pacific

International Solidarity Conference (APISC) which was organized for about ten years by the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) of Australia. When the DSP went into crisis and finally split, the Conference lost its dynamism. The new network is trying not to depend too much on the engagement of only one national organization, to provide a better guarantee that it will be lasting.

### Visit to Paris.

At the beginning of October, the Asia-Europe People's Forum (AEPF) met in Brussels. Following the meeting, ten Asian delegates came to Paris to get a first-hand impression of the struggles for social rights that were taking place in France. They came from Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. They were able to meet researchers, the Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development (CCFD), the Lebreton Centre, the organization Right to Housing (DAL), Roms and Asian migrants, Ritimo (an information network specialising in international solidarity) and activists of Attac, the Emmaüs charity and the Solidaires trade union federation. The NPA also had the occasion to meet with them at length. The exchanges were all the more interesting because the French "social climate" is attracting very lively interest in many countries and because we had never up till then met some of these organizations (Indonesia), or had not yet had on the opportunity to receive them in France (Malaysia, certain Filipinos). The NPA has today more or less regular contacts in a dozen Asian countries, sometimes with one political organization in a given country, sometimes with several.

## Labyrinth of bourgeois politics

5 November 2010, by **Åœemit Å†?rak**

These two phenomena of course existed well before 1980. The Turkish economy was borne by an export-

oriented industry which constituted the outlet for the rural exodus from the overpopulated countryside of

Anatolia. Meanwhile, after the major Kurdish revolts supported by the traditional structures against the new

centralising Turkish Republic which denied national diversity within its territory, in particular the Sheikh Said rebellion of 1925, a Kurdish national movement had emerged during the 1970s based on Kurdish students originating from the Turkish left. Nevertheless an essential element of this period has disappeared: the movements of workers and youth were crushed by the military coup of 1980. The brutal repression that followed paved the way for a neo-liberal reformatting of society.

## Two structuring dynamics

1. An export economy firmly anchored in globalized capitalism. The integration of Turkish capitalism in the world economy is not new but it has particularly increased over the past thirty years. From the beginning of the 1980s Turkish capitalism increasingly rested on exports rather than the domestic market. This evolution was strongly encouraged by neoliberal governments under the leadership of Turgut Â-zal, whose policy aimed at integrating Turkey into global capitalism by greater authorisation of imports and, above all, by transforming it into a competitive country on the international market. Thus, Turkey exported 3 billion dollars worth of goods in 1980 as against 132 billion dollars worth in 2008. This growth was not linear, Turkish exports were still “only” \$28 billion in 2000 but grew sharply between 2001 and 2005. This phenomenon has gone hand in hand with increased industrialization destined mainly for the European Union (EU) and the United States. The share of manufactured products, notably textile and car products, in exports rose from 10% to 92% over the same period with the emergence of new industrial areas in Anatolia in cities like Mersin, Konya, Kayseri, Denizli and with the appearance of many SMEs and a provincial industrial bourgeoisie. This evolution has thus accelerated since 2002 and the coming to power of the AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, Party of Justice and Development, founded in August 2001), especially with the three-year strategic plan for exports and the

transformation of labour relations legislation.

Turkish capitalism thus became, during the 2000s, regionally dominant and capable of achieving unprecedented levels of accumulation. In an anecdotal but significant way, Istanbul has become the fourth biggest city of the world in terms of billionaires - twenty-eight! - behind New York, Moscow and London.

2. A still unresolved national question. Out of the many Kurdish organisations arising at the end of the 1970s, only the PKK (Partiya karkerên Kurdistan, founded in 1978 by Kurdish leftist students) plays a major role and can claim to be the political movement of the Kurds in the southeast of the Turkey. After some difficult initial years, the PKK succeeded both in maintaining its organization under the dictatorship, conquering a broad social base and attracting many activists particularly due to state racism and the extreme harshness of repression against the vast majority of the Kurdish population in the southeast of the country. Clashes between the PKK and the Turkish army and its allies - Kurdish village militias (korucu) and Kurdish Hizbullah, an ultra-sectarian and violent religious grouping, divided into two rival factions, Menzil and Ilim - degenerated into a genuine civil war with its theatre of operations in Turkish Kurdistan (in the southeast of the Turkish state) but also occasionally the big cities of the country. These clashes reached their climax between 1995 and 1996, a period during which the security institutions (the army but also the secret services) thoroughly used their autonomy through the “state of emergency” procedures in Turkish Kurdistan or through the Jitem units (clandestine police cells responsible for counter-terrorism).

The “Kurdish question” was thus relegated to a “simple” military matter while the plural nature of the Turkey was denied for the benefit of the “flag, language, nation” triptych. The deaths of many conscripts during clashes between the army and the PKK, in the absence of an alternative audible discourse, strengthened Kurdish nationalism while military ceremonies

and the funerals of conscripts were an opportunity for demonstrations of Turkish ultra-nationalist force.

Today, Abdullah Â-calan (“Apo”, one of the founders of the PKK, captured in Kenya by the Turkish secret services in 1999 and sentenced to death in June 1999, though this was subsequently commuted to life imprisonment), the historic leader of the PKK and the subject of a strong cult of personality, remains the centre of gravity of the Kurdish movement despite the crisis undergone by the movement after his arrest. It is the main, if not the only source of legitimacy for the vast majority of the Kurdish masses of the country, particularly among young people who are primarily “Apoists” rather than supporters of the BDP (Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi, Party of Peace and Democracy, founded in 2008, when the previous legal Kurdish party, the DIP was banned) as such. The crisis undergone by the PKK after the arrest of Â-calan has in no way finished it off.

Thus, the AKP’s project of “democratic opening”, which sought to make changes in relation to a Kurdish situation which had become intolerable, while avoiding dialogue with the PKK, failed precisely because of the extremely determined and tough reaction of the organization which did not intend to become thus marginalized. These clashes, leading to the deaths of Kurdish combatants and civilians on the one hand and Turkish army conscripts on the other, led to an increased ethnicization of politics. Further evidence was the success of the boycott of the constitutional referendum organized by the BDP in Turkish Kurdistan in its campaign for “democratic self-government” (a quasi-federal model). These are two indications that it is definitively impossible to have a political settlement of the issue excluding the main component of the Kurdish movement. Such a solution has been advanced by the most important capitalist sectors, like the Â-zal government in 1993 before the military escalation in the mid-1990s so as to strengthen Turkish capitalism.

# The meaning of the AKP government

Discussions aimed at politically and socially situating the AKP party in power since 2002 are obfuscated by its "Islamist" label, some of its initiatives of "opening" and the question of "social base".

The adjective "Islamist", often joined with that of "moderate", is probably the most problematic as regards the AKP, since this category means nothing other than the use of a certain religious lexicon without taking account of the real social content and political project characterising an organization. Undoubtedly, on the one hand, the AKP originates from the Milli Görüş (National Vision) current, the main current which granted a central place to religious references in its speech and discourse, while on the other hand the AKP has "moderated" this reference in the sense that it is less marked - with acceptance of the principle of "secularism" (Turkish "secularism" relates much more to control of religious institutions by the state than to separation, and thus the directorate of religious affairs is a state body; while imams are normally trained in public schools and are on the public payroll) and the view that religion is not considered as a source of political legitimacy. However, these notes do not teach us anything about the class character of the AKP. If its electoral base is undoubtedly popular, allowing it to obtain an absolute majority in Parliament, the AKP is located firmly in the framework of bourgeois interests.

It is possible to schematically distinguish three sectors of this bourgeoisie:

1. The conservative-nationalist petty bourgeoisie: artisans and small Anatolian and urban employers, more significant employers originating more recently from this petty bourgeoisie and constituting the spinal column of "Muslim" capital, junior civil servants, landowners and so on. Its aspirations are essentially the defence of small capital faced with the upheavals of

global capitalism, moral conservatism and nationalism. It has traditionally formed the base of the parliamentary conservative parties or political Islam and has been divided between the current ruling party (AKP) and ultra-nationalist formations (MHP, Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, the Nationalist Movement Party) or Islamic parties outside the AKP (Saadet Partisi, Party of Bliss). However, a part of this petty bourgeoisie is integrated into the export strategy and has benefitted from it, directly or indirectly. It has accumulated sufficient capital to direct large SMEs which are the motors of capitalism in the cities and the many industrialized towns of Anatolia. This former petty bourgeoisie in full ascent is the AKP's most faithful base.

2. The "liberal" bourgeoisie - a big bourgeoisie deeply integrated into globalized capitalism, business leaders, intellectual and academic sectors, which, despite tensions, back the AKP in the absence of a credible "liberal" political alternative. Its aspirations are a transformation of society in accordance with neo-liberalism which would allow further integration into global capitalism using the advantages of the country (industrial fabric, basic infrastructure, a skilled workforce at relatively low cost). From this point of view, accession to the European Union, including the democratic transformations that entails, comes before any other project of this "liberal" bourgeoisie, even if this perspective, vaguely equated with a better quality of life, benefits from much broader support (notably from Kurdish nationalism, to which we will return). The AKP's strength comes from its ability to unite, during its accession to power, the small conservative petty bourgeoisie with the "liberal" bourgeoisie. The quotation marks we employ here are just to highlight the extremely ambiguous nature of this "liberalism". The bourgeoisie has emerged over the course of decades but not against the existing political authority (as in France or Britain) but completely in its shadow. Under the regime established by Mustafa Kemal the first large industrial fortunes were made in the shadow of the new state and its desire to create a bourgeoisie which

was "industrial, Turkish and Muslim", as against the Jewish and Christian commercial bourgeoisie (despite the great declarations on the secular nature of the new regime).

The penchant for political liberalism of the Turkish big bourgeoisie has generally proved limited. Faced with the emergence of social protest movements during the 1970s, it quickly fell behind army and state repression. Thus the TİSİAD (Association of Businessmen and Industrialists of Turkey), one of the main organizations of big business, clearly supported the coup of 1980. Today, the same employers' organization still representing the big bourgeoisie defends the European perspective and in this context the cultural rights of the Kurds (such as the use of their mother tongue in education). Indeed, in the current phase of capitalism and in the absence of a real social and political opposition this bourgeoisie defends the political changes of "liberalisation" of the regime in order to resolve those questions which, in its opinion, may "weaken Turkey" (i.e. Turkish capitalism), particularly the Kurdish national question. It is, in essence, a desire for parliamentary democracy laced with federalism which does not however find any significant political outlet.

3. The intermediate categories and the statist, militarist and nationalist bourgeoisie: high and middle civil servants, judges, some "liberal" professional factions such as lawyers or university "intellectuals" and especially military personnel (officers and general staff) who constitute the backbone of the defenders of "Kemalism". We should add to this non-exhaustive list a military bourgeoisie which not only developed in the shadow of the state but owes its existence to the very significant military budgets. Thus, the work of the academic İsmet Akça (See İsmet Akça: Military-Economic Structure in Turkey - Present Situation, Problems, and Solutions, TESEV, July 2010) has particularly well demonstrated the "collective capitalist" nature of the military institution. The leadership of the Turkish army not only constitute the armed fist of capital but are themselves capitalists, either through

the direct economic investment of the army, the activities of foundations that are linked to the latter or more widely the military-industrial sector which exists thanks to military contracts and recycles retired officers and their families.

## Success and impasses of the referendum

The position of the AKP as well as the specific features of its constitutional project can be understood by its relations with these three sectors. The maintenance of a large number of old provisions which suit the conservative nationalist petty bourgeoisie (the unitary character of the State and no reference to national diversity), the cosmetic and formal advances of political liberalization (reduction in the powers of military courts) and, above all, a taking in hand of the judicial milieu close to the third sector of the bourgeoisie and hostile to the AKP. It has thus used its dominant political position very logically to consolidate its position and to strengthen itself in relation to the sectors of the bourgeoisie that are hostile to it, by adopting a project falling short of "parliamentary democracy" despite the impotent criticisms of a certain number of liberals and the frontal opposition, although doomed to failure, of the statist bourgeoisie. It should of course be noted that these tensions are strictly confined within the limits of capitalism. Thus, it appears that the "new" Constitution of the AKP is the adapted declension of relations between capitalist sectors of the long process of neoliberal reformatting of society launched globally at the beginning of the 1980s and initiated in Turkey by Turgut Â-zal.

In the face of this project several opposition fronts have emerged:

- The neoliberal "no" with notably the TÃœS?AD representing big capital and finding this project too far from bourgeois parliamentarianism.
- The ultra-nationalist "no" of the MHP. Seeking to differentiate itself,

the extreme right denounces the general policy of the AKP believing that the latter makes too many concessions to the Kurds (in its attempt at "democratic opening") even if there is no provision for the rights of the Kurds in the draft constitution. It amounts then to a reactionary opposition.

- The ambiguous "no" of the main parliamentary opposition party, the "Kemalist" CHP mixing some vague social considerations with a nationalist and statist discourse.

- We should give a specific place to the "boycott" campaign initiated by the BDP. Indeed, the Kurdish movement and its leadership realize that this draft contributes absolutely nothing for the Kurds, which is undeniable, and call for a boycott rather than a "no" vote. This tactic reflects the structuring character of the Kurdish national question. Indeed, the political situation in Turkish Kurdistan is quite different from the rest of the country. Benefiting from mass support, the BDP (at the instigation of Ocalan) has boycotted the referendum, and has launched a campaign in favour of "democratic self-government" (meaning something close to the German federalism model) as an alternative. If the boycott makes sense from the point of view of the BDP, it should be noted that this campaign has been supported by a few isolated radical left formations, which however have no serious perspective comparable to the "democratic autonomy" of the BDP to propose in the rest of the country. So apart from Turkish Kurdistan, it should be noted that no social condition allowing the successful use of this tactic is present.

- Distinct from these various oppositions, although less audible, there is a unitary "left no" putting forward democratic and social demands and consisting of several associations, professional organisations and national political organizations: the Â-DP (Â-zgürlük ve Dayan??ma party, Party of Freedom and Solidarity in which members of the Turkish section of the Fourth International are active) the TKP (Communist Party of Turkey), the Emep (Eme?in Partisi, Labour Party,

formerly pro-Albanian) as well as the Houses of the People who have declared a common position. This position has also benefited from the support of a number of unions and associations. Its effect has remained limited due to the weakness of the left in Turkey but also because this campaign was launched late and is not supported by rank and file structures such as local committees bringing together all the supporters of the "left no". These limits work against a dynamic born of this collaboration, but its existence is still positive and also allows a little clarification of the confusion emerging from the "left Yes".

Indeed, although this might be surprising after an overview of the characteristics of AKP and its constitutional draft, even on the radical left individuals and groups (most notably the EDP (E?itlik ve Demokrasi Partisi), Antikapitalist linked to the International Socialist Tendency and DS?P (Devrimci Sosyalist ??çi Partisi) formerly linked to the IST but still with links to the latter) have campaigned for a "critical yes", arguing that the adoption of such a referendum would turn the page of the coup of 1980. This, even though the AKP's draft does not integrate political and social freedoms opening the possibility for self-organization of workers' self-organisation. Thus, lifting of the ban on political and solidarity strikes of which much has been made has little meaning to the extent that the possibility of "postponing "a strike on the grounds of "national security" has been maintained and that in case of lack of agreement, the final decision is taken by an arbitration committee (obviously unfavourable to workers) whose decision cannot be questioned (article 54). A procedure which governments, especially that of the AKP, have repeatedly used. The "critical yes" thus amounts to expecting major democratic advances from the party of President Abdullah Gül, whereas the latter has said in relation to the Kurdish question: "it is harmful for the fight ["against terrorism"] to give details after a decision is taken (...)" A program is already being implemented, it would be detrimental to talk about it" and thus criticized the army chief of staff indirectly accused



of talking too much to the press (!) without the slightest stir in his camp. In the magazine "YeniYol", Masis Kürkçügil characterized this as being "lost in the labyrinth of bourgeois politics", that is losing sight of the fact that real progress for workers can result only from the real movement of the workers themselves to the extent that they can establish a relationship of forces.

The AKP draft was adopted with a 57.9% "Yes" vote and a rate of participation of 73.4%, (significantly lower than in the parliamentary elections). This was particularly due to the success of the BDP boycott campaign in Turkish Kurdistan with a rate of participation of only 34.9% in Diyarbakır, 40.7% in Batman, 43.7% in Van, 22.5% in Şırnak and only 9% Hakkari. The "no" vote was focused mainly on the Aegean and Mediterranean coasts, and Eastern Thrace, areas where the vote for the AKP is traditionally low, as well as a few other departments where the implantation of the left is notable (Dersim with the "record" no vote of more than 81% and Eskişehir in Anatolia or Artvin on the Black Sea).

## Exemplary struggle of Tekel workers

The adoption of this Constitution by referendum took place while the labour movement was extremely weak, with the corollary of the evacuation of the social question from the political agenda and the inability of a fragmented left to emerge from its isolation. The political agenda is generally trapped between the imperative of "fighting terrorism" (the Kurdish movement) and the refraction of tensions between sectors of the bourgeoisie.

These tensions can be reflected in the media in an artificial manner, as in the case of the dismantling of the "Ergenekon" network, often presented in Turkey and abroad as a dramatic struggle between the AKP and a putschist sector of army. It only amounted to the sidelining of the most hardcore fringes of the Kemalist

opposition to the AKP, not in the least capable of carrying out a coup d'état.

The Kurdish question is also often used to pull the strings of national unity and thus disqualify any subversive discourse. This is evident in relation to the wearing of the foulard in public buildings by women (public universities and so on). Because of the resolute opposition of a statist bourgeoisie increasingly nervous over its successive losses of positions, the "foulard question" allows the AKP to appear anew as the champion of popular causes while pursuing a brutal policy against workers' mobilisations.

Indeed it is precisely such mobilisations which have brought the social question back on the political agenda. Examples have been the big march of miners from Zonguldak to Ankara in 1991 or the civil service struggle in 1995. The most striking mobilisation of recent years has been that of the workers at Tekel (a formerly state owned alcohol and tobacco company) in 2010 in struggle against the imposition of a new particularly disadvantageous status after its privatisation and dismantling.

This huge and lasting mobilisation, which kept a continuous presence in Ankara for 78 days, was revealing in a number of ways. It was a direct reaction to neoliberalism in Turkey but, since the essence of the waves of unprecedented privatisation has already been accomplished, a very late reaction which thus took on the character of a rearguard struggle. The AKP once again demonstrated its character as a bourgeois party violently opposed to the working class by using the most violent forms of repression. Finally, this mobilisation was confronted by silence from the trade union bureaucracies opposed to the emergence of a movement radicalised by the length and breadth of the struggle. The Tekel workers were confronted not only with police violence but also numerous manœuvres from the leadership of the Türk-İş trade union confederation, of which their union is a member, to channel and thus weaken their movement. The reaction of the Tekel workers, joined by other sectors in struggle, was determined and took a

completely radical turn when the May 1st platform where the leaders of the different confederations were seated was invaded by workers intent on ejecting the president of Türk-İş from it. This action was condemned by all the leaderships of the six confederations including that considered as the most "left", KESK, to which the Tekel workers responded by occupying the offices of Türk-İş in İstanbul and obtaining the support of numerous trade union activists. The mobilisation allowed them to win their case at the Council of State and bring it to the Constitutional Court where a decision is still awaited.

The movement of the Tekel workers cannot of course in itself change the path which Turkey has gone a long way down and of which the new Constitution is only the last paving stone, that is to say the path of neoliberal remodelling of the whole of society in which the social dimension has disappeared from political debate and where the oppositions are reduced to tensions between different sectors of the bourgeoisie.

The "yes" victory strengthens the hand of the AKP in its will to consolidate its power and to thus obtain for its supporters the most significant share of the profits resulting from Turkey's transformation into an exporter country. It disarms somewhat the bourgeois factions which are most hostile to it. Nonetheless, several questions remain unresolved. The AKP has proved incapable of resolving the "Kurdish" question whereas even five years ago, it could claim to compete with the Kurdish movement on its own terrain, in Turkish Kurdistan. Its falling back on its nationalist base and the resumption of a bellicose discourse has led to its failure in this region. This failure has been sanctioned successively by the local elections of 2008, the defeat of the "democratic opening" which sought to marginalise the PKK and finally the success of the boycott in Turkish Kurdistan. In addition the continued retraction of the social question from political debate cannot go on. In a way, the new leader of the CHP parliamentary party has grasped this by reintroducing a dose of the "social" in his discourse, to the detriment of

the ultra-nationalism that characterised his predecessor.

From the viewpoint of the socialist left in Turkey, it is important to be in a position to grasp these questions and act on the class antagonisms, which can only deepen with the integration

of Turkey into globalised capitalism, articulating with this a political settlement ensuring the emancipation and self-determination of Turkey's Kurds. The Tekel movement constitutes a remarkable example showing the basis on which the socialist left can rebuild itself in Turkey so as to change course. An

immense task which begins with awareness that there are no short cuts like an artificial parliamentary election, crumbs of democracy falling from the table of the bourgeois parties or cooptation inside union bureaucracies without real links with the working class.

# Capital's War on the People

4 November 2010, by **Ismael Hossein-zadeh**

[The text of the G-20 declaration from the June 26-27, 2010 summit can be found [here](#). The government of Canada spent a billion dollars to stage the event, including a massive "security" operation that choked downtown Toronto and the construction of an artificial lake for a camera-friendly backdrop. See also reports on the summit and the mass protests from The Bullet, an electronic bulletin of the Socialist Project in Canada, [here](#) and [here](#)- ed.].

## "Bad" Policy for Whom?

For the powerful international financial gamblers the declaration is a good, not bad, policy. Indeed, it represents a monumental victory for these gamblers – an economic coup – as it converts tens of trillions of their gambling losses into gains by having their bought-and-paid-for governments force the people to cut back on bread and butter in order to pay for the fraudulent credit claims of the financial moguls.

What is bad for the people is a boon for the captains of high finance, the main architects of the G-20's policies. Viewing the savage class war of the ruling kleptocracy on the people's living and working conditions as "bad" policy, and hoping somehow – presumably through smart arguments and sage advice – to replace it with the "good" Keynesian policy of stimulus, reflects the rather naïve

supposition that policymaking is a matter of technical expertise or the benevolence of policymakers, without a fight, without grassroots involvement and/or pressure.

The presumed choice is between only two alternatives: the stimulus or Keynesian deficit spending, on the one hand, and the neoliberal austerity of cutting social spending on the other. Experience shows, however, that economic policymaking is not independent of politics and policymakers who, in turn, are not independent of the financial interests they are supposed to discipline or regulate. Economic policies are often subtle products of the balance of social forces, or outcome of the class struggle.

Keynesian economists seem to view economic policies as the outcome of a battle of ideas, not of class forces or interests. Herein lies one of the principal weaknesses of their argument: viewing the Keynesian/New Deal/Social Democratic reforms of the 1930s through the 1960s as the product of the Keynes' or F.D.R.'s genius, not of the compelling pressure exerted by the powerful social movements of that period on the national policymakers to "implement reform in order to prevent revolution," as F.D.R. famously put it.

This explains why economic policymakers of today are not listening to Keynesian arguments – powerful and elegant as they are – because there would be no Keynesian, New

Deal, or Social-Democratic economics without revolutionary pressure from the people.

A closely related flaw of the liberal/Keynesian "bad policy" argument against the neoliberal austerity strategy stems from the optimistic perception that views State power as above economic or class interests. Liberal critics of vicious austerity policies passionately argue against such policies as "bad," "misguided" or "unwise" as if the governments that make such policies do not know what they are doing.

Accordingly, these critics offer all kinds of elegant arguments in favor of stimulus deficit spending that could lead to improved economic conditions, increased tax revenues, and decreased debt and deficit. The fact is, however, that the governments imposing austerity policies serve as bailiffs or debt-collecting agencies on behalf of their corporate/financial masters – an elite guided by the imperatives of big capital, especially finance capital.

If you plead with a court-appointed bailiff who is about to foreclose a debt-burdened family's house, "please, have mercy, don't you see this poor family is going to be homeless?" his/her answer would most probably be "I already know that; I am sorry, but I have no choice," or "that's not my problem."

The difference between this ordinary bailiff and today's governments, serving as bailiffs to collect the

fraudulent claims of the international financial moguls, is that the former honestly admit that they have no choice because they have orders, while the latter pretend that they are independent of special interests and simply carrying out policies of national interests!

Liberal/Keynesian critics of the neoliberal austerity measures as “bad policies” can also be faulted for their belief that the Democratic Party is very different from the Republican Party, and that the blame for the atrocious cuts in social spending should be solely or primarily placed at the doorsteps of the Republicans. The reality, however, is that both parties are beholden to powerful financial interests, and that, individual exceptions aside, their public posturing as opposing parties are essentially tantamount to the proverbial “good cop-bad cop game.”

President Obama himself has frequently stressed fiscal “responsibility” as a catch phrase to justify cuts in social spending in a time of global recession. For instance, in a news conference at the conclusion of the Toronto G-20 summit, the President expressed satisfaction at the G-20’s commitment to cut their deficits by half in three years, arguing that “... if financial markets are skittish and don’t have confidence in a country’s fiscal soundness, that is also going to undermine our recovery.”

## A Circular Debate

Liberal/Keynesian criticism of the neoliberal austerity strategy as “bad policy” has not vigorously challenged or exposed the flaws and myths of the neoliberals’ fiscal “responsibility” claim. This claim, self-righteously touted by deficit hawks, rests upon these theoretical presumptions: lower social spending would lead to lower deficits; lower deficits would lead to lower interest rates; lower interest rates would lead to higher borrowing for investment/spending purposes; which would then lead to economic growth. In this way, austerity hawks claim that it is their fiscal “responsibility” strategy, not the Keynesian deficit-spending strategy, that is pro-growth.

Despite its surface reasonableness, this theoretical postulate is not as foolproof as it sounds. Investment decisions depend on more factors than just interest rates. One such factor is business or market certainty, or lack thereof, and the prospects of sales or effective demand. This explains why, despite the extremely low interest rates of recent years, lending/borrowing/spending for productive purposes remains stagnant if not frozen. Burdened by too much debt, neither traditional borrowers dare or can afford to take on more debt, nor lenders dare to part with their cash — a classic situation of the so-called “liquidity preference,” or “liquidity trap,” as Keynes put it.

The claim of the champions of austerity policies that cuts in social spending would necessarily lead to lower deficits has also been disproved by the experience of recent decades. Since the late 1970s and early 1980s, social spending has been systematically cut while, at the same time, debt and deficit have been rising — except, of course, for the second half of the 1990s, when deficits shrank, not due to cuts in social spending but because of economic expansion of that period.

As long as the liberal/Keynesian proponents of deficit spending do not or cannot expose these flaws and fallacies of the claims of the neoliberal champions of fiscal “soundness,” they are bound to be entangled in an ineffectual, circular debate with the deficit hawks without much success. These proponents may argue elegantly and passionately in favor of “bold, additional deficit spending in order to grow ourselves out of this crisis,” but without compelling grassroots pressure on policymakers they would not get very far with those arguments.

Champions of fiscal “responsibility” can just as forcefully claim to be “the real champions of economic growth” as do the liberal proponents of additional deficit spending.” Because it seems reasonable on its face, the fiscal “responsibility” argument often wins over stimulus spending argument — again, as long as the neoliberal-Keynesian debate remains within the narrow circles of the policymakers and their intellectual talking heads on both

sides, that is, as long as masses of people are not actively involved in the fight against the obfuscationist arguments of fiscal “responsibility.”

Perhaps the most important weakness in the liberal/Keynesian arguments against the neoliberal austerity measures is the presupposition (or the acceptance of the premise) that deficit spending is the only alternative to cuts in social spending. This weakness, in turn, stems from another flaw in their arguments: neglect of the issues of accountability and/or culpability.

The major factors that are largely responsible for the colossal debt and deficit are the out-of-control military/security expenditures, and the huge supply-side tax giveaways to the wealthy since the early 1980s. Keynesian partisans (like neoliberal deficit hawks) let these culprits of the debt crisis get out of jail free, so to speak. They either do not mention these real sources of debt and deficit, or mention them only in passing — just for the record! They are generally unwilling to challenge these sacred cows (their own election/reelection benefactors).

The fiscal-responsibility vs. deficit-spending debate thus seems more like a diversion than an effective strategy to replete the public purse and bring about an economic recovery. The noisy but narrow debate between the Democrats and the Republicans serves first to absolve the real perpetrators of their responsibility for the colossal debt and deficit; and second to restructure the debt and the economy in ways that would dismantle the welfare state, throwing back levels of inequality and class division more than a century.

## Reframing the Debate

It is time to change the parameters of the debate, from “when or by how much social spending should be cut?” to “why should the people pay for something they are not responsible for?” It is time to turn the tables and start asking: Why should the Wall Street gamblers not pay to rebuild the economy they drove to ruins, or pay

the debt they accumulated?

Why can't a part of the hugely redundant and destructive military spending be reallocated to non-military public spending? Why do we need over 800 military bases around the world? Why can't unearned incomes (capital gains, interest, dividends, rents from property) be taxed at least as much as earned incomes, income from work and profit from real production? What are the benefits of the numerous tax shelters (tax-free bonds, family trusts, oil depletion allowances, etc.) to national or public interests?

Obviously, there is not much room for these kinds of questions to be raised within the two-party political machine. Is it not time for the broad masses of the working people – not just the traditional blue-collar workers but also perhaps over 90% of the so-called white-collar workers and “professionals,” especially public-

sector employees – to mobilize and organize independently of the two-party system?

It is abundantly clear that the illusions over Obama's message of change have turned to nightmares as he has betrayed the grassroots who voted for him. More generally, the policy of working and pleading with the Democratic Party in the hope of reversing or containing the relentless attack of capital on labor (and other disenfranchised social strata) must be abandoned, since Democrats are only slightly less Neoliberal than Republicans – they may as well be called stealth Neoliberals.

When workers and other grassroots forces will gain the consciousness and determination to actually appropriate and utilize our society's technology and resources for a better organization and management of the world economy, in the interests of the majority of world citizens, no one can tell. What is certain, however, is that

to play such a role, the working class needs entirely new visions and new politics.

The new, independent labor politics will need to (a) go beyond trade unionism, (b) go beyond national borders, and (c) operate through coalitions and alliances with non-labor grassroots opposition groups. There is definitely no shortage of material resources for this purpose, certainly not in the United States and other industrialized countries.

What is lacking is the political will and/or capacity to reorient society's priorities and reallocate its resources. The feasibility of these proposals (and the fate of capitalism), ultimately, comes down to the relationship of social forces and the balance of class struggle.

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## Solidarity with striking Indonesian workers

3 November 2010, by **Zely Ariane**

The workers have now been on strike for four months; have camped overnight for three days at the Department of Labour and Transmigration and its regional offices; waylaid Labour Minister Muhaimin Iskandar during a visit to a Toshiba company in Bekasi calling on him to make good his promise to protect workers' rights; waged an ongoing solidarity protest actions against the regional Industrial Relation Settlement office in West Java; and setup a camp in front of PT. Kanefusa Indonesia's factory.

PT. Kanefusa Indonesia, which is located in the East Jakarta Industrial Park (EJIP) in Bekasi and has approximately 500 workers, is Japanese owned and produces industrial machine knives and tools. The company's headquarters is in Japan and it has many branches in the

region as well as in the United States and Indonesia (see <http://www.kanefusa.net/>). The company profile shows it to be a large company with considerable assets. But in the capitalist world, this often has nothing to do with workers' welfare.

The industrial dispute started early this year when workers asked senior company managers about the category and status of the company. Workers challenged the status of the company, which is registered with the Department of Industry and Trade as Sector 2. They demanded that the status be changed from a sector 2 category (which produces household tools and knives) to sector 1 (which produces industrial knives and tools), as this what the company actually produced from the start. If it succeeds their wages need to be increase RP. 30.000 (+/- 3 USD) from actual wage

(around 115 USD/month).

The company refused the demand and insisted on sticking with the registered status, even though the Bekasi regional labour office later confirmed that the company should be categorised as sector 1, and admitted that inspections had been careless. It is very important for workers to win this case since the manipulation of status category influences wages, medical benefits and other normative rights (which have now been violated for years), not to mention it is a tax manipulation detrimental to the state. This kind of tactic is used by many big companies in Indonesia but existed laws cannot touch them.

This is the motivating factor, which after months of weary and deadlocked bipartite and tripartite negotiations (January to early June 2010), led the

workers to going on strike on June 17. The company has accused the workers of conducting an illegal strike and some of the FSPMI leaders have been reported to the police. The company has also hired new contract workers and sacked 166 workers involved in the strike. These actions violate Article 143 of the Labor Law No 13/2003 strike actions, Article 144 because the company replaced workers that were on strike and Law Number 22/2000 on the right to strike. The ongoing intimidation and black propaganda against striking workers and their leaders is also a form of union busting since the company is promoting good relations with the leadership of another pro-management's union, the All Indonesian Workers Union (SPSI).

Two weeks ago 500 workers from FSPMI and the Metal Forefront — the forefront unit of FSPMI that usually does solidarity work — besieged the regional Industrial Relation Settlement office in Bandung, West Java, after the judge ruled that there was to be more mediation. It was really disappointing decision since mediations had repeatedly ended in deadlock. The court itself is also illegitimate because it did not provide the previous treatise as confirmed by the regional labor office.

The decision however is not

surprising, since most workers lose their cases in the industrial court, which why poor people end up in jail rather than the big bosses. No state institutions can be counted on to help after Labour and Transmigration Minister Iskandar became frightened and overreacted by asking police to dismissed the workers after they spent three nights at the Labour Department offices demanding his removal from the cabinet over his failure to fulfill his promise to workers and force the company to give them their rights.

The picket line remains in front of factory, although the company is still functioning using new contract workers together with the opportunist SPSI leadership. Although the striking workers have run out money, thanks to the solidarity and the spirit of struggle they continue to fight. The next tactics of struggle will be to further consolidate the factory blockade within the neighborhood industrial area, because a loss by the Kanefusa workers would be a bad precedent for other workers that are faced, or will be faced by similar cases. A political campaign is also being discussed to organise actions at Iskandar private residence and even President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's house. Workers also plan to sue the company for sector manipulation and tax evasion.

Meanwhile, in order to bolster the spirit of resistance, the FSPMI leadership along with around 70 FSPMI workers in Bekasi is participating in weekly political economy education classes organised independently by the radicalised workers of Garda Metal in Bekasi. FSPMI Bekasi has around 40,000 members and some 200,000 members across Indonesia. This type of education is a bridge to connect the economic struggle and political demands of workers and a means to understand why they have to conduct an all-out struggle under this pro-capitalist system and organize against the minority of capitalists that make the economic decisions in this country.

Please provide solidarity and support in the form of statements, solidarity actions (especially in Japan or any other countries where Kanefusa factories exist) and building political pressure, or just by sending solidarity greetings to the striking workers.

For additional information on the strike and ongoing political campaign, please contact:

sumponoteguharifwibowo@gmail.com  
& zely.ariane@gmail.com

Your support and solidarity will help the FSPMI workers to continue, and win their struggle.