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## The Polisario Front: what future?

28 April 2011, by **Hassan Abenay**

However, none of the positions displayed indicates the possibility of a possible resolution through negotiations. Indeed, the Moroccan regime remains intransigent on the maximum threshold represented by its proposal of "autonomy". For its part, the Polisario Front is well aware that once this proposal is accepted, this is tantamount to renouncing its principal claim, total independence. As for the Algerian government - the main support for Polisario - it does not appear to be pressed to find a solution to the conflict in the Sahara and even appears to rejoice in the exhaustion of the Moroccan state with which it conducts a hostile competition in the region.

The imperialist powers will try to prevent any resurgence of violence in a region which is so close to Europe and highly strategic for international maritime traffic. Because a situation of instability could stimulate the dangers posed for them by Islamist terrorism, waves of sub-Saharan

migrants, trafficking in weapons and drugs and so on. However, these powers remain linked by their interests in the region to the two states: Morocco as a historical ally of the imperialist powers and Algeria because of its financial and energy reserves which hold great attraction for a capitalism in the midst of financial crisis, all the more so in that these powers are in fierce competition for control of the world's energy resources.

There is little likelihood that negotiations will lead to a solution and no end to the conflict is on the horizon unless there is a radical change of heart on the part of the Moroccan regime or the Algerian regime, or there is an accelerated decomposition of the Polisario Front, or again an eruption of a strong militant dynamic in the region of Western Sahara.

Still the Moroccan regime will continue to attempt to reach its desired political solution through

negotiations. To do this, it will proceed with a policy of recuperation and corruption of those who are ready to respond among the inhabitants of the Saharan towns. It will try to reconstruct the "Consultative Council" on Sahara and revive a "more autonomous regionalism", while developing further the Saharan regions. This will be in order to win the necessary time to ensure that the refugees in the camps lose any hope of reaching a solution that will put an end to their ordeal and will therefore be pressured to return to the towns, even against the advice of their leadership. So, Morocco hopes to see Polisario break up. At the same time, the latter will continue its wait and see policy that builds on a possible resurgence of combative fervour in the Saharan cities and the expansion of networks of international solidarity to put pressure on the imperialist powers so that they cease to support Morocco.

# The dangers facing the Maghreb region

The question of Western Sahara is determinant with respect to the political situation in Morocco as well as the greater Maghreb region. Indeed, in the name of the Sahara question, the Moroccan regime has managed to maintain a national consensus with docile parties as well as social peace with the trade union bureaucracies. In the name of this same issue, this regime was able to crush the revolutionary left in the last century. It also strengthened official and clandestine links with the Zionist state and deepened its subordination to imperialist capitalism by opening up its domestic markets and by transferring the public sector to it, and so on. Again in the name of the Sahara, the project of a Maghrebian common market has been hampered, even against the interests of the national bourgeoisies in the region. In addition to this chauvinistic hostilities have been knowingly provoked between peoples, whereas in the recent past these same peoples were closely united against colonialism. Recall in this regard the solidarity demonstrations of Moroccan working people following the assassination of the Tunisian trade union leader .Farhat Hached Also, the experience of the united Maghrebian leadership of the armies of liberation will be remembered, and the mutual aid established between Maghrebian activists: the Algerians fleeing to Tunisia, the Moroccan revolutionaries in Algeria, support in money and weapons and so on. This remains a basis for a perspective of unitary Maghreb struggle, despite the fact that the revolutionaries of today are far from providing evidence of it.

The conflict in the Sahara carries a risk of slippage in the region into a real confrontation between Morocco and Algeria, despite the efforts of the imperialists to avoid this possibility. However, such a possibility cannot be ruled out and the two countries are engaged in a frightening arms races and renovation of their military apparatus, so much so that national

budgets are exhausted to the detriment of the basic needs of the popular layers whose social level is increasingly degraded. Also, the hypocritical claims of "good neighbourship" and "historic ties" between the two regimes hide their active preparation for a war that will be harmful to the region unless the struggle of its peoples changes the situation. Which revolutionaries must in the first place commit themselves to.

## The Polisario Front and the cycle of crisis

Since the date of its foundation on May 10, 1973, the Polisario Front has never experienced a crisis that could threaten its existence to the extent of that it is currently experiencing. The only exception to note remains that of the refugee camps in 1988 when a mass insurgency was triggered following a serious split in the leadership of the organization. This insurrection could have led to Polisario falling apart and was only crushed by the intervention of its Popular Army. Among the consequences of these events, we emphasize:

- (1) a moral and psychological deterioration that persists until today;
- (2) a series of capitulations which have led a good number of cadres and leaders among the founders surrendering to Morocco.

Nevertheless, the current crisis is deeper and could have consequences that can seriously undermine the Polisario Front, which would have real repercussions on the entire question of the Sahara.

## What are the elements of the crisis of the Polisario Front?

It is now twenty years since the Polisario Front announced a ceasefire

and accepted the plan of the UN mission for the organization of a referendum in Western Sahara. There it began a pathway of which it knew the beginning, but not the unfolding nor the ending. For its part, the Moroccan regime knew how to take advantage of this situation to weaken and erode Polisario. It skilfully manipulated the detail that would drag on any agreement, namely who among the Saharans has the right to participate in the referendum. This required a proposal to set up committees with the task of determining who had this right and drawing up lists approved by all the protagonists. During this time, the Moroccan regime transplanted thousands of people to the Sahara by providing them with significant grants and assets so that they remained there.

This ploy had as its consequence the paralysis of the referendum process, allowing the Moroccan state to impose a *fait accompli*, mobilizing significant investment in the Sahara while practising a policy of corruption of its inhabitants. In this sense, we can cite 6,000 jobs created for Sahrawi youth; vouchers allowing a monthly income; a fall in food prices; rapid urbanization with significant infrastructure; administrative positions for local notables; a legal laxity, particularly as regards looting of sand and overexploitation of fishing and smuggling; a tax exemption for businesses and so on.

But Moroccan tactics would change course with the coming to the throne of Mohamed VI. Morocco immediately abandoned the referendum plan approved since 1991 to affirm, suddenly and unilaterally, that the referendum was an unfeasible perspective and that the question of the Sahara could have only a negotiated solution. Moreover, he relied in this on the United Nations reports which attested to the impossibility of implementing the referendum and called for a political solution to this impasse. It was in this context that the proposal of "autonomy" was drawn up. It should be noted here that what was striking in all this was the ease with which Polisario slid onto the uncertain path of negotiations while sidelining the

referendum. It is from this point that the extended and complex crisis of Polisario became manifest, so much so that its political future became critical.

## The political crisis of Polisario

Polisario sees itself as being the sole legitimate representative of the people of Western Sahara. It should be recalled that after the Madrid tripartite agreement (Spain, Mauritania and Morocco) which was intended to organise the departure of the Sahara between Mauritania and Morocco, Polisario chose armed struggle as the path to independence. The watchwords of its Congresses sum it up: "freedom comes through weapons", "the war of liberation is guaranteed by the masses", "Neither stability nor peace before return and total independence", "the struggle continues to impose national independence and peace.", "Patria o muerte" and so on. In a promising global context, the Front had until the end of the 1980s strong diplomatic, financial and military support from Libya, Cuba, Algeria and the countries of the former Eastern Bloc. Also, the republic declared by the Polisario Front had been recognized by more than 80 countries and was admitted as a member of the African Union. At this time Polisario won notable victories over the Moroccan Royal Forces (FAR). However, when the world context, hitherto favourable to Polisario, changed dramatically at the end of the 1980s, the Libyan regime stopped helping it and undertook agreements of collaboration with the Moroccan regime, while Cuba turned away to manage the situation of the embargo imposed by US imperialism. Similarly, there was the decomposition of the "Eastern Bloc", while the Algerian regime sank into the crisis which triggered the civil war. Thus the Polisario found himself suddenly deprived of its supporters.

The changes in the international and regional situation exerted pressure on it. It immediately put full confidence in the UN whose neutrality and credibility it had illusions in, along

with its lists drawn up for the referendum, its resolutions and its bodies. Accordingly, the Polisario Front reviewed and adapted its programme and its militant rhetoric: abandoning slogans such as "armed struggle", the "war of liberation", "independence or martyrdom" and so on. to adopt that of "international charters", "international law", and so on. On the other hand, at the structural level, the organizational dynamics of Polisario were reduced to politically dull congresses with monotonous activities of leadership bodies and a popular army atrophied through twenty years of the ceasefire; meanwhile, there was an efflorescence of the activity of embassies and ministries, which are conducive environments for the development of careerist and opportunist intrigues using tribal and family patronage. Such an atmosphere of corruption consumed the ardour of the militants.

Over the last twenty years, Polisario has dissipated all the achievements of the previous period. Also, a number of states which had accepted the Sahraoui Republic successively withdrew their recognition, aided by the corruption and treachery of the Moroccan regime. The reversal of the situation was manifested also on the ground where the Popular Army had lost control. There was also the crisis of legitimacy in terms of Polisario's role as sole legitimate leadership, in the context of the decisions with regard to the ceasefire as well as the democratic blockage and corruption proliferating to the level of the leadership.

We should note the only exception that stands out from this picture. This was the emergence of a Sahrawi independence movement - admittedly embryonic - but very active in the towns of the Sahara and Moroccan university campuses. This movement, which emerged in 2005, is essentially made up of young people, and its leadership of former Saharan political detainees, human rights activists. However, and despite the fact that it took advantage of the media apparatus of Polisario, this movement still failed to take root massively because of the psychological blockage caused by fear, a fear engendered by the years of lead of Hassan II, and the

current repression of which the Sahrawi are most especially the victims. To this should be added the impact of Moroccan policies aimed at corrupting the Sahrawi. For all these reasons, it is easy to understand that Sahrawi are not motivated to engage in a national emancipation movement whose political leadership - Polisario - has fallen into an unprecedented crisis.

Six years after what was called the "uprising of independence", everything now indicates that this movement is at its end. It is exhausted because of the way in which Polisario has led it. It is sufficient to observe in this connection how its effective leading members passed from the role of combatants for the development and enlargement of the movement to that of actors concerned primarily to denounce the Moroccan repression at international meetings and conferences. This approach would be laudable in itself, if it was not at the expense of its effervescence. That said, a few scattered actions are still going on despite this situation of exhaustion.

The illusion of Polisario, which would also explain its management of the movement of 2005, lies in the fact that it had relied on the denunciation of the Moroccan regime in the hope that the United Nations would concern itself more with the human rights situation in the region. Also, in the fact that it envisaged regaining the confidence of the Saharan population after its disastrous policy of the past twenty years.

To understand the political behaviour of Polisario, it is necessary to recall that it found in the recent pro-independence movement in the areas controlled by Morocco a unique chance to circumvent the impasse in which it found itself. Indeed, the referendum process had dragged on for twenty years and the Moroccan regime had even managed to exclude the use of such an option, while thousands of Saharans waited in the desert in desperation. Such a situation would have announced the inevitable end of Polisario if it had persisted. Thus the movement of 2005 gave the Polisario leadership room to allow new hope and other margins of manoeuvre.

However the brutality of the repression imposed on the Saharans reined in the combative momentum of the movement. Those who are deeply involved are only the most dedicated youth, while their forebears - having already experienced the tyranny of Hassan II - have remained discreet. The Polisario is convinced - rightly - that once the terror has diminished, the struggles of the masses will take on an unprecedented scale. It is for this reason that Sahrawi activists will be almost exclusively determined to demand that the UN deal with the Saharan human rights situation. All the Polisario press releases of recent years as well as the statements made by Sahrawi activists residing in Morocco converge around this axis of demand..

However, the Moroccan regime categorically refuses to address the issue of violations of human rights concerning the Sahara. It knows that once the topic is open, it may see its long tradition of repression revealed, and at the same time, this could exorcize the fear among the Saharans who could more freely express their views on the conflict. The Polisario Front has ended up sowing a vacuum and has run up against the wall of illusion that it naively built itself by gambling on the role of the United Nations. Indeed, in full crisis - following the expulsion of Sahrawi activist Aminatou Haidar - the UN Security Council passed resolution number 1920, thus inflicting another defeat on Polisario. This episode prompted the latter, then in total confusion, to take a decision to question its relationship with the UN, just days after the Secretary-General of Polisario said clearly that the organization was engaged in an ongoing collaboration and good faith with the UN. The next two years will be decisive for the future of the Polisario Front and the question of the Sahara more generally. The current situation of "neither war nor peace" cannot last.

Moreover, Polisario is facing two perspectives:

(1) either to declare its refusal to collaborate as long as the conditions for the organization of the referendum are not met, and possibly resuming armed struggle, something it can do

only with the approval of the Algerian regime.

(2) or follow the path of negotiations, which will lead to a solution other than independence, something that Polisario has always rejected.

Polisario has set its Congress for the end of 2011. Unless major events occur within it, or there are significant changes in relations between the Moroccan and Algerian regimes, this coming Congress will be crucial for its future and the question of Western Sahara as a whole.

## **Polisario and the impasse of the military solution**

At the beginning of its armed struggle, the Popular Army inflicted some crushing defeats on the F.A.R., despite the fierce media censorship of the time, to such a point that the Moroccan regime had deny the detention of its soldiers by Polisario until recent years. Through reliance on guerrilla warfare, on a deep knowledge of the Saharan milieu, on its ability to adapt to hostile geographical conditions, on strong support in arms and training from Libya, Cuba, Algeria and the Eastern Bloc, and by counting on the combative spirit of the launch of armed struggle, the Polisario Front was able to take control of the vast majority of Western Saharan territory and threaten the Saharan towns with military attacks and incursions outside the contested area.

However, the relationship of military forces was reversed when the F.A.R built military barriers which total 2.720 kms in length, and surround about 87.5% of the area of Western Sahara. These barriers number six, the fifth being the longest at 670 kms. The objectives of these walls are the following: to isolate the fighters of Polisario from the rest of the population; protect the Bougraa mines and the sea coasts; allow the F.A.R regiments to cover in defence; avoid surprise attacks from the guerrillas deploying means of radar surveillance radars and detector dogs; prevent "enemy" invasions to gain time to carry out better prepared actions by

mobilizing strong resources in soldiers and equipment. These barriers are supported by more than 150,000 soldiers and seven sand belts, each three metres high. They are also reinforced by tanks, artillery, radar, barbed wire, mines, dams of sand and stone, barricades, and so on. Thus, Polisario was forced to retreat to marginal pockets of the Sahara region, whereas the areas of tension were remote from the towns. It is this military situation which explains Morocco's mastery of the stakes of the conflict.

Twenty years of ceasefire seem to have worn out Polisario's Popular Army. Also its numbers have decreased, many of its cadres have left and its morale has weakened. Need it be recalled that in contrast to conventional armies, popular armies soften and atrophy, which is indeed the case for the army of Polisario. That being so, the question that arises is how Polisario can impose real gains when the means by which it exerts weight is decomposing?

## **Polisario and the moral-psychological crisis**

In the mid-1970s, the Polisario Front was founded by young people, not exceeding thirty as an average age, in addition to a few activists from the Liberation Army against Spanish colonialism and a few members of the vanguard organization founded by Mohammed el-Basri. In the wake of the global wave of national liberation movements, the radicalization of youth and the general rise of the left, it initiated the fight against the Spanish occupier, who was forced to leave the region while manoeuvring to ensure its interests in its riches (phosphate and fishing). This merged with the interests of the Mauritanian regime in the region, and those of Morocco in the annexation of the Sahara. In this context, Polisario made the fatal mistake of carrying out its actions outside the cities and encouraging the inhabitants to desert them, brandishing the threat of the

repression that the Moroccan forces deployed. This choice cost them dearly. It prompted them to use the territory of another state, so that political decisions became dependent on it. At the same time this choice deprived it of the support of the Saharawi masses in the towns. Despite the initial advances represented by the departure of the Spanish and the abandonment by Mauritania of its interests in the region specified by the "Algerian Pact" signed by the two protagonists, the impasse could not be avoided: to obtain independence by armed struggle while supported by another regional powers, was to leave themselves open to blackmail, and condemn themselves also to the loss of roots amongst the masses in the towns of the Sahara.

Moreover, it should be noted that most of the refugees are educated youth, and that many of them have benefited from scholarships in various countries (Algeria, Libya, Cuba and so on). Also many people live in the camps in the expectation and the hope of work abroad. Thus, young people undergo a strong pressure because of an uncertain horizon and future. Also, they find private spaces in which they can express their aspirations given the very hostile natural conditions throughout the year and the miserable conditions of life. These young people are awaiting international aid that Polisario distributes through the Red Crescent of the Sahara, or positions in

the civil service, diplomacy in particular. This situation has prompted a number of cadres to prefer not to return to settle in the camps. In sum, emigration has become the sole social outcome. This state of deterioration of conditions alters significantly the commitment and enthusiasm of the inhabitants, and their ability to support life in the camps where the most basic living conditions are absent. This state of mind has challenged the credit enjoyed by Polisario as being the sole legitimate leadership. Indeed, this is understandable if we recall how anchored phenomena of corruption are; the activities of smuggling, the apparent enrichment of a few leaders; clientelism through tribal links for the allocation of responsibilities in the absence of criteria of competence; a severe restriction on freedom to movement in a closed territory which is however open to television channels. This makes the Polisario Front a real powder keg that could explode at any time. It makes very probable the eruption of mass movements in the camps, comparable to the events of 1988 or even more so. The absence of a political outcome only reinforces this.

## Where is Polisario going?

Sometimes in history, a political

leadership finds itself in a situation of extreme complexity where a clear line of advance becomes impossible, and anticipating future contingencies becomes a very difficult task. In such moments, a leadership is questioned as to its courage, its ability to persevere and resist disintegration while awaiting a breakthrough that will avoid disappearance. This is what happened to the Russian revolution during the Brest Litovsk negotiations. Polisario is located in a similar situation. It is torn between contradictory poles: a return to armed struggle whose difficulty we have described and the search for a solution through negotiations with the Moroccan state with all that this requires as concessions. The situation of "neither peace nor war" would lead to the erosion of the political meaning of the Polisario Front. The Polisario leadership is faced with a major historical responsibility and must decide. In this, the supreme values must be frankness and transparency towards the masses, as well as the right to self-determination. However, any attempt to use the masses as the basis for manoeuvre and an agreement behind the scenes will be regarded as treason by history.. Similarly, any contempt for the interests of the masses to serve the diplomatic agenda will be retained in the memory of future generations as collaboration. How will Polisario act? The next two years will answer this question.

# Fukushima, a level 7 accident: The nuclear lobby and the denial of democracy

28 April 2011, by **Pierre Rousset**

If you thought that the evaluation of the seriousness of a nuclear accident was scientifically rigorous, then it seems you were wrong; it is (also) a highly political matter. Thus, only after the local elections of 10 April did the Japanese government recognise that the Fukushima Daiichi disaster reached level 7, the highest level on

the INES scale [1]

Tokyo had first announced, against all evidence, that it was just an accident of level 4 (which produces only "minor release of radioactive material probably not requiring the implementation of planned contra-measures other than the supervision

of local foods"). This ranking was maintained between 12 March and 18 March, during the phase of intense release of radioactivity (the leaking of radioactive gases, explosions, fire ..)! Then, Tokyo claimed the accident did not exceed the level 5 (ie. "limited" radioactive leaks). This succession of lies did not prevent the governing



party losing the local elections (however, its defeat might have been even more severe if the truth had been told earlier). The government must now prepare the population for a sustainable nuclear crisis: the company responsible for the site, Tepco, announced - with no guarantee! - that it will take 6 to 8 months to shut down the plant (in terms of its decommissioning, no one knows what will happen).

French nuclear authorities, keen to appear to be acting transparently without actually doing so, let it be known that the accident Fukushima was level 6. Yet instead of rejoicing in the belated openness of their Japanese counterparts, they are now being rather more circumspect.

Everything in effect lies in the symbolism. No one "shows" that means the severity level 6 ("more than 5, less than 7" in the delicately chosen words of one expert questioned about this on television). We can therefore expect further claims that catastrophe will be avoided. In contrast, level 7 inevitably evokes Chernobyl. It must be recognised therefore that we are dealing with a disaster, and have been so from the start. It must also be admitted that a nuclear catastrophe can occur in one of the most technologically advanced countries in the world.

However imperfect it may be, the information provided in Japan fully justifies the reclassification of the accident at level 7 on the INES scale.

However, reflecting the importance that this question has been given by the nucleocrat lobby, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has been mobilised. Tokyo's admission was followed by a veritable media offensive to say that we could in no sense compare Fukushima to Chernobyl, because the radioactivity released so far (but what of tomorrow?) is only 10% of that which leaked in 1986.

It is very difficult to compare the emission levels of radioactivity when the official figures supplied are so lacking in credibility and are also incomplete. The Japanese authorities have not disclosed the assumptions and calculations underlying their conclusions. Only air emissions have been taken into account and not the very important marine discharges. The strength of the radiotoxicity can not be estimated because too few radionuclides have been taken into account. It is extremely urgent that in Japan independent organisations be allowed to make independent measurements, as Criirad does in France. International antinuclear networks should help to develop the necessary equipment.

All that being said, Fukushima is worse than Chernobyl in several ways. Firstly, because it involves four reactors at the same time, not one (a scenario that had never been considered by international authorities). Because the tonnage of nuclear fuel present at the facility in Fukushima Daiichi is much larger (1760 tons instead of 180 tonnes in

reactor No. 4 at Chernobyl). Also because it can not be attributed to the irresponsibility of 'sorcerer's apprentice' engineers (as was done in 1986). It has also defied all the assurances given about the risks (the possibility of an earthquake of force 9 in this part of Japan had been ruled out). And because it has lasted much longer - and continues to release radioactivity. Finally, it occurred 25 years after the traumatic experience of Chernobyl, in a plant supposed to be much more secure - and in Japan, not in a state in terminal crisis like the then Soviet Bielorrussia/Ukraine.

By lying for a month about the severity of the accident, the Japanese government has not taken the measures it should have to protect the public and workers working on the site. In deliberately clouding the issue, French and international nuclear authorities have tried to prevent any real debate on energy policy. A straightforward denial of the right to information and democratic choice is the real problem.

On April 3, activist Kazuyoshi Sato spoke at a rally held near the site of the nuclear crisis. "I have engaged in the activities of our Fukushima Network for Denuclearization for more than 20 years, but we are now confronted with the ongoing nuclear disaster". [2]

We do not want to face the same bitter reckoning in relation to other plants, whether in France, Japan or elsewhere. We must abandon nuclear power. Now.

## **West supported war to achieve economic miracle - Ban Ki-moon report mere eyewash?**

**28 April 2011, by Vickramabahu Karunarathne**

### **Chauvinist war**

Thus while the so-called economic miracle made the rich prosperous, the

poor became poorer. That is also a miracle! Mahinda managed that, with the consolidation of his authority through the chauvinist war against the Tamil people. The war decimated the

Tamil society with over one lakh of people killed. With emergency powers there is a virtual dictatorship in the country while there is a military rule in Tamil areas. Entire burden of war

expenses were passed on to the shoulders of workers while trade unions and social organizations were made inactive by chauvinist campaigns and state terror. Global powers were aware of all that. In fact they supported the war and the repression and also provided all resources for the war including arms and ammunition. In fact it was global powers including India who insisted that Tamil rebellion should be eliminated totally. However, they never exerted such pressure on the government to grant autonomy to the Tamil people.

Having done all that, now they have come out with a report condemning the war efforts of the government. Have they forgotten that this criminal war brought the political stability to create their “economic miracle”? A chauvinist dictatorial regime is necessary because this “economic miracle” is based on plunder and super exploitation. I find it funny that a pro government paper was first to publish the UN panel executive summary. Obviously they wanted Sinhala chauvinist organizations to start protesting. However paper report said

“Panel’s determination of credible allegations reveals a very different version of the final stages of the war than that maintained to this day by the Government of Sri Lanka.

## Credible allegations

The Government says it pursued a “humanitarian rescue operation” with a policy of “zero civilian casualties”. In stark contrast, the Panel found credible allegations, which if proven, indicate that a wide range of serious violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law were committed both by the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE, some of which would amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. Indeed, the conduct of the war represented a grave assault on the entire regime of international law designed to protect individual dignity during both war and peace. Reading the report one has to cry and laugh at the same time. 17-8Yes, many of the crimes of the Sinhala chauvinist

war are exposed. This exposure may help the ignorant to understand what we said about the war and what is going on in Lanka to some extent. But it will be ridiculous to expect any justice from the world powers who are involved in crimes committed in Iraq, Palestine and Afghanistan. In addition they are the masters who guided the war of Mahinda. The report was not officially released by Ban. Instead he got the help of Mahinda to leak the Report! The game of the global masters is very clear. They do not want to take any action, but want Mahinda take action according to their guidelines. What is more important is the fact that the report has refused to accept the liberation struggle of the Tamil people. Instead, the war is depicted as a war between two states equally involved in war crimes. Thus they have washed out the difference between aggressor and the oppressed. This report proves that it is futile for Tamil people to expect any solution from the “liberal democracy” of the global powers. Only way out is a united struggle of oppressed people.

*From 24 April, 2011 lakbimanews column*

# Marx and the non-Western World

**27 April 2011, by Michael Löwy**

This truly path-breaking book goes against the grain of the conventional wisdom which reduces Marx to an Eurocentric and economic thinker; as Douglas Kellner comments, Kevin Anderson shows that Marx “is the sophisticated and original theorist of history some might not have ever expected him to be.” Analyzing a variety of Marx’s writings, including his journalistic work written for the New York Daily Tribune as well as unpublished material on non-European societies, it brings to the fore a global theorist whose social critique was sensitive to the various forms of social oppression and struggle.

The concept of “margins” may be criticized as too vague and imprecise but it has the advantage of bringing together various aspects of historical development which are peripheral to the capital/labor contradiction and to the Western industrial capitalist world: colonialism, nationalism, race, ethnicity, and non-Western societies. What Anderson argues is that one can find in Marx’s writings from 1848 to 1882 a movement, an intellectual and political evolution, in the direction of an increasingly complex and multi-layered conception of development and revolution. In the Communist Manifesto, as well as in his first articles on India (1853), one can still find an “Orientalist” “according to

Edward Said’s well known criticism “i.e., unilinear and Eurocentric approach, leading to a qualified support for colonialism. However, in his articles on the Opium Wars in China, or the Indian Sepoy rebellion (1857-1859), there is already a clear anti-colonialist stance, which will be later developed, in a very powerful way, in the chapter on “primitive accumulation” of Capital. Similarly, Marx’s writings on Poland and even more so on Ireland reveal an increasing awareness of the importance of movements for national liberation, while his comments on the Civil War in the United States, focusing of course on the struggle for the abolition of slavery, show also his

concern for racial oppression: "In the USA ... labor in a white skin cannot emancipate itself where it is branded in a black skin" (1866).

The most original contribution of this book is without doubt its discussion of Marx's ethnological notebooks (1879-1882). Some of this material has been included by Lawrence Krader in his work, *The Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx* (1972), but much of it is yet unpublished; thanks to his participation in the edition of a forthcoming volume of the new MEGA (the German edition of Marx and Engels Complete Works), Anderson had access to these manuscripts, and presents some of them here for the first time. The notebooks "which contain extracts from M. Kovalevsky, R. Sewell, K. Bücher, and several other anthropologists and historians, often followed by Marx comments" documents not only his anti-colonialism, but also his deep interest in the pre-capitalist and non-Western forms of communal property, particularly in India, Algeria, and Latin America. In a very interesting comment on the French colonial policy in Algeria, Marx refers to official material of the French National Assembly in 1875 "quoted by Kovalevsky" where the same

"Rurals" that suppressed the Paris Commune in 1871, denounce communal property in Algeria as a danger, since it is "a form that supports communist tendencies in people's minds"; those representatives of the French bourgeoisie, adds Marx, "are unanimous on the goal : destruction of collective property."

As Anderson points out, this concern with the persistence of communal forms, even into his own century, explains his embrace of Russia's rural commune in the 1880's. Marx had already explained, in a letter to a Russian journal in 1877, that his historical sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe (in *Capital*) was not to be considered as "a general course fatally imposed on all peoples." A few years later, he came to the conclusion that Russia can follow a different path, and its rural communes could become, as he wrote in a letter from March 1881 to the Russian revolutionary Vera Zassoulitch, "the fulcrum for social regeneration in Russia." Finally, in the preface, co-authored with Engels, to the Russian translation of the *Communist Manifesto* (1882) "his last writing" he states : "If the Russian revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the

West, so that the two complement each other, then Russia's peasant communal landownership may serve as the point of departure for a communist development."

As Anderson observes, important anti-capitalist movements have developed recently in places like Mexico and Bolivia, based upon indigenous communal forms, in an unexpected confirmation of Marx's intuitions.

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## Let us challenge reactionary Mahinda regime on May Day

26 April 2011, by **Vickramabahu Karunarathne**

Salaries are cut while taxes have increased. Under the pretext of giving a pension to the private sector, the government is planning to rob from EPF and ETF accumulations. While people are thrown out from urban houses land is given to the rich. People are driven away from their traditional land made destitute.

Even after two years Tamil people are displaced and miserable. Political prisoners are many a time not allowed even to see their kith and kin. Without

what happened to the disappeared not even religious rites could be completed. Tradition and culture has become a prohibited subject. Autonomy for Tamil homeland is still a dream.

All these are done making use of emergency powers and the dictatorial presidential powers. In the mean time the government is using the Ban Ki Moon Report exposé of war crimes to arouse chauvinist feelings. Mahinda is preparing to make the May Day a

blood thirsty chauvinist campaign day. Attempt is to blanket the real issues faced by the workers.

In that context the decision of powerful array of trade unions, to come out to challenge the government on workers and democratic issues is remarkable. We have decided to participate in this May Day and support it to make it massive success. We appeal to all our members and supporters and all progressive working people to rally round to



defeat the attempt of the IMF led government to make the May Day, a

chauvinist black day. All should come with respective trade union banners to Fort railway premises at 1 pm on May

Day to march to Hyde Park to attend the rally at 4 pm.

# **“If we want the world without nuclear plants, we must challenge the capitalist system”**

**26 April 2011, by Kenji Kunitomi , Ryota Sono**

*Kenji Kunitomi - What is the main motivation for you to call for direct protest action to TEPCO.*

Ryota Sono - Some anti-nuclear groups organized protect action in front of TEPCO building in Tokyo on next day of earthquake and tsunami, which gathered only less than 20 activists. But after that there had been no initiatives to call the action against TEPCO for a week. During that week, there have been series of big media campaign aiming for “calm down” mass anxieties and angers, as well as for stirring up nationalist sentiment such as “Japan should unite” to recover the worst damage. DPJ (Democratic Party of Japan) government and ruling class are willing to shut down any people’s voice to criticize nuclear development policies of successive Japanese governments.

I thought that we should condemn directly TEPCO for its responsibilities causing these tragedies. TEPCO had explained that “nuclear accidents such as Chernobyl would never happen because Japanese nuclear technologies are excellent”. I could not allow TEPCO to evade its responsibilities.

*How about the people’s reaction to your call for protest action in front of TEPCO building?*

For first one week after I called protest action, the number of people

who gathered with me in front of TEPCO building every evening were only about 10. But people began to understand more and more that TEPCO hid inconvenient facts for the company that really occurred in the Fukushima nuclear plants. People recognized clearly that they had been deceived by TEPCO. From two weeks after the disastrous earthquake, several hundreds of peoples joined our action and actively protest to TEPCO, shouting no to nuclear plants! They have believed that without people’s action demanding to stop the operation of nuclear plants, another tragic nuclear accident would happen because there are 54 nuclear reactors all around Japan, and many of them are located in seashore site which easily damaged by earthquake and tsunami.

Many foreign media reported our action, but Japanese media didn’t. I think many of Japanese big newspapers and TV stations are controlled by big business and government.

*I think your protest actions to TEPCO surely stimulated young people to join demonstrations against nuclear plants.*

I joined the demonstration against nuclear power plants in Koenji, western district of Tokyo metropolis on April 10th, to which nearly 15,000 peoples, mainly youth, participated.

For many of them it was the first experience to join any kind of demonstrations. I always have insisted on young people to organize themselves to rise up against these criminal human disaster caused by big electric power capitals and governments. Many participants knew the demonstration through new social networks such as twitter.

Now we are now planning “One million people’s action against nuclear plants’ all over Japan’ on June 11th . It’s just the day three months after the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster.

*What is your main demand of the project of demonstration on June 11th.*

Of course, we would like to build nationwide networks to stop nuclear plants and to demand TEPCO and government to fully compensate for those who affected by threefold “earthquake, tsunami and nuclear plants-?disasters for their responsibilities. But I think our protest should go beyond those demands.

?Even after the Fukushima, Japanese government and capitalist don’t renounce the project of nuclear plants. They are still developing export of nuclear plants. I think it is the problem of the system, capitalist system.

If we want the world without nuclear plants, we must challenge the capitalist system.

# Several doctrines for the same shock

25 April 2011, by **Éric Toussaint**

In reaction to the impact of the 1929 *laissez-faire* response, a certain number of measures were taken in the North to cushion the impact of the financial crisis: massive aid to banks, injection of an enormous mass of liquidities to keep credit and trade from drying up, lowering the interest rates of the US Federal Reserve followed by the Bank of England and the European Central Bank...

Measures have also been taken in terms of limiting erosion of the public's income and consumption. Social stabilizers have been implemented, i.e. several schemes to guarantee income or provide a substitute income independently of economic activity. In several countries, these schemes were extended for several months to expand their social safety net role. Recovery plans consisted of increasing public spending to make up for the fall in private spending. In this context, some people imagined that in the face of the crisis, the governments led by Barack Obama, Gordon Brown, Nicolas Sarkozy, José Luis Zapatero, José Socrates or even Angela Merkel and Silvio Berlusconi would make a Keynesian turn: a structural increase in public spending, concessions to wage-earners, strict rules imposed on financial firms, a halt to the privatisation wave or even resort to long-term nationalisations[Barack Obama, Gordon Brown, the Netherlands government and some others did undertake some isolated nationalisations in 2007-2008, but with the sole aim of preventing an utter failure of the financial and real estate sectors.]. This didn't happen.

In hindsight, it is reasonable to think these "social shock absorbers" were only implemented temporarily, merely in order to soften the recession and limit the risks of potential social unrest due to the crisis provoked by the combined effect of bankers' appetite for maximizing profits and

several decades of neoliberal policies. In fact, in 2008, parties in power and editorialists at major financial media were really afraid that awakening public opinion to a radical critique of capitalism would lead to a popular mobilisation in favour of revolutionary changes. This distress was particularly keen when, in Greece, the rightwing New Democracy government rapidly resorted to austerity measures, provoking a social explosion in December, 2008 and leading to its stinging electoral defeat in the early legislative elections in October 2009.

As for the former Soviet-bloc countries that have become part of the European Union, in particular those that have joined since 2004, the shock doctrine was applied from 2008. The IMF presence since 10 to 15 years strengthened and facilitated this orientation, not without provoking large social mobilizations in certain countries. In Iceland, which is not a European Union member, the shock doctrine was applied swiftly, provoking a very broad popular mobilization and a major political crisis that brought down the government and rejection of a foreign debt repayment scheme in a referendum.

To avoid such an outcome, demand-stimulating expenditures were made in 2008-2009 in the United States, Germany, Spain, Great Britain and France. By taking such action, the governments put off implementation of shock doctrine[See Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine, the Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, Knopf Canada, 2007], i.e. the use of a major psychological shock (such as one provoked by a large-scale crisis, a natural disaster or a terrorist attack) to bring in a new wave of neoliberal reforms and brutal economic measures that would be unthinkable in normal times.

Government leaders of these countries

(supported by the European Commission in that continent) thus combined bank and insurance bailout with setting up a few social shock absorbers, and to succeed in calming down social discontent against bankers, government leaders themselves spoke out against the bad apples at the head of certain private financial institutions. They even criticised a certain type of rogue capitalism and some of them called for putting capitalism on new foundations.

Moreover, at the time, they did everything to avert bringing up the risk of a massive increase in public debt, so as not to attract attention to its main cause: the exorbitant cost of bank bailouts, without the money poured in being used to impose public controls on the financial sector or be recovered from the holdings of these banks' major shareholders.

The implementation of shock doctrine in these countries came about later, starting in 2010, after it was applied in the most fragile countries in the debt chain and the Euro zone: Greece, Ireland, Portugal... Today, while governments vie with each other to impose ever more brutal and dramatic austerity therapy, it is fundamental for public opinion to know exactly how we wound up in such a situation. Running headlong to keep up with the demands of financial markets, the governments of the most industrialized countries have made their own citizens foot the bill.

As bank bailouts required investments very risky for immediate profits, on the one hand, and tax policies greatly favouring the richest, on the other, have meant the more humble classes are paying more and more for the consequences of the world crisis and of congenitally unegalitarian capitalism. In other words, the victims of the crisis wind up having to foot the bill for those who caused it. This explains why millions of people

experience this as a deep injustice. Such a sense of injustice could trigger

a powerful response.

*Translated by Marie Lagatta*

# Getting to the root causes of the food crisis

**25 April 2011, by **Éric Toussaint****

The explosion of the economic crisis, the financial crisis and the food crisis in 2007-2008 shows just how interdependent the economies of the world are.

In Third World countries, for most people, the main concern these last two years has not been the financial crisis of the banks of the United States and Europe, but rather the dramatic rise of food prices. This year's record cereal harvest and the recent fall in food prices on the commodities stock markets should not create a false sense of security. "For example, if the current price volatility and liquidity conditions prevail in 2008/09, plantings and output could be affected to such an extent that a new price surge might take place in 2009/10, unleashing even more severe food crises than those experienced recently," a recent FAO report said. [Financial crisis will hurt agricultural markets", FAO, 6 November 2008, Rome <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/it...>]. Lower production and higher food prices in 2009 could add to developing countries' problems in obtaining sufficient credit and foreign exchange to buy agricultural commodities. "Export finance is becoming more difficult to obtain, with banks tightening up the conditions for issuance of letters of credit," the FAO said.

Faulty explanations for the food crisis are currently rife. Increased Chinese and Indian consumption is a reason so often repeated it has become a truism. We urgently need to identify the real causes and those really responsible.

In its annual report published in June 2008, the very respectable Bank for International Settlements [The BIS is the bank of the big central banks,

see its website: [www.bis.org](http://www.bis.org) For a description of the BIS, go to: [www.bis.org/about/profile.pdf](http://www.bis.org/about/profile.pdf)] tells the familiar tale of increased consumption in China and other emerging economies. This false trail is intended to conceal, first, the responsibility of Northern governments and transnational agro-food businesses in increasing the production of biofuels, and secondly, the responsibility of the big financial groups that speculate on the commodity markets. The BIS authors are trying to make their explanations sound scientific.

What, according to the BIS, is the principle cause of rising food prices? "In the case of food commodities, rapid GDP growth in EMEs (Emerging Market Economies) in recent years has played a large role in boosting demand. This effect has been reinforced by structural changes, as rising per capita incomes, notably in China, have increased the demand for cereals, particularly for grain-fed livestock. According to Food and Agriculture Organization estimates, the consumption of cereals per person in developing countries rose by 20% between 1962 and 2003, while that of meat increased threefold. The demand effect on grain prices is amplified because, according to some estimates, two to five times more grain is required to produce the same amount of calories through livestock than through direct grain consumption. Around one third of global grain production was used to feed livestock in 2002." [BIS, 78th Annual Report, Basel, June 2008, p. 39.

In this so-called scientific explanation, the reasoning goes as follows: consumption by inhabitants of developing countries has risen sharply, these people eat more and

more meat, so prices have risen accordingly.

But there's a problem here: why would the peak in prices occur only in 2007-2008, when consumption in developing countries has been substantially increasing for 40 years?

In reality, food prices dropped throughout the 1980s and 1990s. They dropped further between 1998 and 2002, increased slightly in 2002-2004, then dropped again in 2005-2006 [See the data provided by Martin Wolf in the Financial Times of 30 April 2008 and by Jacques Berthelot, op. cit.]. After the 2006 harvest, food prices on the world market were at the 1998 level, which was well below that of the 1970s.

In 2008, in constant dollars, food prices remain lower than the maximum level reached at the end of the 1970s [The IMF confirms this: "The current boom has also been more broad based and longer lasting than is usual, and it contrasts noticeably with the 1980s and 1990s, when most commodity prices were on a downward trend. That said, despite the apparent reversal of the downward trend, inflation-adjusted prices of many commodities are still well below the levels seen in the 1960s and 1970s." See [www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft...](http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft...)]. In conclusion, what needs to be explained is the price explosion in 2007 and 2008. And the explanation given by the BIS has nothing to do with the real causes. As Jacques Berthelot observes: "the increased consumption of food products, linked to the rapid rise in the standard of living in emerging countries like China and India (...) has been an ongoing trend for several years and cannot account for the continued rise in

agricultural prices over the last two years"Â [Jacques Berthelot, op. cit., p. 2.]. He goes on to state that the price of rice remained stable until October 2007. On the other hand, it increased almost threefold between October 2007 and May 2008.

Here, then, in three points, is the most accurate explanationÂ [This explanation is taken from the article by Damien Millet and Eric Toussant published in August 2008 entitled "Why a world food crisis? (yet again)", [www.cadtm.org/spip.php?artic...](http://www.cadtm.org/spip.php?artic...)]:

First, faced with historically low prices for cereals up to 2005, US and EU governments granted agribusiness corporations subsidies to develop the biofuel industry. These corporations wanted to increase their profits in two ways: sell their cereals at higher prices and make biofuel production profitable. They won on both counts.

How did they do this? They started from the following assumption: what will no longer be possible with oil in a few decades (because of shrinking available reserves) can be done with soybean, beet, cereals or sugar cane. They therefore asked the public authorities to grant subsidies so that the very costly production of biofuel would become profitable. Washington, the European Commission in Brussels, and other European capitals agreed, claiming they were securing energy independence for their countries or regionsÂ [Note again the "double standards" policy: to ensure energy security, the governments of the North are quick to subsidise private industry, while via the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO, they deny governments of the South the right to subsidise their local producers, whether in the agricultural or industrial sector.]. The pro-biofuel lobbies convinced governments to use the fallacious argument that biofuels have a positive impact on the environment, as opposed to hydrocarbon fuels.

This support policy syphoned off significant amounts of essential food products towards the biofuel industry. Similarly, land that was formerly used to produce food was converted for biofuel production. This also limits the supply of food products available and

contributes to rising prices. In short, to meet the interests of a few private corporations intent on developing biofuel production, it was decided to hijack a sorely needed portion of the world's food production. It should be noted that the above-quoted BIS Annual Report gives State-subsidised biofuels only a minor place in its explanation of the hike in food pricesÂ [BIS, 78th Annual Report, Basel, June 2008, p. 41.].

Second, speculation on farm products was very high in 2007-2008, reinforcing a trend that started in the early 2000s after the Internet bubble had burst. After the subprime crisis shook the US in summer 2007, institutional investorsÂ [The main institutional investors are pension funds, insurance companies and banks: they can mobilise some US\$ 70,000 billion, which they invest where return is highest. Not forgetting hedge funds, which can mobilise US\$ 1,500 billion.] gradually moved out of the debt market that had been built on the US housing industry and identified agricultural commodities and biofuels as likely to bring high returns. They bought future crops on the Chicago, Kansas City and Minneapolis stockmarkets - the major world markets for speculation on cereals. Similarly, they bought future oil and gas production on other markets, speculating on a rise in prices.

Third, developing countries found themselves in a weakened position to cope with the food crisis because policies enforced by the WB and the IMF since the debt crisis have deprived them of the necessary protection. Such policies include: reduction of land used for crop cultivation and enforced specialisation in one or two export products, the removal of price stabilising systems and the end of cereal self-sufficiency and of cereal reserve stocks, a weakening of local economies by making them dependent on changes in the world market, drastic cuts in social spending, suppression of subsidies for staple commodities, the opening up of markets, and unfair competition between small farmers and transnational corporations.

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## Some faulty explanations in review

Jacques Berthelot documented a series of quotes which all bolster the myth of growing consumption in emerging countries, in particular China and India, as the main cause of the food crisisÂ [All these quotations are taken from the study by Jacques Berthelot.].

For the business daily Les Echos, 15 April 2008 issue: "The new phenomenon stems mainly from fast-changing consumer habits in emerging countries. The two giants, China and India, have increased their demand for meat and cereals as incomes have increased" [[www.lesechos.fr/info/agro/47..](http://www.lesechos.fr/info/agro/47..)].

Le Nouvel Observateur of 17-23 April 2008 identifies the first of seven causes as "changing eating habits in the emerging countries, particularly China and India", and adds: "India and China have gone from the status of exporting countries to importing countries".

Jacques Diouf, Director General of the FAO, declared at the Africa-India Forum of 8 April 2008, after meeting India's Minister of Agriculture, Sharad Pawar, that "world cereal stocks were enough to meet demand for just eight to 12 weeks", and that "This is due to higher demand from countries like India [and] China, where GDP grows at 8% to 10% and the increase in income is going to food"Â [ [www.nationalpost.com/news/wo..](http://www.nationalpost.com/news/wo..)]. For Randy Olson, Director of the Iowa Biodiesel Board: "among the reasons for the higher price of soybean oil is the increased demand of the ever-growing middle classes in China, India and elsewhere"Â [[www.desmoinesregister.com/ap...](http://www.desmoinesregister.com/ap...)].

Similarly, to the question "Why are food prices going so high?" Nicolas Bricas, CIRAD researcher, answered: "Consumer habits are changing fast in China and India, where purchasing power is on the rise. The result is an explosion in demand. People want to



buy more and eat better. They are eating more meat. For their livestock, farmers need to grow more fodder crops. All this contributes to higher prices overall. On an international scale, agricultural tariffs have also soared because they have been deregulated"Â [See

[www.lexpansion.com/economie/...](http://www.lexpansion.com/economie/...)].

In Le Monde of 22 April 2008, to the question "Is the arrival of two new ogres on the international markets (China and India) the main cause for this price explosion?", Philippe Chalmin simply replied "Yes"Â [See [www.lemonde.fr/archives/arti..](http://www.lemonde.fr/archives/arti..)].

Philippe Lemaître continued in similar vein in the same issue of Le Monde: "Lacking infrastructures, a country like India loses about 30% of its harvests and once again becomes a net grain importer"Â [See [www.lemonde.fr/opinions/arti.](http://www.lemonde.fr/opinions/arti.)].

President Lula of Brazil declared to the FAO on 18 April 2008: "For God's sake, don't tell me that food is expensive because of biofuels. It is expensive because the world is not prepared to see millions of Chinese, Indians, Africans, Brazilians and Latin-Americans eat three times a day"Â [See [www.lemonde.fr/ameriques/art.](http://www.lemonde.fr/ameriques/art.)].

### **China and India are not responsible for soaring food prices**

China and India export more food than they import. Jacques Berthelot shows - with figures to prove it - that China is still a net exporter of grain (wheat, corn, rice) and meat! The same goes for India. The Indians have been net food product exporters since 1995. So these two countries cannot be at the root of the price surge on the world marketÂ [See [www.lemonde.fr/ameriques/art.](http://www.lemonde.fr/ameriques/art.)].

### **India suffers the consequences of import liberalisation**

India's experience of free trade has been a very negative one as regards wheat importsÂ [[See Berthelot, p. 27.]. Under pressure from its partners in the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the Indian government of Manmohan Singh - himself a good pupil of neo-liberalism - removed customs duty on wheat imports,

effective as of February 2006. In that year, for the first time since 2001, India imported more wheat (6.7 million tonnes) than it exported (0.6 million tonnes). This was a deliberate policy on the part of the Indian government who wished to satisfy two needs: find favour with its WTO partners and buy wheat on the world market at a lower price than that practised by local producers.

The Indian State bought 5.5 million tonnes of wheat directly from countries abroad when its national production would have been enough to satisfy domestic demand (Indian wheat production reached 74 million tonnes whereas domestic demand required 60 million tonnes). So wheat prices, instead of going down on the domestic market, went up because of speculative stockpiling by traders. This deplorable action by the Singh government led its opponents to bring an appeal before the Supreme Court. Made cautious by popular anger and public pressure, the Prime Minister backed down in 2007.

We should note that while India became a net importer of wheat during the 2006 episode, it remained a net exporter of cereals thanks to its rice and corn exports.

With the lack of evidence against Chinese responsibility, the press has begun to change tact.

On 19 August 2008, the French financial daily Les Echos published an article titled "Hausse des prix alimentaires: La Chine declare non coupable" (Rise in food prices: China found not guilty). Drawing on OECD statistics and a study from a North American researcher, published by the North American department of agriculture, the French daily stated that the Chinese are self-sufficient, especially when it comes to cereals. Meanwhile, the British neoliberal weekly The Economist, in its edition of 16 August 2008 managed the feat of saying one thing and contradicting itself in the same paragraph: "There is something to the claim that China's huge demand for food and energy is pushing up global commodity prices." A few lines down, the editorial of the The Economist continues: "And China's food production has grown

faster than consumption over the past few years. As a small, but growing net exporter of wheat, corn and rice, China has, if anything, helped to ease world grain price." Metal gymnastics no less!

## **The policies of the US and the EU are the main causes of the global food crisis**

While China and India export more foodstuff than they import, the US and the European Union do the contraryÂ [We return to J. Berthelot who dedicates 8 pages of his study to show the lopsided character of the food trade between the US and EU and the rest of the world.]. During 2006-2007, the US were net importers of foodstuff. The same applies for the EU, which is in third place in the list of net importers of cereals (after Japan and Mexico). It is thus the demand that comes from the US and EU that is likely to drive up the prices.

But, specifically, how are the US and the EU responsible for the rise of food prices?

Firstly, it must be factored in that the US plays a determining role in fixing global grain prices (cereals, oil producing grains, and protein rich grains) since the other countries adapt their prices according to the listings on the Stock market of Chicago, Kansas City or MinneapolisÂ [See Berthelot, p.3.]. Furthermore, the rise of grain prices directly push up the price of meat since livestock animals feed on grainsÂ [The price of beef increased by 47% between January 2006 and April 2008, that of chicken by 42%, and that of mutton by 31%. It is to be noted that the price of pork, of which the Chinese are particularly fond, has stagnated. See Berthelot, p.6.].

Two factors that are directly dependent on the US and Europe came into play in the brutal rise of food prices in 2006-2008.

Firstly, there is the continued



aggressive production of biofuels in the US and EU. Secondly, there is the speculation of the food prices (and hydrocarbons – [Rising hydrocarbons prices directly affect the prices of food since the costs of production increase (transport, use of tools, chemical fertilizers).]) on the stock markets.

### **Massive rise in biofuel production in the US**

In 2007, the United States accounted for 43% of global production of biofuels – [Followed by Brazil with 32% of biofuels (we consider the case of Brazil further down), the EU with 15%, China with 3%, India and Thailand at 1% each. The rest of the world represent 5%]. Between 2005 and 2006, the production of ethanol from corn was multiplied by a factor of five in the US. Between 2005 and 2009, this production has thus been increased by a factor of nine! The percentage of corn dedicated to the production of ethanol has passed from 14.4% to 23.7% between 2005-2005 and 2007-2008.

A share of soybean production is also diverted to the production of biofuels (in August 2007, 23.2% of the internal consumption of soybean oil was dedicated to the production of biodiesel) but its cost is much higher than ethanol from corn. A large portion of land previously used to grow wheat and soybean has now been converted to corn, and this has pushed up the prices of wheat and soybeans. The price of corn for animal and human consumption has also shot up ever since a large part of corn production has been diverted towards ethanol. Likewise the price of rice produced in the US has soared due to a decrease in production since it has become more profitable to grow corn, soybean, wheat and other forage grains (see frame).

The increased production of biofuels has nothing to do with the free market; it is purely the result of the direct intervention of the state under the pressure of agribusiness.

Despite the rise in oil prices, the production of biofuels is not profitable without subsidies from the US federal budget. In 2005, the US Congress adopted a law on energy which

boosted biofuel production. This policy of support was reinforced by the law of 19 September 2007 on energy independence, which actually threatens the oil industry with severe penalties if they do not include 57 billion litres of biofuels in their production of fuel by 2015 (15 billion of US gallons – [1 US gallon = 3.78 litres.]) and 136 billion litres in 2022. To reach this target, the part of the production of corn destined to biofuels will reach 32.8% by 2011-2012.

Thanks to this rigid law the revenues of the agricultural sector in the US, which is dominated by big agribusiness firms, jumped by 48% in 2007.

On the responsibility of the US in the global food crisis, we defer to Jacques Berthelot who states: “The United States are undeniably the major cause in the rise of agricultural prices and the current food riots due to the wild policies concerning the production of biofuels and because, as we’ve seen, it is the price of US grains that is responsible for the rise in world prices and on which other exporting countries base their prices.” – [See Berthelot, p. 32.] We will later see that the role of speculation, which is particularly rife in the US, must also be factored in.

How the increase of biofuel in the US has led to a worldwide increase in the price of rice – [The content of this section has been taken from J. Berthelot, p. 9].

Speculation on rice has played a large role, but the ethanol boom is also responsible for the explosion in the price of rice, despite the fact it is common practice to deny any link between the two. According to the USDA, although the US accounts for only 2% of the global production, it is still the fourth-largest rice-exporting country... In 2007/08, the price of US produced brown rice was at its highest level since 1980/81. On the other hand: “Much higher fuel and fertilizer prices since 2005, and extremely high prices for competing crops since 2006/07, have made rice uncompetitive with soybeans, feed grains, and wheat” – [See <http://www.ers.usda.gov/briefing/Ri>].

In fact, US rice production fell by 12%

between 2006 and 2007 after a 16% decline in cultivated land, and US rice exports fell by 20% as a result, even though the US represented only 12% of worldwide exports in 2006 and 9.6% in 2007. However, Daryll Ray et al. demonstrated that the US is the “price-setter” for the world price of rice: “Eighty-four percent of the variation in the Thai rice price could be explained by the Texas price and the US rice stocks-to-use ratio, and a ten-percent increase in the US price will result in a 4.7 percent increase in the Thai price. This correlation is compelling evidence that even where the US is not a dominant exporter, its commodity exchanges influences world prices” – [[ See <http://agpolicy.org/blueprint/APAC%...> ].

## **The European Union’s responsibility**

As Jacques Berthelot writes: “The EU-27 – [The EU was composed of 27 countries in 2008.] preaches a desire to feed the rest of the world while raising the spectre of a threat from China and India! This is saddening and even laughable when, in reality, the facts demonstrate that the EU, even more than the US, receives a massive amount of food aid from developing countries” – [See Berthelot, p. 38].

Under the pressure of agribusinesses, the EU has adopted a similar policy to that of Washington. By 2010, 5.75% of all fuel must be in the form of biofuel (10% by 2020). The EU produces biodiesel principally from rapeseed oil (the EU produces 77% of global biodiesel) and ethanol from wheat, barley, corn, beet and distilled excess wine. The European production of biofuel is not profitable, and can only be sustained with subsidies. In order to reach the goals cited above without having to resort to importing, by 2012 twenty percent of arable land currently being cultivated would need to be devoted to this project.

The EU wants people to believe that this policy aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Yet, according to many scientists, the environmental cost of

biofuels exceeds all the possible benefits they could ever provide. For its part, the OECD, in a report published on September 12, affirms that, "The current push to expand the use of biofuels is creating unsustainable tensions that will disrupt markets without generating significant environmental benefits... National governments should cease to create new mandates for biofuels and investigate ways to phase them out..." [ <http://www.cfr.org/publication/1429..>]. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier De Schutter, wrote: "Instead of helping to fight against climate change, the use of certain types of biofuel could in fact accelerate this process" [Olivier De Schutter, carte blanche in the newspaper the Le Soir, September 6 and 7, 2008 titled: "Il faut suspendre les programmes d'investissement dans les agrocarburants", [http://www.lesoir.be/forum/cartes\\_b...](http://www.lesoir.be/forum/cartes_b...)].

## Does the biofuel produced by China, India and Brazil, play an important role in soaring food prices?

**China:** Until 2006, China was the third global producer of corn-based ethanol (far behind the US and the EU) but in June 2007 Chinese authorities prohibited all new production of corn for ethanol in order to address the 42% increase in the price of pork on the domestic market. Chinese production of ethanol effectively fell by 50% in 2007. Jacques Berthelot specifies: "While, despite the production of corn-based ethanol, China still exported a large quantity of corn in 2007, its ethanol cannot be blamed for global price inflation of cereals. And as it only produced 50 000 t of biodiesel in 2006 instead of the 2 Mt expected by 2010, its production of biodiesel is not

responsible for the explosion in the price of oleaginous plants" [J. Berthelot, p. 23].

**India:** Just like its North American and European counterparts, the Indian government also obliged its oil industry to incorporate 5% of biofuel by 2010, and 20% by 2025. India had become, by 2006, the fourth global producer of bio-ethanol but, in 2007, India's production literally collapsed (falling from 1.9 billion litres to 200 million litres, almost a 90% reduction). Jacques Berthelot concludes: "As this bio-ethanol is produced from sugarcane molasses, and India exports sugar, the price of which has dropped since 2006 and didn't pass its 2007 level until 2008, we cannot blame India for the explosion in the price of cereals" [J. Berthelot, p. 29 that can be found at <http://www.grain.org/agrofuels/?ind..>]. In addition, India decided to develop biofuel production from the seeds of an inedible plant, the jatropha.

However, according to J. Berthelot this program failed to succeed because the government fixed the price of bio-fuel below the costs of production. It must be noted that, "Indian agricultural co-ops and NGOs for the defence of the environment are resolutely opposed to the development of biofuels, be it derived from jatropha or the eventual second generation of cellulosic products" [J. Berthelot, p. 29 that can be found at <http://www.grain.org/agrofuels/?ind..>].

**Brazil:** The third global producer of biofuel, Brazil comes in just behind the US and the EU, greatly surpassing China and India. In fact, it produces 10 times more biofuel than China and 30 times more than India. The vast majority of Brazil's production up to this point has come from sugarcane (a very small but increasingly important percentage is derived from soybean). The environmental and social impact of the development of single-crop-farming of sugar cane is clearly detrimental, and the Brazilian authorities' policy is thus highly criticized by numerous social movements. Nevertheless, the production of sugarcane-based biofuel cannot be cited as a factor in the increase of global food prices because the price of sugar has continued to fall

since 2006.

In conclusion, Chinese, Indian and Brazilian production of biofuel [Even if Brazil is not responsible for soaring food prices, its agribusiness exportation industry generates huge profits. Brazil's revenue from agricultural exportations greatly increased in 2007 and in 2008.] , although highly questionable from an environmental or social standpoint [Designating arable farmland for biofuel production is unacceptable because this restricts farmers from land that could otherwise be used to grow food crops. Moreover, sugar cane production is in the hands of and large landowners and capitalistic agribusiness companies that overwork agricultural workers and keep landless farmers from obtaining their own land. Negative environmental aspects abound as well. Two examples: carbon dioxide emissions created from the harvest of sugarcane (because it is probably burned on the spot) and massive deforestation - specifically of the Amazon rainforest - in order to extend sugarcane fields.], is not responsible for the explosion of food prices.

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## The fundamental role of speculation in food price inflation

Speculation on the main US exchanges, where the world prices of commodities (farm products and raw materials) are negotiated, has played a fundamental role. The principal actors in this speculation are not independent, but institutional investors: investment banks [Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley and, until their dissolution or takeover, Bear Stearns, Lehman Brothers, Merrill Lynch.], pension funds, mutual funds, insurance companies and commercial banks. Hedge funds and sovereign wealth funds [Sovereign wealth funds are public institutions which, apart from a few exceptions, belong either to emerging countries like China or to

oil-exporting countries.

The first sovereign wealth funds were created during the second half of the 20th century by those governments that wanted to put aside a portion of their earnings from oil and manufactured products.] have also played a role, even though their weight is much less than that of institutional investors. [Globally, at the beginning of 2008, institutional investors represented 70 000 USD, sovereign wealth funds 3 000 billion USD and hedge funds 1 000 USD.].

Michael W. Masters, who directed a hedge fund for 12 years on Wall Street, attests to this fact in his account presented May 20, 2008, before a committee of Congress in Washington. [Testimony of Michael W. Masters, Managing Member/Portfolio Manager Masters Capital Management, LLC, before the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs United States Senate [http://hsgac.senate.gov/public/\\_fil...](http://hsgac.senate.gov/public/_fil...)]. In front of this committee, assembled to investigate the possible role of speculation in the increase in the price of commodities, he declared: "You have to ask the question 'Are institutional investors contributing to food and energy price inflation?' And my answer is 'YES.'"

In this definitive account, he explains that food and energy price inflation is not due to insufficient supply but to a sudden increase in demand by new actors in the commodities market where "futures" are traded. In the futures market, investors purchase the upcoming production: the wheat harvest that will happen a year or two years from now, the oil production three or six years down the line. Theoretically, the principal investors in these markets are for example airline companies that buy the oil they need or agro-firms that purchase specific cereals. Michael W. Masters demonstrated however that in the US, assets allocated by institutional investors to commodity index trading rose from \$13 billion at the end of 2003 to \$260 billion as of March 2008. ["Assets allocated to commodity index trading strategies have risen from \$13 billion at the end of 2003 to \$260 billion as of March

2008".]

The prices of 25 commodities listed on these markets climbed 183% during the same period. He explained that it has to do with a narrow market. [In 2004, the total value of future contracts outstanding for all 25 index commodities amounted to only \$180 billion. Compare with worldwide equity markets which totalled \$44 000 billion, i.e. over 240 times bigger". Michael W. Masters indicates that during that year, institutional investors invested \$25 billion in the futures market, accounting for 14% of that market. He shows that in the first trimester of 2008, institutional investors greatly increased their investments in this markets: \$55 billion in 52 business days. Now there's a way to incite price inflation!].

Institutional investors such as pension funds, only need to allocate 2% of their assets to overwhelm the system. The price of commodities on the futures market has immediate repercussions on the current price of these goods. He demonstrated that institutional investors had purchased enormous quantities of corn and wheat between 2007 and 2008, resulting in massive price inflation. [It's important to note that the governing body of the Futures market, the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) doesn't consider institutional investors to be speculators, but instead views them as commercial market participants.

This allows them to reinforce the fact that speculation plays no significant role in soaring food prices. A critique of the CFTC can be found in Michael W. Masters' op. cit. and especially in Michael Greenberger's testimony, law professor at the University of Maryland, before the U.S. Senate Committee, June 3, 2008. Michael Greenberger who was the director of one department of the CFTC from 1997 to 1999, criticises the laxity of the current directors of the CFTC turning a blind eye to institutional investors' energy price manipulation. He cites a series of claims made by CFTC figureheads which would not be out of place in an anthology of hypocrisy and idiocy.

Michael Greenberger believes that, on

the US stock market, between 80 and 90% of all transactions in the energy sector are speculative (p. 22). Testimony of Michael Greenberger, Law School Professor at the University of Maryland, before the US Senate Committee regarding "Energy Market Manipulation and Federal Enforcement Regimes", June 3, 2008. September 22, 2008, in the heart of the United States' financial crisis, when President Bush announced a bailout plan of \$700 billion, the price of soybean jumped 61.5% because of speculation!

Jacques Berthelot, who devotes six pages of his study to the role of speculation, also shows the crucial role that it plays in the rising prices. [J. Berthelot, p. 51 to 56.]. In addition, he uses the example of the Belgian bank, KBC, which ran an advertising campaign in order to sell a new commercial product: investing their savings in 6 agricultural raw materials. In order to convince clients to buy into its investment fund, "KBC-Life MI Security Food Prices 3", the KBC advertisement affirmed: "Take advantage of the rising prices of food commodities!" This advertisement presented the "shortage of water and farmable land" in the form of an "opportunity" as there is now a "shortage of food products that has led to rising prices of food commodities" [http://www.lalibre.be/index.php?vie..].

Trade agreements imposed by industrialized countries and the institutions they dominate (WB, IMF and WTO) weaken developing countries' capacity to face rising food costs

In 2007-2008, more than half the world's population saw their living conditions sharply deteriorate as they were confronted with a massive increase in food prices. This sparked substantial protests in at least 15 countries in the first half of 2008. The number of people affected by hunger has increased to tens of millions, and hundreds of millions have seen their access to food greatly restricted (and, consequently, other vital goods and services. [Actually, in order to purchase food, the price of which has risen sharply, poor families have had to reduce spending on healthcare and



education, as well as on various household needs.]). All of this is the result of the decisions made by a small group of companies in the agribusiness sector (biofuel producers) and the financial sector (institutional investors that manipulate the flow of farm products) that benefited from the governmental support of Washington and the European Commission.

However, the amount of exports in world food production remains weak. A very small amount of rice, wheat and corn produced in the world is exported, as the vast majority is consumed on the spot. For example, Oxfam claims that in the case of rice, "only 4 to 5% of rice production is sold on the world market" [See [www.madeindignity.be/Public/...](http://www.madeindignity.be/Public/...)], while nearly 20% of wheat production is exported [See [www.fimarc.org/Fiche1BLE.pdf](http://www.fimarc.org/Fiche1BLE.pdf)]. Nevertheless the prices on the local market are determined by the export prices.

Moreover, as we have already seen, these prices are essentially established on the floors of three of US exchanges (Chicago, Minneapolis et Kansas City). As a result, the prices of rice, wheat or corn in Timbuktu, in Mexico, in Nairobi and in Islamabad are directly affected by the change in the price of these crops on the US exchanges. In 2008, in fear of being overthrown by massive social uprisings, authorities of developing countries all over the planet urgently had to take measures in order to guarantee their citizens access to basic foods.

If we have arrived at this point, it is because for many decades, governments have progressively stopped supporting local producers of these crops - the majority of whom are small producers - and followed the neo-liberal recipe for success dictated by institutions such as the World Bank, or the IMF's structural adjustment programs and poverty reduction action plans. Claiming to fight against poverty, these institutions convinced governments to push policies that reproduced, and even reinforced, poverty. Furthermore, over the last couple of years, numerous governments have

signed bilateral treaties (free trade treaties most notably) that further aggravate the situation. Trade negotiations in the WTO's Doha Development Round also resulted in disastrous consequences.

## What happened?

**Act 1.** Developing countries renounced the customs protections that protected local farmers from the competition of foreign agricultural producers, mainly the large North American and European agricultural exporting firms. These large companies invaded the local markets with farm products sold at prices which were actually lower than it cost local farmers and breeders to produce the same foodstuff, thus causing them to go bankrupt (many have since emigrated towards the large cities in their own countries or in more industrialized countries). According to the WTO, the fact that Northern governments provide subsidies to their large agricultural companies on the domestic market is not an infraction of anti-dumping rules. As J. Berthelot writes: "While the man in the street understands dumping as exporting at a price lower than the cost of production, for the OMC, it is not dumping as long as the export price is the same as the domestic price, even though this price is lower than the cost of production"

In short the countries in the EU, the US and other exporting countries can invade other markets with farm products thanks to enormous domestic subsidies. An emblematic case is that of US corn exports to Mexico. Because of the Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) signed between the US, Canada and Mexico, the latter abandoned the customs protections between itself and its northern neighbours. Corn exports from the US to Mexico increased nine-fold between 1993 (the last year before the NAFTA came into effect) and 2006. Hundreds of millions of Mexican families had to stop producing corn because domestic corn cost more than the corn arriving from the US (produced with industrial technology and enormous subsidies). This not only created an economic drama, but also engendered a loss of identity, as corn is a symbol of the

Mexican culture, most notably for the Mayan people. The majority of corn farmers abandoned their fields and searched for work in the industrial cities of Mexico and the US.

**Act 2.** Mexico came to rely on US corn to feed its population, and was thus unprepared to face the stark increase in the price of corn, caused partly by market speculation in Chicago, Kansas City, and Minneapolis and partly by its northern neighbours' production of corn-based ethanol. Mexican producers of corn no longer existed to meet the domestic demand and Mexican consumers have had to face an explosion in the price of their staple food - the tortilla - the corn-based crepe which is the equivalent to the bread or bowl of rice consumed in other parts of the world. In 2007, enormous working-class protests shook Mexico.

These various events show that it has become necessary vindicate clear alternative propositions. The last section of this study draws on the provisional conclusions of the task force on "food sovereignty" set up by the farmer's organization, Via Campesina. These propositions are still being worked on and have not (yet) been adopted by the leaders of Via Campesina and therefore could possibly be partially or considerably modified by them before being adopted. Here the author discusses the conclusions as they stand at present..

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## Alternative propositions

Food security for all starts with stable food prices that cover the cost of production and ensure producers a living wage. The model of low prices, promoted by western governments to increase the mass consumption of manufactured products and services (tourism, entertainment, telecommunications, etc.), is neither socially nor environmentally sustainable. This model mainly benefits large companies and also - by diverting the population's attention away from democratic ideas towards

mass consumption - the political and economic elite of those countries who thus preempt power.Â [This section entitled alternative propositions is derived from Â« Proposition de document de position de la Via Campesina sur les prix agricoles et la spéculation Â», July 2008]

Faced with the current food and environmental crises, radical changes must be made, and fast. The propositions listed below are feasible ideas for agricultural and business policies based on food sovereignty. They would stabilize food prices at levels capable of assuring sustainable food production in the large majority of countries.

#### **On a local level:**

Â Support local farm production, notably by supporting farming practices and by facilitating small producers' access to credit, for men and women

Â Support and develop short/direct marketing channels between producers and consumers in order to ensure that prices are profitable to farmers and affordable for consumers

Â Encourage consumption of local products

Â Support more autonomous forms of production that are less subject to price fluctuations than those forms of production that use chemical fertilizers (breeding with grass instead of corn/soybean for example).

#### **On a national level:**

International law allows States to implement unilateral sovereign laws to protect their agriculture and guarantee sovereign use of their natural resources. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognizes the right to food as a basic human right. It is thus the States' responsibility to make sure that this fundamental right prevails over business law. States can call on the legal notions of fundamental change in circumstances (food price inflation, climate change) or unavoidable necessity (maintaining social order, enabling the population to fulfil basic needs) to withdraw from treaties which threaten the food

sovereignty and security of their population.

The following propositions are based on this legal framework. It is the responsibility of the individual states to implement such measures.

Â Re-establish policies that support the family farm production

Â Not to sign and, if need be terminate, multilateral (WTO) or bilateral (ALE et APE) free-trade agreements that conflict with food sovereignty

Â Establish or re-establish agricultural import restrictions

Â Build up public food reserves in every country

Â Re-establish mechanisms that will guarantee stable agricultural prices

Â Develop production control policies in order to stabilize agricultural prices

Â Control the profit margins of intermediaries

Â Set up global land reforms (for farmland, but also water and seeds) to ensure that farmers that produce food products for the local population have access to resources, rather than the large companies that produce for exporting purposes

Â Ban speculation on food

#### **On an international level:**

Â Ban speculation on food; it is a crime to speculate on a person's life, and it is for this reason that governments and international institutions need to stop speculative investments on farm products

Â Add a law on food sovereignty to international law so that every country's right to develop their own agricultural policies in order to protect their agriculture, without harming other countries, is formally recognized (primarily to the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights)

Â Declare a moratorium on the industrial production of biofuel

Â Establish or re-establish

international organizations to regulate the market and the production of the main export products (coalitions of countries that produce coffee, coco bean, bananas, tea etc.) so that stable prices are assured on an international level

Â Terminate Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) that force States to give up their food sovereignty

Â Terminate the exploitation caused by the mechanism of the external debt

Â Reform the EU's Agricultural Policy and the United State's Farm Bill, both of which have disastrous effects on the agricultural markets. [53]

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## **Conclusion**

This research provides an alternative point of view to the current mainstream explanations Claiming that China and India are responsible for the food crisis is a red herring.

In fact, the actions of large capitalist interests, notably in the US, and, to a lesser degree, in Western Europe, are the real cause of the food crisis. More specifically, institutional investors that speculate on food and hydrocarbons and large agribusiness companies that forcefully advance biofuel production, are responsible for food price inflation and by doing so have increased their own profits.

The world food crisis reveals the driving force behind the capitalist solution: the quest to maximize individual short-term profits. For capitalists, food is nothing more than a product to be bought and sold at a price that generates the highest possible profit. Food, human beings' essential element of survival, has thus been reduced to a simple profit-generating tool. This lethal logic must be stopped. Capital's stronghold on the major forms of marketing and production must be curbed.

The world food crisis - the consequences of which will only become worse with the present economic crisis and current climate change - calls for a whole new set of radical public policies. Moving



forward in this direction concerns the whole of mankind.

21 November 2008

Translated by Judith Harris, Brian Hunt and Diren Valayden in collaboration with Elizabeth Anne.

*The author has drawn largely on the remarkable 57-page study by Jacques Berthelot entitled: "DémÃler le vrai du faux dans la flambée des prix agricoles mondiaux" (Separating the*

*true from the false in the world commodities price explosion), published 15 July 2008. Readers are invited to read the full text at: [www.cadtm.org/spip.php?artic....](http://www.cadtm.org/spip.php?artic....) The author also wishes to thank Daniel Munevar for his documentary research on the role of speculation. The author also consulted the following sources: Jean Ziegler, United Nations special rapporteur on the Right to Food and Olivier De Schutter - his successor since May 2008, the Bank for International Settlements,*

*The World Bank, OECD, FAO, The Economist, The Financial Times and other publications that are clearly credited in this article. Finally, the author is indebted to the discussions in which he took part as a lecturer during the seminar organised in the Canaries from 21 to 24 July 2008 by the Food Sovereignty Commission of the Via Campesina movement. Naturally, the contents of the present study are the sole responsibility of the author and in no way commit the persons and organisations cited.*

## Another policy is possible!

24 April 2011, by **Chawki Salhi**

Worried by the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions, Bouteflika is promising to demolish the legislative arsenal of political repression and the system of circumscribing freedoms which he himself put in place during his first two terms of office (criminalization of the violation of press laws, the repressive electoral law of 2007) and the communal code in progress, sanctifying the supervision the wali (male person in authority).

But he still intends to keep control over our freedom of expression, our freedom to demonstrate, to establish a party, a trade union or an association... whereas these rights are not negotiable! No one has asked for authorization to march or to organize their struggle.

Worse, he intends to decide alone on the project of a new constitution. Whereas in a democracy, a free national debate would be necessary, with access to the media for all opinions, and then the election of representatives of the people, with proportional representation of the positions expressed, to a constituent assembly charged with concretising in the constitution the aspirations of

workers, of young people, of the majority of working people.

His self-satisfaction on the economic and social level is contradicted by thousands of struggles. If everything is going so well, why are there all these demonstrations?

Admittedly, he affirms that he has not completely capitulated to the ultraliberal lobbies, those of the importing racketeers, of the barons of informal trade, of the private agribusiness monopolies. Admittedly, he maintains timid reservations about the imperialist aggression in Libya. But he maintains a policy of low wages, precarious work and massive public expenditure for the profit of the multinationals, while Algeria's ability to produce and market goods is being dismantled. His repentance on this ground is expressed in the protectionist policy that has been in operation for several years, which works to the advantage of foreign partners and local capitalists, whereas it is necessary to abolish this liberal option which increases dependence and social precariousness.

We think that it is necessary to restore to the people the public property that Bouteflika has sold off, and to nationalize or re-nationalize essential strategic sectors and public services.

But it is up to the workers, to the popular masses to conduct another policy which would represent a real change. And it is possible.

Because if Bouteflika intends to restore freedoms to the state in which he found them in 1999, we want more. We want a real democracy which allows the expression and the sovereignty of the hard-working and poor majority our people.

If Bouteflika undertakes protectionist mini-reforms to correct the damage from his ultraliberal course, we want a real policy of national development in the service of the people's needs, a development which creates genuine decent jobs.

To change the government, the assembly and the president is necessary, but it is not enough for us. We want another social order which banishes exploitation and oppression.

Algiers, April 16, 2011

# Unrest In Algeria: The Window is Closing Fast

24 April 2011, by **Lakhdar Ghettas**

Algeria has been in a state of paralysis since plans for the third term went ahead two years ago. It was a moment when the Algerian ruling establishment crossed the Rubicon. A general state of government dysfunction manifests in every aspect of Algerian affairs, not least the SONATRACH scandal and several other corruption affairs in various key sectors. As the ruling establishment struggled to reconcile their entrenched disagreements, a state of paralysis gripped the already blocked channels of communication between state and society. This meant that violent protests and riots have become the only medium of exchange between top and bottom structures of the state.

The genuine civil society in Algeria has been decimated and replaced, over the last two decades or so, by a facade, weak and discredited structure of rent distribution and cooptation. Algeria's return to the World Cup, after twenty years, galvanised the national spirit and delayed the inevitable explosion of frustration fuelled by the lack of opportunity for the youth in a country which struggles to take off economically, despite the unprecedented public investment programmes (\$200 billion for 1999-2008, \$286 billion for 2009-2014) and \$150 billion in reserves. As soon as the World Cup anaesthesia was over, Algerians woke up to the same bitter reality; and as the Tunisian uprising rolled into its third week,

Algerian youth were rioting in the streets in early January protesting exclusion and demanding social justice. Those riots were very violent in over 20 provinces and resulted in 5 killed, several hundreds wounded and over 1,000 arrested. The destruction of public property and damage to

private businesses was significant. But because this was Algeria, a country that is no stranger to violent protest, the riots were overshadowed by the uprising next door in Tunisia, whose last revolt dated to the early 1980s.

By January 10th calm was re-established while the government rushed in to pass an emergency economic incentive package in order to cap tariffs and grant tax breaks on basic foodstuff imports. The government blamed the riots on lobbies' plotting in an effort to challenge new commercial regulations, and opted to believe that the problem was a mere consumption one fuelled by hikes in foodstuffs. Witnessing the uprising in one of the neighbourhoods of Algiers from its eruption to the return of calm I warned at the time that the issue was primarily political.

The spectacular way in which Ben Ali fled and Mubarak resigned increased panic within the ruling establishment in Algiers. A more comprehensive economic package targeted to the youth was deployed, which included almost interest-free loans and subsidies for housing, among other measures. The news of the uprising coming from neighbouring Libya added to the distress of the establishment, while timid but growing calls for genuine reform started to open the debate on an issue which had until then been ignored. Panic was at its peak.

The tragic turn of events which had taken place in Libya was a golden opportunity for the regime in that it could revive the fear of Algerians of returning to the bloody civil conflict 1990s decade should they press further for demands for radical reforms. The regime have come to the charge now that it could play on the

difficult memory of the tragic 1990s among Algerians. Nevertheless, what remained of the genuine civil society managed to form a broad coalition headed by the respected human rights militant Ali Yahia Abdenmour, aged 90; intellectual Dr. Fodil Boumala, and columnist Kamel Daoud to name few.

The National Coordination for Change and Democracy (CNCD), led by Dr. Mustapha Bouchachi the president of the Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights, succeeded in breaking the barrier of fear when it managed to stage a march in Algiers despite the unprecedented and disproportionately heavy riot-police blockade. The 19 year long state of emergency was lifted soon thereafter *de jure* but remains in force *de facto*, in that marches are still banned and a new legal framework of security measures has been put in lieu of the state of emergency.

The escalation of violence in Libya suited the regime's rhetoric in deterring any peaceful mass mobilisation for fear the country might default back to the instability of the 1990s. The regular Saturday marches organised by the CNCD lost momentum and the regime's bet on the collective tragic memory and fear seemed winning. The government then geared up its campaign to claim that Mr. Bouteflika has been in office for only 12 years (unlike Ben Ali, Mubarak, Qadhafi, and Abdullah Salah) and that the government has delivered in comparison. In other words, Algeria is not Tunisia, nor for that matter Egypt or Libya.

On those two accounts my counter-argument has been the following: the regime would be making a big mistake to exaggerate the impact of the memory of the 1990s on the twenty and thirty year olds. If fear of

returning to the violent and tragic 1990s is so deeply instilled among Algerians then how would the regime then explain the fact that Algerians have been protesting violently almost non-stop, especially over the last two years? How would it explain the 11,000 riots and 70 protests registered in 2010 and last March alone respectively?

There is no denying the presence of fear but it is not as profound within this disfranchised young generation as its elders. The lack of opportunity has offset fear below the deterrence threshold. On the argument that the government has delivered then I would say the riots themselves over jobs, public services, housing, etc undermine those claims and anything achieved is dwarfed by the financial means available (\$158 billion in reserves) and the duration (two terms and half). The humiliating way in which the constitution was amended to allow a third term tarnished the little achievements of Mr. Bouteflika's rule.

Meanwhile calls for genuine reform emerged from within the ranks of the regime. Key historic figures like Abdelhamid Mehri and Hocine Ait Ahmed have both addressed open letters to Mr. Bouteflika urging him to execute profound political reforms so as to coincide with Algeria's 50th anniversary of independence next year. There have been similar calls from within the ranks of the military as well as the intelligence services Département du Renseignement et de la Sécurité (DRS), in the form of articles in *Le Monde Diplomatique* (and the Algerian daily *El Watan*.) This latter's dossier, of 15 March, on the DRS was historic in that for the first time public debate has been opened on the security intelligence services and their role within the affairs of the state. It is clear something is in the making. Now even the coalition parties forming the ruling government have called for profound reforms including amendments to reinstate into the constitution the two-term restriction and dissolving the whole facade democracy structure (parliament, local assemblies, call for anticipated elections, etc).

This has created the perception that

the regime is on the defensive and compelled to buy social peace in order to quell any sign of unrest. It is what I call "the now-or-never moment". Over the last two weeks several sectors have staged sit-ins in Algiers, despite the heavy security presence and curtailment. The list is long but four need be examined to elicit the trend.

First, the students went on strike and camped outside the ministry of higher education as well as the presidency palace for over a month. Second, paramilitary communal guards, formed in the 1990s to help combat terrorism alongside the regular military and police forces, managed to march in Algiers, in uniform, to protest plans to disband the corps. Third, teachers on temporary contracts for many years maintained a sit in outside the presidency palace for ten years despite police harassment aimed at breaking up the protest. Fourth, Sonatrach workers in the gas-rich field Hassi R'mel went on hunger strike on socio-economic grievances for few days following which the company's top management has come to meet their demands this week.

All four protests managed to have most of their demands satisfied after two weeks of a *bras de fer* with the regime. This has had an instant domino effect on the other sectors, and right now resident doctors (7,500 doctors), and the powerful independent civil servants union which comprises the personnel of Algeria's 1541 municipalities have all gone on strike. Meanwhile protests of neighbourhoods and the jobless have been flaring up here and there more often. This week Mohamed Slmani self-immolated his 19 year old body and succumbed to his burn wounds several hours later. Over 30 have now gone down that path, among which 6 have died.

The regime might have perfected tactics of all sorts (media campaigns, heavy security policing, etc) in order to abort the revived civil society mobilisation in the aftermath of the Tunisian uprising, and one might argue it have succeeded in that effort. What we are, however, observing now is that the mass mobilisation the regime feared has gone sector-based, making it impossible to discredit it as

Islamist, ethnic, or subversive. The regime was caught off-guard by the impressive march of 3,000 paramilitary guards, the persistency palace sit-ins of the students, the resilient teachers and the disarming hunger strike of the SONATRACH workers. Each threatened a nightmare scenario: confrontation with elements that fought terrorism, disfranchising the students and risking pushing them to the opposition movement, prolonged strike as high school Baccalaureate exam loomed and finally paralysing the most sensitive energy sector generating the country's hard currency.

Having witnessed the results obtained by their fellow active countrymen in the space of two weeks or so, the "now-or-never" spirit has been spreading like wildfire, reaching every sector; even the journalists of the state's mouthpiece *EL Moudjahid* and the national radio have staged sit ins. The state apparatus is chronically dysfunctional but now it is being rapidly paralysed. The regime won't be able to satisfy all of the "now-or-never" protests. The only way out from this deadlock is for the regime to break this cycle by declaring a roadmap for real reform. A few viable projects have been devised by credible figures such as Dr. Ahmed Benbitour's initiative. It is the other "now-or-never" for timely change, in that the regime might not have another chance to effect profound reforms in the future, should it miss this opportunity

Should the regime fail to seize this opportunity and introduce profound changes which would address the real political problems in Algeria then

I am afraid the following scenario will come into play: the fact that some sectors driven by the "now-or-never" spirit will inevitably be disappointed and not see their demands met; in that the government will not arguably be able to satisfy the socio-economic grievances of protesting workers would prepare them to forge tacit and ad hoc alliances with those outside the active segment of the society i.e. the jobless and disfranchised youth who rioted last January.

In other words, the disappointed workers who are on strike now would march behind and support the jobless

and marginalised youth who have been in the streets for several years now. This possible scenario would give momentum for another wide-spread uprising, which would in turn focus the minds within the ruling establishment as to the urgency of change.

Should things come to this scenario, then I am confident a fraction of the January uprising in terms of intensity would force the way for real change, probably in a more peaceful and less costly way than the Tunisian and Egyptian experiences. There is still time for the regime to end the 'now-or-never' domino effect and go ahead with genuine reforms, but the clock is

ticking.

Over the next few months new factors will come into play as well: the end-of-year exams in high schools and the spectre of a missed year should universities not regain normalcy, followed by summer with Ramadhan in the hottest month this year (August, when domestic demand for electricity because of increased use of air conditioning sets in not only south but also north reaches its peak). Either of these factors might become the trigger, especially electricity supply shortages (judging by last summer's experience); where riots flared up in many towns and villages of the southeast over the issue. There was a region-wide violent precedent one to

this in the mid-1970s.

Let's hope that the ultimate national interest of Algeria focuses minds and rises above all because time is of the essence and the window of opportunity is closing fast. The regime would be making a costly mistake to believe that the chaotic situation in Libya and the fragile one in Tunisia and Egypt would make the west favour stability in Algeria for the simple reason that Algeria cannot escape the ripple effects of the geopolitical earthquakes in the region, two of which on its eastern borders. History is on the march.

*18 April 2011*

## **Egypt 2011: a historic revolutionary process**

**23 April 2011, by Chedid Khairy**

Power has been transferred into the hands of the Higher Council of the Armed Forces to manage the transition. what has taken place has come as a surprise to everyone: the Egyptians themselves, the peoples of the Maghreb and the Middle East, journalists and other experts, and not forgetting the imperialist powers. Following the victorious uprising in Tunisia, the Egyptian people overthrew a previously immovable dictatorship. Rather than merely being the result of a domino effect, what has happened can be explained by the particularities of the Egyptian situation itself.

### **The Origins of the Conflict**

The revolutionary process is the consequence of the spark lit by the Tunisian revolution, of a new mood of audacity. Nevertheless, there has been for some years in Egypt an atmosphere of protest that has been fuelled by solidarity with the people of Palestine and also by the opposition to the war in Iraq, in addition to the

effects of the generation of Facebookers and the Kefaya (Enough!) movement as well as the large numbers of young people entering the terrain of domestic politics. Numerous demonstrations were organised to protest against the regime, bringing together at most 2,000 to 3,000 people. The post-Mubarak era brings with it serious political obstacles amid a rise in corruption.

Large workers demonstrations continued. Workers did not benefit from representation or autonomous organisations. Faced with the series of strikes, the authorities preferred to grant concessions, which in turn led to a growing confidence. The appeal for a general strike on April 6 2008 in solidarity with the workers led to the creation of the Youth Movement of April 6. This group focussed on campaigning and brought together various political tendencies and independents.

### **Democratic**

### **Protest, Generator of Mass Revolt**

The first January 25 initiative [3] brought together around 15,000 people: something was happening. For a number of years there was more freedom of speech. People criticised those in power more and more openly.

A question mark existed as to who would succeed Mubarak, as well as a sense of resentment at the hoarding of power in the hands of businessmen and at increasing corruption. The economic opening-up had led to the development of consumerism but also that of infrastructure. Society was changing. Certain sectors of the population were suffering from increasing impoverishment. The number of grievances and the level of discontent were accumulating, particularly in relation to police abuse but also in relation to increasing daily economic hardship and high unemployment. The situation with regard to housing was also becoming more difficult. Some took to repeating the self-immolating gesture of the



Tunisian Mohamed Bouazizi.

The level of participation in the demonstrations was a significant factor right from the start, rather different from the traditional type of demonstrations which the police were able to disperse easily and brutally. The strategy employed by the protestors was particularly effective: the organisers opted to assemble at different points before converging on the agreed site of the demonstration.

The echo in the provinces of the Tahrir Square demonstrations would prove not merely important but decisive. In Alexandria, the attacks by the police did not serve to prevent anything: the crowd counter-attacked! Suez was witness to a near-insurrection. Police stations and the local headquarters of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) were destroyed. In Alexandria, the Governorate (headquarters of the regional Government) was captured, and the huge amount of files kept by Mubarak's regime were mostly burnt in public. The densely-populated Nile Delta region saw powerful demonstrations in al-Malhalla al-Kobra, al-Mansoura, Tanta, Damanhour...

Confronted with such power and determination, the regime could do nothing but back down. On February 1, Mubarak committed himself to not standing in the next presidential elections. This first victory did nothing to appease the demonstrators. Very soon after, the bell tolled for 'tawrith' (the proposal that power would simply pass to Mubarak's son Gamal). Then the regime turned to the mercenaries, the 'Baltagya', who brutally attacked those gathered in Tahrir Square. But the retreat of the Government was remarkable. The regime even agreed to dialogue with the forces of the opposition, among whom the Muslim Brotherhood remained banned. The movement did not give up and maintained its demand for Mubarak to stand down. Denunciation of the PND, the parliament and the media kept on growing.

The leadership of the united opposition, which consisted of eighty or ninety MPs, assembled a kind of 'counter-parliament' which brought together several opposition parties.

They tried more or less to coordinate the initiatives. Young people debated together what they should do next. The Muslim Brotherhood withheld their support at the start of the demonstrations but allowed their members to participate on an individual basis.

Popular support for the demonstrations was increasing, and Tahrir Square had become a physical symbol of protest. It is also there that can be found the headquarters of the Arab League, the massive administrative complex known as the 'Mogamma' [4], the American University, the Omar Makram Mosque [5], a luxury hotel and the Egyptian Museum. This space had become the symbol of protest that the mercenaries on horses and camels tried to crush using force and terror.

Just next to the Egyptian Museum, the headquarters of the PND was burnt. This was an expression of the square's huge rejection of the regime embodied in the person of the president. It included people from all generations, backgrounds and very different political orientations. Sectors of society who would usually ignore each other or at least avoid each other, rubbed shoulders, talked and collaborated. The unity between Christians and Muslims embodied that new spirit. The sentiment of the Revolution of 1919 was in the square [6], as a new kind of social life saw the light of day. A mini-society materialised in the form of food, blankets, health care, rest areas and security (guard towers, searches). A new Egypt appeared, one that overcame traditional divisions.

This revolutionary process has experienced moments of hesitation. Thus, part of the opposition called for the appointment of the head of the Constitutional Court as interim President to organise elections to a Constituent Assembly. Others called for the establishment of a national committee with representatives of the opposition to take charge during the transitional period. The young people gathered in al-Tahrir held firm and kept up their fight for the departure of the President.

## Aspects of a revolutionary process

Radicalized youth has been the engine of this powerful movement, able to coalesce around itself a wide variety of social forces. Despite a fragile structure and a very general leadership, it maintained the right course until the departure of the President. We must also mention the important work of women - on the web, in groups and on the street.

The Egyptian revolution is above all democratic. It demands the repeal of the state of emergency and judicial exceptions, the release of political prisoners, the dissolution of the People's Assembly, Consultative Council [7], and local councils, not to mention recognition of the freedom of the press and liberty of organization and association. The revision of the constitution is a particularly important issue which should be ratified by referendum. Hence the importance of the call for a democratically elected Constituent Assembly. The development of an independent judiciary, the establishment of a civil state and independent religious authorities, all show signs of progress despite the hostility of large numbers of clerics, both conservative Islam (Al-Azhar Sheikh, Grand Mufti, Salafi circles, etc) and the Coptic Church.

## Role of the Army

With the departure of Mubarak the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) has been presented as a credible guarantor of transition to elected civilian power. The protesters remain very suspicious. The AFSC is made up of a score of senior army officers with their Head Marshal Tantawi. The Head of State has departed, the Constitution annulled, and parliament dissolved but we can not talk about regime change.

The army is in control and it remains an important institution with social enterprises, farms, clubs, hospitals and its academies. Many officers or former holders of military positions



remain important in economic life, Administration and the media. The officers constitute a specific elite corps. The army, a key element of the security apparatus which includes between 350,000 and 500,000 men, came out of the shadows and took things in hand in order to avoid a shipwreck. The situation is more dangerous than in 1986, when the military had to intervene to restore order against an uprising of conscripts. Huge illusions exist, with many expressing sympathy with the military. The army enjoys great prestige because of the country's history, the wars against the State of Israel and the importance of patriotism. People say it is an army of the people. This may be true at the grassroots level, it is not true of the officers. The army has cleverly refused to enter in the spiral of repression.

Until then, it stayed behind the scenes. Now, it is projected onto the centre stage. So what will happen now? It is difficult to predict. Now, after the departure of Mubarak the debates begin: Are we heading for Portugal 1975 when the army gave the power to civilians? Will the regime close ranks? Will it lead to the scenario of Turkey in the 1980s with a strong army but in a formal democratic framework? What of the constitution? What kind of elections will take place? We can still only speculate about what will follow.

A wacky conspiracy theory has been circulating in certain media and intellectual circles including in Europe. The fall of the ra'is not a coup. There was a showdown with the United States, but this was not itself the source of the powerful mobilisations.

## The Religious Question and the Role of the Muslim Brotherhood

The revolutionary process has undermined religious authorities, Muslim as much as Christian because of their support for the regime. This applies to the Al-Azhar, a university

and mosque which as much a foundation of official religious authority as the Coptic Church. Islamism in Egypt is plural. We can distinguish between Salafism, radical Islam which supports the use of arms, and finally the Muslim Brotherhood. There are also independent forms of Islamism, nationalists influenced by Islamic currents as well as religious conservatives who are not concerned with politics ..

The Salafists, ultra-fundamentalists, supported the regime. They denounced the demonstrations and the revolution which they regarded as a mutiny. The regime even allowed them access to state television and private channels to denounce the absence of patriotism (sic) of the protestors who they condemned as part of an American-Zionist or Iranian conspiracy!

The radicals, al-Jama'at al-Islamiya and al- Jihad, broken by repression, are committed to a violent strategy. Only two historical figures supported the Revolution: Abud and Tariq Al-Zomor [8]. Al-Al-Gama'at Islamiya called for an end to the process, refused to demand the resignation of Mubarak and offered to participate in political dialogue

The Muslim Brotherhood, regularly repressed and weakened, reappeared as Mubarak fell. Their role in the mobilisations was important but discreet. They joined the movement after its onset. They proved very effective during the baltagya attacks on the demonstrators through their organisational skills, but their attempts to negotiate with the regime were frowned upon and they soon ceased.

The Muslim Brotherhood has always had an important place in Egyptian politics. Founded in 1928, the Brotherhood has been a force since the late 1930s. During the Nasser period, they suffered a great deal of repression. From the 1970s, they were able to reconstruct and play a leading role. Nowadays they are structured, modern, and non-traditionalist, although they hold to some very conservative beliefs, for example, the refusal to accept a woman or Coptic head of state. A Muslim Brotherhood

leader even suggested that Coptics should again be made to pay a capitation (guezia), or tax for non-muslims in an Islamic state. However, they are in favor of a parliament and they defend human rights.

They no longer prominently demand the implementation of Sharia (Islamic law) and assume a stance in favour of protest and democracy. Neither fascist nor anti-imperialist, they have not yet become the Turkish AKP. Nothing is impossible but what happens will depend on political and social dynamics and processes.

The Muslim Brotherhood always cultivated an ambiguous relationship with the regime. When, in 2005, under pressure from the United States, they were allowed to take part in Parliamentary elections, the Brotherhood - under the label 'autonomous' - gained 88 seats. In 2010, the regime's policy changed and they retained only one seat! Their strategy has always been characterized by a logic of voluntary restraint. They do not want direct confrontation, and their relations with the state are conditioned by their quest for legal recognition. This has led to very uncritical positions vis-a-vis the regime. For example, during certain events a few years ago they were able to ban anti-Mubarak slogans. Their supreme leader once declared himself willing to support the tawra'ath (hereditary succession). Several times the Muslim Brotherhood refrained from participating in demonstrations.

Their relations with the opposition are therefore complex. They do not want to surrender their room for manoeuvre. For some time, the regime made them a number of concessions in social and cultural areas, on such issues as the censorship of culture, giving way easily to campaigns from fundamentalists on movies or books so as not to appear timid in matters of religion and morality.

The Muslim Brotherhood has also made some false moves. Other elements have also played a role including the new generations and new politicized. The game is not yet over for them and they are also not

free of tensions and divisions.

They frequently seem to be attached to the military; thus, they were involved in discussions with Vice-President Omar Suleiman before Mubarak quit. One sign of the role that the army seems to award them is that the current president of the Constitutional Review Board belongs to the Islamist movement and the Vice-President is part of the Brotherhood. This committee comprises a range of political and religious tendencies. The Army gives them space and visibility with the aim of restoring calm. The episode of the Friday prayer with Youssef al-Qaradawi, also attests to this. In addition, part of the elites of dominant countries would not object to a Army-Brothers axis of power to ensure social peace and regional stability.

## Options of the Dominant Classes

The army is trying to reassert its authority, to "modernize" in a different sense the result of this explosive crisis. It is constrained to make concessions including opening up to elements of the opposition. It is a question of redefining the terms of its control (the control of information, the role of the police, the legitimacy of the army, the political structure). The position of the army at the head of state has always had the political and financial support of the US and EU.

It seems to be moving toward the establishment of a conservative pluralism which would allow it to maintain its power and to achieve popular legitimacy and international credibility. "Democratisation" would not only be formal. Some heads will roll and some practices will be abandoned. But it will be limited because the central objective remains to preserve its interests and to ensure a new social calm. The counter-revolution is well underway!

It is too early to predict the behavior of the Muslim Brotherhood, the main opposition force, the nature of whose recent evolution is unclear. Will they accept a compromise à la the Turkish secular state or will they follow the

example of Pakistan with Islam playing a very increased role in the State and society? Will they see themselves forced to opt for a middle path? None of these formulas is inconsistent with the pursuit of current economic policies and with close partnership with Israel and the United States. The main sections of the opposition, Islamists as much as liberal democrats, are not hostile to neoliberalism.

## The Labour Question

As the demonstrations mounted the social issue rapidly became prominent with a wave of strikes and workers' protests on an enormous scale. The advent of workers' struggle provided fuel for the anti-government movement. Their involvement first took the form of street demonstrations.

Three days before the departure of Mubarak a wave of strikes broke out [Joel Beinin has written a number of excellent articles on this subject in English] which then spread and affected many sectors throughout the territory. The Suez Canal was affected but without the navigation of vessels being affected [Provoking fears among the imperialist powers and the Gulf elites: 8% of the world's trade passes through the Suez Canal]. These strikes involved hundreds of thousands of workers in sectors as diverse as textiles, military production, transportation, gas and petroleum, cement, steel, hospitals, universities, telecommunications, without forgetting the Suez Canal region. Even the police demonstrated for higher salaries, probably to rebuild their image, tarnished by repression and deep resentment among the people.

The realities of the working world are complex and difficult: Wages in a context of skyrocketing prices, working conditions, the attitudes of certain companies, the absence of active union branches, union assets; a lot of thorny issues. Unemployment is high: officially 12%, it is in reality more than 20% at least. The rising prices are not just for food but also transportation, and fuel.

This wave has older roots, some would say over the last ten years which saw the rise and affirmation of workers' struggle despite severe repression: 2 million workers have taken part in 3000 strikes, sit-ins and demonstrations since 1998. These joined together economic demands (salaries, bonuses), social demands (right to employment, unemployment benefits, pensions, housing, medical care, free education) but also union demands. Their impact was such that the regime chose to make concessions.

One important indication of this is that the name of the Youth Movement of April 6 came from solidarity with the textile strikes of al-Mahalla al-Kobra in 2008. This emblematic struggle began in December 2006, and was not limited to specific demands but also involved directly confronting the official trade unionis. Another important case is the five-months strike in Tanta flax mill in 2009. Previously, forms of self-organization had grown with events such as demonstrations of support to the Palestinian people and against the war in Iraq. The struggles of textile workers, in the property taxes sector and transportation also charted the course.

The intervention of workers has led to the creation of a more organised, collective, and specifically social form of self-organisation. On February 9, transport workers went on strike and announced that they wanted to create their own independent union. They were demanding the lifting of the emergency law, the dissolution of the NDP, a new constitution, a government of national unity, the prosecution of corrupt officials, a minimum wage of 1,200 Egyptian pounds (about 130 euros). This last demand has been included in many conflicts.

The mobilizations of workers and the anti-regime movement were confronting the official trade unions, veritable conveyor belts of power. The Egyptian Federation of Trade Unions (EFTU) was formed in 1957 by military leaders, and union officials were often also members of the PND. The law prohibited even the existence of non-unions not affiliated to the EFTU. The attitude of union official

was favourable to the regime, and this served to increase popular discontent. Many workers wanted to start expressing their demands. The echo of the wave was so powerful that the EFTU was forced to express support following the uprising in Tunisia, demanding price controls, wage increases and supplies to the subsidized food stores providing stable foods such as bread.

The range of demands is wide and includes many economic issues: wages and bonuses but also respect for the terms of contracts, denunciation of mass redundancies and demands for a change in the behaviour of the bosses. The shift from economic to political claims seemed very complicated in an authoritarian context. The desire for independent trade unionism is long-standing. It emanates from hitherto small active networks which aspire to break with the formal structure connected to the regime and which encourage the creation of autonomous unions and an independent trade union federation. [9].

The old demand for a pluralistic union (al-al-ta'adudya niqabya) of the left trade unionists has been reinvigorated by the demand for the freedom to establish independent trade unions. With great difficulties, two independent unions managed to obtain legal recognition: in 2008, the Tax Collectors' Union and in 2010, the health technicians. In the wake of protests and social policies, on January 30, the existing independent union leaderships and representatives of a dozen companies made public their plans for the founding of an autonomous confederation.

The military leadership wants to turn back the wave of working class struggle. It has announced plans to prohibit meetings and strikes, and multiplied appeals for calm. It has not been able to arrest the growth of the movement even when major strikes (al-Mahalla al-Kobra ...) have ended. It could not even bring itself to intervene directly because it would be interpreted as a confrontation with the revolutionary process. How long can this go on? The pressures for a return to calm and economic recovery are high. They emanate primarily from the bourgeoisie, especially that of Egypt

and the Gulf, which has much to lose. Part of Egyptian society may also be tempted by such an option.

Might the army encourage reforms on a social scale? Nothing is less certain, especially since the Egyptian elites are too marked by a spirit of authoritarianism that could almost be described as "feudal", especially in terms of social relationships, especially in business. Especially since the regime has not changed. The prospect of workers setting up trade unions or autonomous political structures, autonomous and combative, is not a pleasant one for the authorities.

The actions of workers weighed heavily on events and on the departure of Mubarak. Anger at the bottom of society remains strong. The range of sectors in turmoil attests to the vitality of the movement. Demands, both economic and democratic, raise the question of trade unionism, its status and its reality. The profound grievance towards the official trade union movement have been accentuated by the revolution. A real space for the demand for independent and representative trade unionism, has opened up.

## Political Earthquake and Open Future

The political scene is experiencing an earthquake. All the political forces have been shaken by what happened, whether the Muslim Brotherhood, the Wafd, the Nasserites, or the left. Many political persuasions exist without necessarily being organised. More importantly, a new generation has taken its place in the public arena: Facebookers, that is to say young people in their thirties, who have studied and are in tune with globalization and connected via new media. A new period of politicisation has begun. Discussions concern a thousand and one subjects: the constitution, elections, citizenship, corruption, the role of the police, the relationship between Copts and Muslims, the role of the army, the fight against corruption, social

issues... Egyptian society is seething. Cultural expression demonstrates this with songs, poems and rap, highlighting this vitality.

Could the personality of Mohamed El-Baradei unify the opposition? Nothing is less certain. El-Baradei is respected but better known abroad. He received the Nobel Peace Prize for opposing Bush's plans for war in Iraq, but he has spent a long time away from Egypt and is out of the loop in terms of the political situation. Certainly he has been the object of a lot of expectation and hope but he has also disappointed his supporters by missing the start of the movement and by his approximation to the Muslim Brotherhood. Will he be able to take advantage of the credit he has earned? Other important figures could emerge, such as Amr Mussa, former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Secretary General of the Arab League.

The legal forces of opposition have demonstrated themselves to be rather distant from the movement, which has not sought to engage with them. They have been considerably discredited, especially when they sought to negotiate with Omar Souleyman after the departure of Mubarak. The Egyptian opposition has a wide range of legal parties such as the Wafd, the Tagammu', and the Nasserite party, not to mention the Muslim Brotherhood, banned since 1954, but tolerated by the regime.

There are also political movements from "civil society" such as Kefaya ("Enough!"), or the Egyptian Movement for Change, a coalition of activists from several opposition forces born in 2000 at a time of immense solidarity with the Second Palestinian intifada. This movement then was involved in opposition to the invasion of Iraq by the Bush administration before becoming a small but dynamic movement of democratic opposition to the Mubarak regime.

## A Historic Opportunity for

# the Egyptian Left

The Egyptian Left has existed for a hundred years and consists of a range of very different persuasions; in fact it would be better to talk about the Egyptian lefts. The revolutionary process has opened up tremendous opportunities for them.

The most important is the Tagammu' (Gathering) Party (known in English as the National Progressive Unionist Party), which has legal status and holds several seats in Parliament. It was formed in the 1970s with the introduction by Sadat of a multi-party system. It was the only party which emerged from popular debate. A key figure was Khaled Mohieddin, one of the Free officers who represented several tendencies: Marxists, socialists, nationalists and enlightened religious groups. It also included many former communists after the dissolution of the Egyptian Communist Party in 1965.

The Tagammu' has a newspaper (Al Ahali) and sites around the country. It soon found itself in conflict with Sadat in particular when it opposed the signing of Camp David and was repressed. The Tagammu' continues to exist for better or worse, presenting candidates for elections with some success. It is basically a left reform party that did not constitute a threat to the regime because it was very accommodating to it. Its president has even said that Mubarak's departure would be negative, which led to a heated debate inside the party.

The Communist Party of Egypt, reconstituted underground in the mid-1970s [10], was heavily involved in Tagammu' while trying to exist independently, although not without difficulties. The CPE has a split in the late 1980s and early 1990s around figures such as Michel Kamel because of problems with orientation and operation. This small organization is now in great difficulty because of its aging base and the recent loss of its two principal officers (Nabil al-Hilali and Youssef Darwiche).

With the rise in fundamentalism and of conservatism in the 1980s, the left went into retreat and suffered a

number of serious internal crises. The fall of the USSR accentuated this. Some left groups which had been fairly radical and very prominent in the 1970s such as the small Revolutionary Communist League, even ceased to exist around the late 1980s and early 1990s [11].

Many left activists became involved in the establishment of NGOs and took up the cause of human rights. Furthermore, many elements of the left are no longer part of any organized framework. Trade unionists and leaders of associations are still present here and there throughout the country.

Students at Cairo University, 'Ayn Shams and the American University (AUC) created a group called Socialist Revolutionaries. Trotskyist in orientation, it is associated with the British SWP, known for its militant activism and its analysis of the USSR as State Capitalism. The group puts forward an special analysis of Islamism and argues for an alliance. It regards the Muslim Brothers as a reformist movement. This current also recently had a small split: there is therefore also now a Socialist Renewal current which expresses criticism of its methods of building the organization and supports the idea of a broad party of the left.

From the 2000s, a new wave of social protest has shaken Egypt. In the middle of the decade, strikes and workers' struggles erupted, especially with the iconic textile strike in the industrial city of Mahalla al-Kobra in the Nile Delta which called into question the official union. We have witnessed a revival of social protest and activism in different professional categories. Attempts at building union networks resumed. Some NGOs did considerable work with meetings, trainings, reports, and magazines. We include the Dar al Khadamat al Niqabya [12] in Helwan lead by Kamal Abbas, a former steel worker arrested after the great strike of 1989, or the Coordinating Trade Union Committee which includes several dozen unionists from Cairo and the provinces of different persuasions and which seeks to develop an independent and combative voice.

The various left forces were involved in the protests of 2011. Note that the overwhelming majority of people who took to the streets had no membership or political affiliation. These citizens were expressing their discontentment and profound rejection of the regime and its embodiment in the form of authoritarian abuse, economic difficulties, enrichment on the back of huge corruption.

A huge phenomenon of politicisation is underway. The revolution has also led to a profound process of political regroupment. In this situation, political initiatives are increasing. The Muslim Brotherhood have set up a legal party called Justice and Freedom. Al-Wasat, composed of former members expelled from the Muslim Brotherhood for developing more moderate positions, has been granted legal status.

There have also been two left initiatives inspired by the revolution of January 25, by the demand for a civil state and by the call for social justice on a massive scale.

At the beginning of the revolution, independents and former members of Tagammu' established the Union of Forces of the Left. Then a call for the creation of a legal broad left party and legal was launched. Its signatories represent a wide range of political backgrounds: former Tagammu' members, members of the Socialist Renewal Current, former militants of groups from the 1970s union members, intellectuals, people from a social-democrat background, and others. At a meeting on Saturday 26 January, they founded the legal Popular Alliance [13], which wants to bring together people of different tendencies and generations to promote freedom and social justice.

On Friday, February 25, a network of militant workers around Kamal Khalil, a leading figure on the radical Left in the 1970s, who is now one of the leaders of the current Socialist Revolutionary current, began the process of legally establishing the Democratic Labour Party [14]. Open to employees (manual workers, farmers, etc) it seeks to express the voice of workers, support their demands and defend their interests.



Their founding statement declares that while the political elites and business owners have had their own organizations, workers have not had that right.

Both initiatives are collecting together signatures and preparing their next congress. In the spirit of the revolution they aim to break with the regime, to establish a democratic and civil state as well as promoting a politics that fights capitalism and defends the rights and interests of the working class. Their aims can be summed up as freedom, civil status and social justice. Similarly, the objective is to give birth to a new party which is truly democratic ... Both programmes also include both social and economic demands (a minimum wage, an end to privatisation, policies which serve the masses, etc.)

## Regional Impact

The Palestinian question has not had a significant role or been a significant issue in the popular movement. The deep causes of the revolt are essentially linked to internal democratic and social issues. Since the signing of the peace agreements with Israel, Egypt has established relationships with the State of Israel. During the second intifada, with the border question and the tunnels, the official policy led to disappointment and discontent. Pro-Palestinian sentiment is very strong: the occupation and oppression which has lasted sixty years has deep resonances. Typically, Egyptian followers are more in favour of a "cold peace", without trade or links with the Zionist state. Obama's election provoked a great deal of hope but anti-

American sentiment in relation to the Palestinian issue, is again strong. A challenge to agreements with Israel under the current regime is not on the agenda. Some political forces (Left, nationalists, Islamists) will demand it nevertheless.

The Egyptian revolution has implications at regional and global levels. It is important not to speak of a mechanical domino effect but the Arab world is in full fervour: Yemen, Algeria, Jordan, Sudan, Bahrain, Libya today, maybe Morocco, Syria maybe tomorrow. And even Iran! The authoritarian regimes of the Middle East and Maghreb fear what might happen. A real "Springtime of the people" is in prospect. This wave of protest resembles that which shook the countries of Eastern Europe in 1989.

## Only the beginning...

In Egypt, the dictator has fallen and the process of revolution is far from complete. It is only just beginning. Given the support of imperialist countries for the regime, including the United States without underestimating the EU and France, pressure on the authorities and the battle to support the revolution is important for the struggle that is being played out in Egypt. Awareness of the realities and current dynamics will also challenge existing stereotypes and fears of this region and will have an impact on people from the Arab region living in Europe.

The commitment of young radicalized connected by social networks has initiated this process. Street demonstrations have caused this

historic change. This revolution means the end of the generalised apathy and depoliticisation which often exist in an authoritarian context.

This popular wave is struggling for more democracy in countries where economic liberalisation has weakened the social situation of large segments of the population without providing any form of freedom in return. The victory of the revolutionary process is not yet certain. The democratic transition implies many pitfalls; it is not simply a matter of a simple normalisation process in a formal parliamentary framework of the parliamentary with the army in the background.

This victory has given the Egyptian people pride and represents a victory against the wall of fear. It serves as an example to the peoples of the Middle East and the Maghreb. A series of impressive advances have been achieved even if nothing is settled yet. Everything will depend on mobilization and the balance of power. Historical transformations are underway!

### Paris March 8 2011

*This text owes much to the many contributions published during the revolution. This includes texts from Kamal Abbas, Gamal Wa'el, Fatma Ramadan Hossam al Hamalawi, Shukrallah Alaa, Amr Abdel Rahman, Omar Chafe'Ã®, Yassine Tamlali, Gilbert Achcar, Ahmed Shawky, Joel Beinin, statements from Left currents, NGOs, trade union networks, without forgetting exchanges with those involved in the movement of solidarity. The ideas expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of the publishers.*

# First National Meeting of PSOL Ecosocialists approves Curitiba Charter



23 April 2011, by **PSol**

The meeting was also attended by the PSOL's General Secretary and Social Movements Secretary, both of whom emphasised the importance of the party as a whole taking up ecosocialist campaigns and principles. At the end of the meeting it was decided to set up an Ecosocialist Section in the PSOL, similar to the party's various secretariats, which will be a vital tool for promoting ecosocialist debates and activities both inside and outside the party.

The meeting discussed and adopted the Curitiba Charter, outlining the principles and campaigns that the Section will promote within the PSOL, in the environmental movement and in Brazilian society more generally. This Charter is dedicated to the memory of Chico Mendes and Dorothy Stang.

## Curitiba Charter

### **The creation of an Ecosocialist Section of the PSOL**

The ecosocialist members of the Party of Socialism and Freedom (PSOL), meeting in Curitiba from 1 - 3 April, decided to address the whole of the party, the ecological and environmental movements and society in general, and after analysing the current planetary crisis, to put forward a common analysis and agenda of struggle.

There is no doubt that we are in the midst of a worldwide environmental crisis on a scale never before experienced by human society. Its most evident expression, but not its only one, is the overheating of the earth and climate change. Not a day goes by without some extreme weather or environmental event occurring in some part of the world. So intense and frequent are such events that the vocabulary of war has been adapted to the environment; we already have tens of millions of "climate refugees" and "environmental refugees" across the planet.

However, global warming and climate change are just the most visible face of a bigger crisis related to the current form of capitalist production. With its productivist-consumerist model of development built on energy from fossil fuels and a life style of conspicuous and extravagant consumption for the world's economic elite, this form of production is both environmentally unsustainable and socially unjust.

Other signs of this crisis include the shortage of water, where one in four people in the world today do not have access to drinking water; the extinction of species, now proceeding at its fastest rate in 65 million years; and the break-down of the earth's ability to re-generate itself, with the threshold already passed in 1980, meaning we now spend every year 25-30% of our natural capital.

The health of children and the elderly, women and men, is under constant threat from infectious disease, the contamination of water, air and foodstuffs, but mainly from the irresponsibility of governments and capitalists in developing environmentally damaging projects, as well as the historic dismantling of public health systems. On top of all this come the latest environmental catastrophes, like the landslides in the mountain region of Rio de Janeiro state and the accident at the Fukushima nuclear reactors, whose tragic consequences it is still too early to measure.

Given the multiple nature of the crisis, which is social and environmental, but also puts in question the character of civilisation itself, there then arises an ideological dispute over its causes and how to confront it. This pits the framework of "green" capitalism against that of "ecosocialism". In other words it is a dispute over the kinds of society, or indeed of civilisation, that we want.

The view of those who lay claim to the traditions of 19th century egalitarianism and modern ecologism

is expressed in the words of the International Ecosocialist Manifesto:

"The present capitalist system cannot regulate, much less overcome, the crises it has set going. It cannot solve the ecological crisis because to do so requires setting limits upon accumulation"an unacceptable option for a system predicated upon the rule: Grow or Die!"

It is therefore not just an environmental and social crisis, but one of capitalist civilisation itself, of its economic logic and model of development, of its way of life and the values it promotes. These create an ever wider social gulf between a global oligarchy and the more than a billion human beings who have to survive on less than a dollar a day. The income of the 500 richest people on the planet is greater than that of its 416 million poorest inhabitants.

In Brazil, whose social, economic and cultural history was based on the production of single export commodities, on slavery, on the super-exploitation of indigenous peoples and those of African descent, and on the ravaging of our nature, the current Accelerated Growth Programme (PAC)<sup>1</sup> - with its environmentally unsustainable and socially unjust mega-projects - is the most visible face of our modern "developmentalism".

Big hydroelectric and infrastructure projects like Belo Monte, Jirau, TKCSA, CSU and the diverting of the São Francisco river, with their catalogue of aggressive environmental, socio-cultural and ethnic impacts, are one part of the story. There is also the extension of Brazil's nuclear programme, even after the contamination at Caetité and the Fukushima tragedy; the attack on environmental protection laws, symbolised by the proposed reform of the Forest Code and laxer environmental licensing standards; and not least the exclusionary construction projects planned for the World Cup and the 2016 Olympics. Together, these show just how far

capital, acting through its governments and its corporations, aims to go in our country.

We denounce and resist the spurious and corrupt links between public bodies or elected representatives and big financial and industrial groups, building contractors and agribusiness, who finance their electoral campaigns only to charge the bitter price of destruction, making all forms of life impossible.

We denounce the rhetoric and practices of those who claim to preserve ecosystems while concealing perverse interests in accelerating the exploitation of natural resources and destroying the various habitats and human ways of life that depend on them.

Such ecocapitalist practices are based on vague and often distorted arguments about the big environmental questions and tend to push environmental policy towards forms of social and territorial segregation, upsetting the balance of the ecologically most important protected areas.

We also denounce those who have betrayed the great causes of the left and, instead of defending the rights of the working classes, have chosen an alliance with the international bourgeoisie, becoming some of the main supports for environmental destruction and devastation. It is worth remembering that the choice of all-out economic growth is a direct result of tying the Brazilian economy to payment of interest on the public debt, since most large-scale production is aimed at exports. The export of commodities is also the export of water, energy and the life of our people and our ecosystems.

We find ourselves in a situation where a government coming out of social struggles has come to rest on support from the most conservative, reactionary and corrupt circles, with no sense of environmental responsibility at all. This means that the struggle is against two groups who, although opposed to each other electorally, are ever closer in the aims and interests they defend. Only a party that places itself firmly in the

anti-capitalist tradition, but which has broken with the authoritarian, bureaucratic and predatory experiences of “really-existing socialism” – a party in constant exchange with traditional communities and social and environmental movements – can confront such regression and build the tactical and strategic alliances needed for ecosocialist struggle.

It is true that Ecosocialism remains a promise, a gamble on the future, but it is a pressing necessity if we are to ensure our survival as a species and as a society, as well as that of all other forms of life. It is something in process, under construction, which is based on principles of social equality, ecological sustainability, the defence of diversity in its biological, social, ethnic and cultural dimensions, as well as on a new way of life, that takes as its starting point “being”, not “having”.

Ecosocialists propose a transversal intervention, across the board, because the environmental struggle should interact with all the different movements that make up the struggle for social emancipation, including those that raise demands for land reform and urban reform, trade union and youth struggles, as well as movements against environmental racism and for racial and gender equality.

Our main organizational priorities are as follows:

The urgent need to develop an ecosocialist programme in order to improve the level of debate within the party and its relation with society;

Our institutional presence should occur in all areas where public policy is up for discussion, both in official councils and commissions as well as in the thematic forums of the social movements;

Areas of intervention and action proposals:

To denounce and combat the continuing attempts to make environmental policies laxer, particularly the modification of the Forest Code, building the national action called by the social movements on 07-04-11 in

Brasilia, the state-level actions called for 28-04-11 and the intervention by PSOL MP Ivan Valente, with his constant and powerful criticism of this further attack by capital on the environment;

To investigate, denounce and resist the excesses and negative impacts of the PAC projects, including those leading up to the mega-events (2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics), especially in relation to the attacks on working conditions, the forced evictions of poor communities, the encouragement of prostitution and the trafficking of women and children, as well as the reduction of biodiversity;

To demand that communities affected by big infrastructure projects, urban development plans, conservation zones and agro-industrial projects should be guaranteed genuine and continuous participation, with real authority, in all phases, from the initial assessments to the measures to deal with their impacts.

To mobilise a broad movement on the nuclear question, and to block Brazil's nuclear programme both in parliament and through the social movements! For the decommissioning of the Angra 1, 2 and 3 nuclear plants! For the scrapping of new nuclear projects and power stations and of any military use of nuclear materials or reactors!

To extend the areas protected by conservation zones in the country's various ecosystems, with guaranteed and genuine public participation in their management and their integration into the local communities' ways of life;

For an ecological land reform and an inclusive and environmentally responsible urban reform! Against the Green Desert, single-crop agribusiness and land and property speculation!

Given the fundamental necessity of human mobility for the future of society, to give full support to movements against the high cost of public transport (movements for free passes and zero fares), as well as to the struggle for more transparent control of urban transport systems, the integration of different forms of transport and for an end to

dependence on road travel.

Also in towns and cities, the challenge of rubbish disposal and other solid waste cannot be put off. It is urgent to attack in a didactic way the degrading aspects of existing production, including firms' irresponsible use of packaging and the absence of serious recycling policies, as well as to promote and protect the situation of workers in the urban cleaning and rubbish collection sectors.

Coastal areas should be managed as inalienable public patrimony and as

sanctuaries for life. We therefore reject any activity that harms small-scale fishing and navigation, the public use of beaches and other natural coastal environments, or the genetic stock of the sea and river estuaries.

We are for the recognition and demarcation of indigenous lands, of the territories of traditional Afro-Brazilian communities and of sustainable, community, extractive reserves. Against Environmental racism!

Against the criminalization of social movements and the political

imprisonment of social activists and leaders!

Finally, what is at stake for humanity is the challenge of building a new society that can be, at one and the same time, politically democratic, socially just and egalitarian, culturally and ethnically diverse and environmentally sustainable. As Michael Lowy suggests, we need to update Rosa Luxemburg's slogan to read, "Ecosocialism or Barbarism"!

*In memory of Chico Mendes and Sister Dorothy Stang*

## Update on fund raising and solidarity

22 April 2011, by **Danielle Sabai, Pierre Rousset**

Emergency aid (basic material needs, canteens, clearing up...) is provided by various trade unions (in particular members of the NTUC), Peace Boat, Greenpeace, citizens' groups, etc

Various groups and researchers are trying to collect independent information on the state of the Fukushima catastrophe such as the Tokyo Citizens' Nuclear Information Center, Tanpoposya No Nuke Plaza Tokyo... There have been repeated gatherings in front of the head office of the TEPCO (generally bringing together young people not belonging to organizations). Demonstrations for "for an immediate stop nuclear power" have taken place in the Tokyo urban area on March 27th (1200 people), April 10th (2500 to Minato and 15000 in Musashino). A national mobilization will take place on April 24th, birthday of Tchernobyl.

Activities on the Fukushima disaster are gradually being coordinated. They include, in addition to specialized antinuclear associations, movements like People's Plan Study Group or Rodo-Joho (Labor Information), groups of consumers, citizens, defenders of human rights, women, alternative media, NGOs...

### Balance sheet of solidarity fund today

As of April 21, 2011, 12,159.54 euros had been collected as part of the initiative launched for financial solidarity by Europe solidaire sans frontières (Europe in solidarity without borders, ESSF). [15] Of this amount, 11,745 euros had already been transferred to Japan.

#### Source of funds:

**Germany: 1000 â,- (individual donation from a member of ISL)**

**Congo: 20 â,- (individual donation)**

**France: 5590 â,-**

NPA: 1500 euros

individual donations: 4090 â,-

**Great Britain: â,- 1658.54**

individual donations: â,- 578.54

donations from members of Socialist Resistance: 1080 â,-

**Hong Kong: 2820 â,-**

Pioneer Group: 2320 â,-

October Review : 500 â,-

**Pakistan: 35 â,- (LPP)**

**Philippines: 110 â,- (RPM-M)**

**Quebec: 141 (individual donation)**

**Sri Lanka: 50 â,- (NSSP)**

**Taiwan: 745 â,- (individual donations)**

(The funds collected in Taiwan were sent directly to Japan without going through the account of ESSF.)

This at present means 10 countries have been involved, including one in North America, 1 from Africa, 3 from Europe and 5 in Asia.

The biggest "regional block" of countries comes from East Asia. This expresses the solidarity of "proximity" between movements that have formed regional connections and who, moreover, have all experienced humanitarian disasters.

Among the individual donors are those who regularly respond to calls for

solidarity initiated by ESSF.

A network of political organizations has also (albeit unevenly) responded to the appeal from Japan by JRCL and NCIW, two groups who have links with the Fourth International, and who called for support for the initiative of the ESSF). [16]

The funds collected by ESSF are being sent to a trade union network operating in the affected region - the Northeastern branch of the National Council of Trade Union (NTUC) [17] -, contacts were established by ESSF with organizations such as, in France, the Trade Union centre "Solidaires" and Attac, and the appeal has been circulated through email networks such as the European Social Forum (ESF). Solidaires has circulated within its ranks a document by the NTUC that ESSF translated and posted on its own website [18].

We are sending the money to the Northeastern branch of NTUC, not only to ensure that our material aid will go directly to the popular sectors (and at lesser expense), but also to strengthen the capacity of action by social movements so that the cost of the crisis does not fall back again on the poor.

However, it is clear that apart from the Via Campesina, which has also issued an appeal for financial solidarity for its sister peasant organization Noumiren, most unions, "radical" social movements and anti-globalization currents seem, according to the information in our possession, to be reacting slowly to the Japanese disaster of March 11, 2011.

This seems to be the case as well for the antinuclear network in France, while the independent associations in Japan need equipment, especially for measuring levels of radioactivity and to analyze the magnitude and nature of contamination to air, marine, land and food products. This is not just about money: the dosimeters had become unavailable in the Archipelago! It takes know-how, equipment and computers with sophisticated analysis programs.

Thanks to the help of our contacts in Japan (and France), we have had translations of articles and documents from the social and antinuclear movements in the Archipelago - posted on our website and on many others. Information is part of solidarity. We contribute the same, within our means, the mobilization for the end of nuclear energy.

Of course, there are certainly surely initiatives we do not know of, and we will try to make a fuller assessment of the solidarity (including financial) later. But it seems that overall, the issue of relief in times of humanitarian crisis has not yet been integrated as a major field of political action, while it should be an essential component of internationalism. A tradition has been lost. However, the experience of ESSF (and a few others like the Via Campesina), from the Indian Ocean tsunami or the earthquake in Pakistan on, confirms how urgent it is to deploy a "progressive policy of aid ". It also shows that significant results were obtained even with very modest means. What would happen if the networks of social movements (and

also in this case antinuclear) mobilized their forces together?

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

### **Cheques**

*cheques to ESSF in euros only to be sent to:*

ESSF

2, rue Richard-Lenoir

93100 Montreuil

France

### **Bank Account**

Crédit lyonnais

Agence de la Croix-de-Chavaux  
(00525)

10 boulevard Chanzy

93100 Montreuil

France

ESSF, account number 445757C

### **International bank account details**

IBAN : FR85 3000 2005 2500 0044  
5757 C12

BIC / SWIFT : CRLYFRPP

Account holder : ESSF

# Fukushima and capitalist inhumanity

**21 April 2011, by Pierre Rousset**

"Working conditions are awful" said Thierry Charles, Director of the Institute of Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety (IRSN), quoted in an article by Catherine Vincent [19]. Then, it was still difficult

for journalists to verify the extent to which that judgment was justified. The fate of the employees of subcontracting companies remained in particular "unfamiliar" noted Philippe Pons, a correspondent for "Le Monde"

who has lived for several decades in the archipelago. The sociologist Paul Jobin, a specialist on this question, knew enough to warn: "Without reinforcements, the Fukushima workers are doomed" [20].



Are the doses of radioactivity received by these workers as dangerous as Jobin claims? Many "experts" say no, relying on the (notoriously incomplete) official data and legally authorized "levels" of exposures to radiation - forgetting that these levels are defined taking account of the needs of the industries concerned rather than medical criteria: as evidence, they change according to the emergency and the country, as if the effects of radiation varied depending on the place and time!

Thus on March 19, the Japanese authorities identified the legal maximum as up to 250 millisieverts in order to continue to send employees into Fukushima and reduce population evacuations. Paul Jobin notes that "in normal times in Japan, the legal maximum exposure is 20 millisieverts (mSv) per year averaged over five years, or a maximum of 100 over two years, which is already very high, but one can translate this "emergency" decision as a way to legalize their coming death and avoid having to pay their families, because cancer risks increase in proportion to the steep dose. With doses of 250 mSv, the risks of cancers, mutagenic violations or reproductive risks are very high." [21]

Beyond the somewhat abstract figures, all this should convince anyone who still doubts that the health of human beings is not the first concern of industrialists and governments! All the employees of Tepco - the company responsible for the site- as well as the fire-fighters and soldiers involved in the plant are at significant risk; but it is the employees of subcontracting companies who do the most dangerous work (notably wading in pools of highly radioactive water, pulling cables to restore electricity, removing debris from the sites, spraying the reactors deprived of cooling systems and attempting to restart the operation of the equipment).

There is a history of trimming costs and, despite the harshness of their tasks, "workers at risk" are poorly fed. "We eat twice a day. For breakfast, energy biscuits, a dinner of instant rice and canned food" explains

Kazuma Yokota, a supervisor at the plant, to a Japanese television crew. There is no midday meal. In the early days of the crisis, each worker received only a litre and a half of bottled water. They sleep (briefly) in precarious conditions on the site of Fukushima in a building purpose built for resisting radiation, on a mat and with a sheet of lead, supposed to protect: "employees sleep in groups in the meeting rooms, corridors or near bathrooms. Everyone sleeps on the floor". [22]

The "gypsies of nuclear power" as they are called in Japan (they move from plant to plant, as needed) live 24 hours a day in a contaminated environment. The protection equipment failed badly. They often only had one dosimeter for two people - indeed, according to Tepco, after the disaster of March 11, there were only 320 dosimeters functioning of the 5,000 officially in-store! They wear rubber or plastic boots. "Working conditions are increasingly dangerous, I don't think you would find other employees who would accept this, a subcontractor said to the newspaper "Asahi"". [23]

The anti-nuclear movement - and not only the trade unions - must defend these employees in danger. As noted by Abraham Behar, "only the workers have a double risk, high doses associated with accidents and low doses like any exposed and contaminated population [...] What solidarity can we, should we, put in place for the obscure Japanese precarious workers? The trade union movement has been able to mobilize for temporary workers in nuclear power and the European Union has taken some draft provisions, and we, what do we do?"

The seriousness of the danger to the Fukushima workers is in no doubt. The Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare has acknowledged this in its own way : "It is never good to have any kind of work that requires putting one's life on the line," a high-ranking official of the Ministry said. "However, the importance of settling the situation at the nuclear plant goes beyond the range of labor policy. I

cannot be confident about whether that or the safety of the workers should have priority." Even if expressed in a somewhat circumvented language, it could not be clearer. [24]

Paul Jobin notes that the employees of subcontractors "often work below the standards of protection. The boss of a small company residing near Fukushima 1, who had worked on behalf of manufacturers of nuclear reactors (General Electric, Hitachi and so on) showed me in 2002 the "no anomaly" stamp that he had used for years to falsify the health records of workers for whom he was responsible, until he was himself suffering from cancer and dismissed by Tepco." [25]

The scandal having erupted publicly, workers at the crisis-hit plant got better conditions of protection and compensation - in the hope that the employees of subcontractors will also benefit from the new measures. But all this says a lot about the state of unpreparedness of the nuclear industry and the government for a major accident. Tepco had to confess that it had, even with respect to its own employees, not defined a level of payment corresponding to the present crisis, having "never contemplated a situation in which workers would operate continuously at a high level of radiation." [26]

All this also reveals the daily inhumanity of capitalism for which the health and life of workers - or neighbouring populations, victims of the pollution - is an adjustable variable, like wages. Thus, in the name of the interests of the shareholders, Tepco had refused to implement legally required safety measures and had negotiated lower insurance contracts. Tomorrow it will declare itself bankrupt if necessary, leaving the state to take up the burden of compensation. However, Tepco is not a marginal representative of the business world. Founded in 1951, this Japanese multinational has become the largest private producer of electricity in the world. Thus, the company's policy casts a floodlight on the background of the set, on the nature of actually existing capitalism.

# Thai military make threats against pro-democracy Redshirts

21 April 2011, by **Giles Ji Ungpakorn**

Naturally the Democrat Party Government and its bosses in the Army will not be stuffing ballot boxes or inflating the number of votes for the Government. That would be too obvious and they would be quickly found out. But what they have been doing since the 2006 coup has been a war of attrition to gradually destroy Taksin's Thai Rak Thai Party and the Peua Thai Party which is its new incarnation. The Courts and the Election Commission have been used in a bias manner to destroy the chances of a Red Shirt election victory. Bribery and threats have also been used to get politicians to change sides. Added to this we have blanket censorship and the use of the *lèse majesté* law against government opponents. The Military have also used bloody violence and threats.

Yet Peua Thai Party is doing nothing to try to win the election. They have virtually no new policies and hope that Red Shirts will automatically vote for the party. If they are seen to lose, this will give a great deal of false legitimacy to the dictatorship. There is growing unease among many Red Shirts and the gap between this huge social movement and the professional politicians in Peua Thai is widening.

General Sansern Keawkamnurd, spokesperson for the Army, has announced that the Army is accusing Jatuporn Prompan and two other Red Shirt leaders (Wichien Kaokum and Rambo Isarn) of "*lèse majesté*" following their 10th April rally in Bangkok. Jatuporn is accused of "insulting the princess" by saying that he too would like to be interviewed on TV by the same presenter. The Democrat Party Spokesman Teptai Senpong supports the Army's accusation. The recent interview of the King's youngest daughter indicates how the Thai Monarchy is in

the process of degeneration. Firstly, the princess' speech delivery and the content of what she said, is more likely to remind people of an intellectually challenged individual than a demi-god. She boasts about how rich she is while trying to tell the public about the "good works" of her parents. The interviewer grovels on the ground in front of the princess' shoes, twice, and she nods with approval. He also grovels on the ground at the same level as the princess' dog and even shares the dog's cup cake. The Thai population are supposed to be brought near to tears of joy and loyal emotion by such idiotic spectacles.

The Army has threatened those who are trying to campaign for the repeal of the *lèse majesté* law (see adjacent article) and urged loyal subjects to "prevent" such activities. The generals claim that foreigners are "impressed" by the greatness of the Thai Monarchy, but are confused by misinformation from Red Shirts.

It is the Army that is the real unconstitutional power in Thailand. They use the Monarchy to legitimise all their actions. This explains why the Army is so manic in defending the Monarchy and in using *lèse majesté* against democracy activists. The generals stand to lose everything if a republican movement sweeps across Thailand and it looks like that might just happen.

Army commander General Prayut Chan-ocha has declared that the country was always "democratic", as though the 2006 coup and all that followed, never took place. He reaffirmed the lie that the Military "never shot pro-democracy demonstrators" last year. Yet there is overwhelming photographic and documentary evidence that the

Military and the Government ordered the killing of unarmed Red Shirts by bringing in tanks, heavily armed soldiers and snipers to crush the pro-democracy demonstrations in Bangkok. Nearly 90 unarmed civilians, including paramedics and foreign journalists were shot by snipers in "free-fire zones" set up by the Military. The army has now sent troops into villages this April, to coincide with the Songkran festival. They claim that they want to tell the people the "truth" and make sure everyone remains loyal to the Monarchy. General Prayut claimed that many Red Shirts were trying to insult the "holiness" of the Monarchy and told Red Shirt leader Jatuporn Prompan to "watch it".

The DSI or Department of Special Investigation has been "unable" to release the results of autopsies on civilians killed by the Army 12 months ago. Now the head of the DSI is demanding that Red Shirt leaders, who are out on bail, be returned to jail for making pro-democracy speeches at recent rallies.

Recently the Oxford-educated Finance Minister Korn Jatikawanit, boasted on his facebook site that he had ridden in a taxi driven by a Red Shirt. On leaving the taxi, Korn gave the driver a lesson: "you can hold different views from me but don't use violence", he said. Korn is part of the military-installed Democrat Party Government that ordered the cold-blooded shooting of Red Shirt civilians last year.

The "Electoral Commission" has just confirmed that 73 loyal servants of the regime have just been appointed as unelected senators, making up half of the upper house. There are 18 former government officials, 11 military officers and 6 policemen. After the

2006 coup the Military re-wrote the Constitution so that half the senate would be appointed instead of being elected as before. Earlier, pro-military Election Commissioner Sodsri Satayatum said that she would prefer it if the General Election was cancelled. She claims the country isn't ready for an election. Meanwhile the fascist PAD is destroying itself with internal strife. Their support has seriously declined and they cannot agree about participating in the coming election because they know that they will receive a miserable vote. The PAD staged violent pro-Monarchy and pro-dictatorship demonstrations in Bangkok, including the seizure of Government House and the International Airports. Now some of their leaders want the election scrapped and a Burmese style junta to rule the country. The Thai Military-dominated "security council" has also stated that since Burma now has a new "democratic" government, Burmese refugees can be forced back over the border.

Background to the rise of the Red Shirts

There is a common thread running through the political crisis in Thailand and the political crises that exploded earlier this year in the Middle East. In Thailand, Egypt, Tunisia and many other "developing nations", societies have been rapidly urbanising and changing over the last 30-40 years. Yet the ruling elites and the power structures which dominated these societies had not changed. Different events triggered uprisings and struggles, but the underlying tensions remain the same.

For the last forty years the Thai ruling class has maintained its power through the Military, the Monarchy and occasionally by the use of an electoral system dominated by the money politics of business controlled political parties. The naked coercive power of the Military and other state institutions is complemented by the ideology of the Monarchy. This is achieved by imposing and socialising the belief among the population that the King is an all-powerful god who is to be loved or at least feared. This belief is a complete myth, but at

various times it has been effective in serving the interests of the conservative ruling elites.

This state of affairs has constantly been challenged by mass uprisings and struggle by social movements. But in 2001 a serious challenge to the old order arose from within the ruling class itself. Taksin Shinawat's Thai Rak Thai Party (TRT) won a majority in parliament by winning the hearts and minds of the electorate. His business-dominated party promised and delivered a universal health care system, job creation programmes and a raft of modernisation policies. In the past, elections had been about money politics, where politicians acted as personal patrons of their constituents while offering no political policies. The rise of TRT came to represent a serious, but unintentional, challenge to the conservatives in the ruling class. This sparked a military coup in September 2006, which in turn sparked the building of a pro-democracy mass movement called the Red Shirts.

12 April 2011

## Fukushima, a slow Chernobyl

20 April 2011, by **Koji Saito**

During the Chernobyl accident, deemed level 7, following the destruction of the building and core caused by a violent explosion, a large quantity of radioactive matter was ejected at altitude, spreading for nearly 10 days over a large area across borders, and strongly radioactive "hot spots" were formed according to conditions such as wind, geography, and rain.

While foreign government agencies assessed this accident at level 6 since the hydrogen explosion of the third reactor on the morning of March 15 and the jet of radioactivity, the Japanese Government continues to place it at level 5, as if it wanted to conceal its initial criminal delay [27].

This delay, manipulation and bureaucratic concealment have aggravated the pollution and radiation. France and the United States - which have atomic experiences in the open air, scattering fatal ashes and radiation among the peoples and fishers in the surrounding area, as well as soldiers - participate today in helping with reconstruction and the removal of radioactive materials by promoting their nuclear power plants.

### The worsening of the situation due

### to delay

The newspaper "Fukushima Minpou" reported on March 28 that the NISA (Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency) had "delayed taking a series of steps immediately to avoid the worst expected scenario, the meltdown of the core, because of the visit of the Prime Minister Naoto Kan to the disaster area carried out at his request on March 12." According to the weekly "Bunshun" on March 31, the MP Hattori (Social Democratic Party, SDPJ) stated that "during the visit of March 12 by the Prime Minister to Fukushima, in the helicopter, the President of the NSC (Nuclear Safety Commission of Japan)

Haruki Madarame told him that all was well and that there would not be any hydrogen explosion." But eight hours afterwards, a hydrogen explosion occurred in reactor No. 1. The next day, March 13, when I visited the official residence of the Prime Minister, he complained that Madarame had guaranteed to him the contrary."

In 2007, during the Hamaoka trial, Madarame had testified for the accused, Chubu Electric Power, that: "there will never be any halting of emergency electricity". We recall that in March last year, the head of the SDPJ strongly argued inside the Government against Madarame's proposed appointment to the position of Chair of the NSC.

The Democratic Party [currently in power], has left outstanding its electoral commitments on nuclear safety, as well as on the separation of the NSC and the METI (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry), appointing persons such as the MP Akihiro Oohata, formerly designer of the nuclear plant at Hitachi, and has promoted new facilities in Japan and for export. The cause of the delay that we are experiencing is due to sabotage by supporters of nuclear power.

## "To avoid misunderstandings"

Agencies of countries affected by Chernobyl such as Australia, Germany or Sweden immediately published forecasts on the release of radioactivity from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power on the Internet. In Japan, this information was widely relayed on the Internet by people who wanted to correctly grasp the situation.

The NSC made public for the first time on March 23, the result of the "SPPEDI" projection, a calculation of the spread of radioactivity controlled by the MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, science and Technology Japan) and it revealed that

there could be "hot spots" of more than 10 milli sievert/h outside the 30-kilometre radius of the plant. But in reality, the calculation had been already made from the quantity of ejection of radioactivity estimated for March 15 and the prediction had already been made on March 16. Despite this, the NSC continued to conceal the result. The SPEEDI was merely a projection, but on April 4 at Namie Cho, located outside the radius of 30 kilometres, a rate of more of 10 milli sievert in total (the threshold of caulking) was observed. The JAEC (Japan Atomic Energy Commission) made it public stating "this will become the criterion of caulking within a few weeks."

On March 18, the Meteorological Society of Japan called on researchers to refrain from making public the forecast on the dissemination of radioactive substances. We also discovered that the JMA (Japan Meteorological Agency) had calculated this prediction of diffusion after the earthquake of March 11 and had communicated the information to the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency), but did not make it public. The JMA has justified this concealment "for fear of being misunderstood" since it was not based on actual observation of the radioactive substances.

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## For all disasters

The earthquake and tsunamis have caused the accident at Fukushima, and this accident has made clear the difficulties and the danger of nuclear fission through such a huge complex system under high temperature and overpressure, with a plant producing not only electricity but also an enormous amount of radioactivity and heat. In issue 2166 of our newspaper, "Kakehashi", we spoke of the damage of the earthquake of the year 869, the "Jyogan earthquake", and the need to reconsider it. When TEPCO reviewed it, it underestimated the frequency of earthquakes in this scale, placing them every 10,000 to 100,000 years. And the state confirmed this statement.

The weekly "Kinyobi" in issue number 841 said in its conclusion that "a year before the Jyogan earthquake (in 869), there had been an earthquake in Harima-Yamashiro (868), and 6 years prior to Ecchuu-Echigo (863), 9 years after in Sagami-Musashi (in 878) and 9 years after in Nankai (in 887)." In around 25 years there was a series of large earthquakes, like today and it concluded that "it is necessary first to stop the 54 reactors that exist currently and not to activate these reactors until we can deal with radioactive substances in all safety centuries later." We support this conclusion in principle, but the people who have had to flee and who are exposed to strong radioactivity will be not satisfied.

To reassure the population, it is necessary that the state and TEPCO declare the definitive closure of all of the reactors at Fukushima Daiichi, the shutdown of the plants at Fukushima Daini and Kashiwazaki-Kariwa and that TEPCO (and the other electricity companies) and other companies in this area mobilize their resources to "repair" the cooling functions of the reactors at Fukushima Daiichi. To do this, all available resources should be employed, while closing all nuclear power plants.

With the shutdown of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant, the "programmed power cuts" will resume because the big thermal power plants of TEPCO and Tohoku Electric Power have not yet resumed production. Consequently other sectors of production will suffer difficulties and will no longer be able to produce. It is necessary to put an end to these discriminatory cuts imposed for the benefit of the capital (Tokyo), and instead limit the opening times of offices in the capital so that the maximum of resources are invested to help the stricken population and repair the seismic disaster.

*This article is translated from the weekly "Kakehashi" of April 11 2011. Kakehashi is published jointly by the Japan Revolutionary Communist League (JRCL) and the National Council of Internationalist Workers, two organisations which cooperate with the Fourth International.*



# Why the Lese Majeste law in Thailand is an abomination

20 April 2011, by **Giles Ji Ungpakorn**

Today, Da Torpido, Red Eagle, Surachai Darnwattanan-nusorn (Sa-Darn) and many others are in prison in Thailand for merely expressing their beliefs in a peaceful way. In recent days arrest warrants have been issued for 5 more people and the police have a list of 30 more people who face arrest. [

<http://thaipoliticalprisoners.wordp...>]. Lese majeste prisoners are denied bail. The royalist judges claim that the offense is "too serious" and "a threat to national security". Thai dictatorships have used the excuse that their opponents were seeking to "overthrow the Monarchy" in order to kill unarmed demonstrators in 1976 and 2010. Jail terms for lese majeste are draconian. Da is in prison for 18 years and prison conditions are appalling. Chiranuch Premchaiporn, the web manager of the independent Prachatai newspaper faces 50 years in prison for not removing other peoples' web-posts. A student faces lese majeste charges for not standing up for the King's anthem in the cinema and the Military-backed Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva tells lies about how he is committed to reforming the law. Abhisit and the army generals also tell lies about the deliberate state-ordered killings of unarmed protesters in May 2010.

In my particular case, my own university gave my anti-coup book to the police special branch, which resulted in a lese majeste prosecution against me. Imagine the impact on my fellow academics. This climate of fear creates poor quality academic work which avoids all important controversial issues and debates. This appalling tradition of educational mediocrity starts at primary school and works its way right to the top of the educational system. Students are encouraged to learn subjects parrot-fashion and write descriptive, one-

sided essays. Academics refuse to engage in any debate, do not read work by those who do not agree with them and regard any academic arguments as personal attacks.

Professor Amara Ponsapich and the Thai National Human Rights Commission have disgraced themselves by remaining silent on lese majeste. At the same time they have defended the "right" of fascist PAD members to cause a war with Cambodia. Recently Amara warned the pro-democracy Red Shirts not to cause "trouble" with their protests. No such warning was ever given to the royalist mobs. NGO senator Rosana Tositakul told Red Shirt MPs to stop whining about the 90 deaths last year and to concentrate on the problems of inflation. Amnesty International has followed in the same path by defending the use of lese majeste. Academic hold seminars about why the lese majeste law "needs to be reformed". But it cannot be reformed. It has to be abolished.

The Thai Monarchy is said to be "universally loved by all Thais". This may have been the case in some periods of history, but it is no longer true. Many millions have turned against the Monarchy for appearing to condone the 2006 military coup and for saying nothing about the 90 deaths last year. This openly expressed hatred of the Monarchy is despite the climate of fear created by the lese majeste law, along side a manic promotion of the Monarchy. The King is said to be a genius in all fields. All statements by the Monarch are repeated as though they are the ultimate wisdom and he is referred to as "our father". Photographs are circulated to "prove" that the King actually tied his own shoe-laces!! Many have made comparisons with North Korea. Now they are comparing

Thailand to the Middle-Eastern dictatorships. Recently the head of the army claimed that Thailand was "nothing like Egypt". If he really believed that, then why did he bother to make the public statement in the first place?

Another example of "Monarchy Mania" is the idea of "Sufficiency Economics". Once the Monarch gave his blessing to the "Sufficiency Economy", we were all supposed to accept it and praise it without question. The Sufficiency Economy is really a reactionary political ideology that teaches people to be happy with their present circumstances and to ignore the need for income redistribution. Luckily, this aspect of brain-washing has not worked very well in Thai society, for a society which cannot openly discuss economic and political policies will remain backward and under-developed. But the mere criticism of the Sufficiency Economy is enough to attract charges of lese majeste.

What is the aim of all this attempt at enforced idiocy among the population? It is a continuous attempt to keep the vast majority of Thai people in their place. We are encouraged to believe that the King is all powerful, when in fact he is a spineless willing tool of the Military. The Thai population are encouraged to believe that we live under an "ancient system of Monarchy", a cross between a Sakdina, Absolute and Constitutional Monarchy system. People have to crawl on the ground in front of the King. But the true beneficiaries of this are the Military, the civilian conservative bureaucrats and the Democrat Party who are now in government.

The Military often claim that they are the "defenders of the Constitutional

Monarchy", yet the Thai Military has a long history of making unconstitutional coups. These are often "legitimised" by claiming to protect the Monarchy. The 19th September 2006 coup is a good example. The Military sought to legitimise themselves by referring to the Monarch. The lese majeste Law is thus used as a tool by the military to defend coups. The promotion of an image that the Monarchy is all powerful (an unconstitutional image), is part of this self-legitimation by the military and other forces who are now in government. Les majeste cases have multiplied since the Democrats were manÅ"uvred into government by the army in December 2008. It is now a central weapon to be used against all

those who criticised the 2006 coup or those who oppose this military-installed government.

It is now an undeniable fact that this brain-washing campaign is falling apart. And it is falling apart at the very moment when the King is getting old and may soon die because he is so frail. If the King were ever loved and respected, the same cannot be said about his son. We know from Wikileaks that even the elites think the prince is a liability. The Military, the right-wing PAD protestors who closed the airports and the Democrat Party, have dragged the Monarchy into politics by claiming that the 2006 coup and violent actions by the PAD were supported or even directed by

the Monarchy. It is now common to hear ordinary Thais complain that "the iguana and his wife" ordered the May 2010 killings. Royal legitimacy is all that the conservative authoritarians have and they are panicking because it is all unravelling. They have brought this on themselves.

We must not forget the plight of those jailed and killed on the pretext of defending the Monarchy. We must wage an international and national political campaign to defend democratic rights in Thailand and for the abolition of the lese majeste law. Without abolishing this law, we cannot have democracy in Thailand and without overthrowing the dictatorship we cannot abolish lese majeste.

# The IMF-EFSF and the answer from the Left

19 April 2011, by **Bloco de Esquerda**

1. The Prime Minister has announced, this week, a request of intervention addressed to the European Financial Stability Facility and the IMF. After having insistently promised to avoid and to oppose this intervention, José Sócrates has given up from his most solemn promise.

Left Block rejects this use of the IMF and European Union programmes. It is not an aid, but rather a redemption and a financial intervention that has as a price the imposition of extremely severe measures against wages and pensions, that worsen and extend the decadence of the Portuguese economy and its inequality. As in 1983, it is about an enormous transference of income from the labour to the capital, to promote the economic laxity and the absolute power of finance. We recall that, in those years, the workers have lost three months of their salary per year and the economy has afterwards maintained all its inefficiencies and structural defects.

Left Block holds the Socialist Party (PS) and the Social Democrat Party (PSD) directly responsible for the several Growth and Stability Plans

(GSP) that led to this situation, thus creating an extremely severe recession. All these packages of austerity measures have stimulated more speculation and have not avoided it, they have worsened the crisis and have not solved it.

2. Left Block acknowledges the announcement from the President of the Republic, which takes as a given the agreement of PS, PSD and CDS with the austerity strategy and the deficit targets. In this very direction, PSD and CDS have already shown their availability to support the appeal to IMF-EFSF, accepting the compromise towards the social and economic measures that such an intervention might establish.

Although in the present moment the program the Government is negotiating is not yet known, the Minister of Finance has already reaffirmed that it is based on PEC4 (4th Growth and Stability Plan), previously rejected. The privatisation programme and the amendments to the labour law in order to facilitate workers' dismissals have also been

emphasised, and sources from the IMF also added the use of dismissals in the public sector.

3. Left Block has, in due time, proposed an intervention in order to maintain the liquidity of the State financing, through the support of the ECB to the Portuguese CGD (Portuguese Public Bank). Such an intervention could have made possible to avoid the financing difficulties of April and May, and the blackmail from the bankers, that has been jointly expressed in public, in order to impose their conditions, but the Government has rejected any alternative whatsoever.

The most severe problem of the financial system is a private debt much higher than the public debt, and the Portuguese banks are exposed to an excessive leverage and unsustainable indebtedness. Therefore, they requested a redemption that, however damaging the national economy, could assure them an effective protection.

4. In the new context created by the request of the IMF-EFSF intervention

by the Government, Left Block demands an audit to all external debt, whether public or private, in order to identify the nature of its parcels, their maturity and conditions.

This way, it will be possible to determine the restructuration of the debt - of its time limit and its conditions - and to refuse the payment of usurious interests or abusive debts, especially as an effect of interests charged to pay excessive interests. The mobilisation based in alternative concrete proposals and on the unity of each and every person that refuses the bankruptcy policy, is the way to increase the public confidence, the workers struggle and the capacity to face and defeat the IMF programme, which unites PS and the right. In the social struggle and on the elections, the unity against the IMF is essential for the Left to compete for the alternative.

5. Left Block will not, in the current political debate, give up from the insistence on the need of budgetary consolidation and on the profound rupture on the economy, in order to face bankruptcy and recession. As

such, the key for the solution is a tax reform in order to mobilise the necessary resources, the fight against the created and protected tax evasion in our country, and the reduction of scandalous expenses such as the ones with Public-Private Partnerships. The country has to choose if it wants to continue to accept to finance the income from the banks and building societies, through the assignment of public hospitals to private management and with the management of highways and railways, or if it wants to use the public resources to reduce poverty and unemployment.

6. Given the threats from the Government, in order to relaunch and worsen the measures already foreseen in PEC4, and that constitute the electoral programme of PS, attacking the salary, namely the 13th and 14th month salary, reducing the pensions and worsening the essential public services, Left Block makes a call to all social mobilisation. Only democracy can save the economy.

Our compromise on the struggle for a

Left Government responds to this crisis. It is necessary to have a Government that is a result from the force that democracy can give to the fight for financial responsibility, for job creation, for the reduction of poverty and precariousness.

7. The meeting that took place, upon request of the Left Block, with a delegation of the board of the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP), on the 8th of April, was the first formal meeting of these two boards, which can be inscribed in the sequence of multiple common answers that took place along the years, on the fight for the defense of labor laws that protect the workers, of tax laws that protect tax payers and of economic answers that protect employment and social rights. The meeting has confirmed these common answers and has established a process of consultations between the two parties.

Left Block remarks the importance of this dialogue, and shows its commitment regarding its proceeding, as well as all the forms of convergence that mobilise the left for political answers against the bankruptcy.

# **Fukushima - an ongoing nuclear disaster**

**19 April 2011, by Kazuyoshi Sato**

Kazuyoshi Sato, a member of Iwaki city assembly, gave his eye-witness report to the meeting, personally one of his aunts being missing due to the tsunami. He came to Tokyo as a representative of the Fukushima Network for Denuclearization in order to file the denuclearizing demands with the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry the next day. The following is excerpts from his April-3 speech:

I have engaged in the activities of our Fukushima Network for Denuclearization for more than 20 years, but we are now confronted with the ongoing nuclear disaster. We are obliged to be conscious of our weakness, and we should apologize in

this regard.

The radiation dose of Iwaki City is 1.2-1.3 micro Sv at the moment, 100-times higher than that of Tokyo. Coastal areas of the city are in horrible situation as though they might have been struck at ferociously by air bombers. Iwaki City has a population of 340,000, and one third of the population is presumed to have evacuated voluntarily. In my neighborhood, there are not many houses with electric light on at night. The mass media ran away from the city all together after the explosions and radiation leakage at the Fukushima nuclear plant. The normal workings of city lives were paralyzed. Water was cut off over the whole city,

and the water supply started on March 18. Autonomous ability of local communities are to be tested under such a state of emergency, and it has become clear that those local communities which have had their own local activities on a day-to-day basis have the capability to confront the crisis situation.

There are 20,000 people at the evacuation sites, and relief goods do not reach those sites. The official countermeasures operations have not corresponded to the actual local realities. There is no privacy at the evacuation facilities, and there are quarrels among the evacuees necessarily. Residents of my birthplace Naraba-cho, where the

Fukushima No. 2 nuclear plant is located, are worried seriously, thinking that they might never be able to return to their hometowns. At the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, there are various systemic damages and disorders, and its cooling mechanism has not been restored right now: the state of things will be drawn out. Radiation dose is high, and stresses are building up among the population.

A new term of school is to start on April 7, and my city-assembly group has been proposing a two-month suspension of classes. Our group has demanded the municipal board of education to introduce radiation meters into all the schools, too. However, the board of education has refused our proposal of two-month suspension, and its position on the radiation meters is to leave the matter to the discretion of each schoolmaster/mistress or principal. Usually the board of education decides on anything by itself and does not allow any discretion of each school.

However, our board of education is utterly irresponsible for this kind of matters.

Since March 11, we have been confronted with a totally new state of affairs: we are forced to be faced with the radiation exposure under de facto decommissioning of nuclear reactors. Never being able to get free from this reality, including the marine contamination, we are obliged to subsist under the despair.

Futaba-cho, where the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant exists, was the location of an army airfield during the World War II. After the war, the Tsutsumi family of the Seibu capital group bought up the land, and the lot was sold as the nuke site. Accordingly, we are now realizing the real seriousness of popular sacrifices that "national policies" might bring about. The electricity that is generated at the Fukushima nuclear plants is transmitted to the greater metropolitan area, and it is not consumed at all in Fukushima

prefecture. The greater metropolitan population should not count on Fukushima prefecture for the electricity any more, and the generating and consuming system of electric power must be decentralized and localized from now on. TEPCO has filed its plan to build the 7th and 8th nuclear reactors in Fukushima prefecture with the government at the present point of time. What a horrible entity TEPCO is!

It is really necessary to have a 100,000-strong demonstration, surrounding the official residence of the prime minister, under the banner of 'Decommission all the 10 reactors of the Fukushima No. 1 and 2 nuclear power plants!' and 'Do away all the nuclear power plants!' Now is the time to move ahead for the definite and total denuclearization; if not, when will it be possible for us to do so?

*Translated from the JRCL-NCIW joint weekly "Kakehashi", No. 2170, April 18, 2011: <http://www.jrcl.net/>*

## Egypt's constitution: a controversial declaration

**18 April 2011, by [ahram on line](#)**

The declaration, announced by Mamdouh Shahin, SCAF's legal adviser, in a press conference, elicited surprise and even frustration from many. It includes 62 articles, on top of which the 56-year-old article stating that half of the seats in the People's Assembly "Egypt's lower house parliament" must be reserved for representatives of workers and farmers. The declaration also espouses the 1971 Constitution's controversial Article 2, stating that Islam is the religion of the state and that the principles of Islamic Sharia law are the main source of legislation in Egypt.

To the dismay of many, Shahin said the Interim Constitutional Declaration

includes 80 per cent of the mainstays of the 1971 Constitution. This is an ominous development for the 25 January Revolution Youth Coalition who asked for the elimination of the 1971 Constitution altogether. Shahin explained that "the drafting of a new constitution is not the job of the army and that this will be left to the new parliament and president."

In general, the Interim Constitutional Declaration's 62 articles are divided between four chapters regulating the performance of the state, including basic rights and freedoms; the system of government; and the rule of law. The declaration contains the nine constitutional amendments approved in the 19 March referendum, on top of

which is limiting the presidency to two four-year terms and easing restrictions on candidates seeking to run in presidential elections. They also state that elections must be held under full judicial supervision and compel the elected president to select a vice-president within his first 60 days in power. It also puts an end to an indefinite state of emergency and calls for a constituent assembly to be formed by the new houses of parliament to draft a new permanent constitution.

The Interim Constitutional Declaration also noted "in ambiguous terms" that the powers of the Shura Council would be reduced. Shahin refused to give a clear-cut answer when asked if



the elimination of some of the Shura Council's powers is prelude to eliminating the council altogether. In Shain's words "if this council is to be eliminated, it could stay until it completes a three-life year." As for the 50 per cent quota of seats for workers and farmers, Shahin justified maintaining this controversial article upon the grounds that "40 per cent of Egyptians are still illiterate."

Initial reactions to the Interim Constitutional Declaration were negative on the whole. Gamal Zahran, a professor of political science at Suez Canal University and a former independent MP, argued that "the declaration is a new frustrating development." "Above all," Zahran told Ahram Online, "it maintains the 50 per cent quota of seats reserved for workers and farmers and this means that next September's parliamentary elections will still be governed by this very bad quota that belongs to the old socialist age of late President Gamal Abdel-Nasser and no longer reflects the realities of the new age."

Zahran also voiced criticism of the declaration's attitude towards the Shura Council. "The declaration states that the powers of Shura Council would be reduced while the powers of this council are very few in the first place," argued Zahran, expecting that "no one will be interested in contesting the coming elections for the Shura Council, bearing in mind the ambiguous future of the council."

The Interim Constitutional Declaration comes as the last in a series of steps taken by SCAF in the last few days. It also comes amid calls issued by the 25 January Revolution Youth Coalition, aiming to organise a massive million-man protest under the slogan "Save the Revolution" or "the Friday of Salvation". The coalition primarily includes activists of the 6th April Youth Movement, the Kifaya Movement, the Democratic Front Party, Al-Ghad Party led by opposition leader Ayman Nour, and the National Association for Change led by Mohamed ElBaradei, ex-chief of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

A few hours ahead of the declaration, the coalition issued another

statement, indicating that "it would give SCAF ... space time until 8 April to achieve the 25th Revolution's unfulfilled demands." The coalition explained that on top of these demands is speeding up the trial of ousted President Hosni Mubarak and his regime's "gang of the three": Fathi Sorour, former speaker of the People's Assembly; Safwat El-Sherif, former chairman of the Shura Council and secretary-general of Mubarak's erstwhile ruling National Democratic Party (NDP), and Zakaria Azmi, Mubarak's chief of staff and the NDP's assistant secretary-general."

This trio, in addition to Mubarak's former Interior Minister Habib Al-Adli, should be held accountable, the coalition says, for more than 650 dead and several thousands injured in attempts to put down the popular uprising which began 25 January.

In a statement issued on 28 March, the 25 January Revolution Youth Coalition argued that "three weeks ago, we decided to stop protesting at Tahrir Square in order to give SCAF and the government a chance to achieve the objectives of the 25 January Revolution, bring stability back and rebuild the country." But, the statement argued, "while we were rebuilding our country, it took us by surprise that some are doing their best to steal the revolution." "We will not allow the vestiges of the toppled regime" state security, Mubarak's NDP, thugs and corrupt business tycoons "to steal our revolution," the statement said.

In the words of the statement, "it is highly provocative that some of Mubarak's corrupt disciples, such as Sorour, still make press interviews while Azmi is on television screens and is still in charge of running the affairs of the presidential staff and palaces." It wondered: "How are not Sorour, El-Sherif and Azmi summoned for interrogation before authorities, although they face strong accusations that they masterminded the 'Battle of the Camel' on 2 February to kill pro-democracy protesters on Tahrir Square?"

The coalition asked that a special judicial committee be formed to bring Mubarak and his corrupt aides to trial

as soon as possible. "What we see is that low-profile corrupt figures are the ones who face trials, but the big fish, like Mubarak and his henchmen, still appear to be immune," said the coalition statement. It also underlined that quicker and more serious efforts should be made to reclaim the assets of Mubarak and his family and associates from local and foreign banks.

The coalition demanded that Mubarak's once ruling NDP be disbanded as soon as possible, with all of its headquarters and provincial offices reclaimed. "Its members should be barred from political activities for at least five years," said the coalition's statement.

It also called for cleansing media institutions "including state television and radio, and newspapers" of sycophants still loyal to Mubarak and his regime; dismantling local councils and ridding state universities of Mubarak's men. "All those who belonged to the ousted regime must be fired from their positions, particularly in media institutions, and held accountable," the statement insisted. Around 500 journalists protested on Sunday in front of the buildings of the national radio and TV union and the press syndicate, calling for ridding media institutions of Mubarak's men.

This article was first published on March 30

Finally, the coalition called for the release of all political prisoners, abrogating the newly-issued anti-protest law and forming a "presidential council" to be tasked with running the affairs of the country and drafting a new constitution.

The call for the Friday of Salvation received great support among internet bloggers and young political activists, even after SCAF announced the long-awaited Interim Constitutional Declaration yesterday.

The government of Prime Minister Essam Sharaf also issued a number of reformist measures. A national dialogue was launched, including 160 public figures belonging to different political forces. Deputy Prime Minister

for Political Affairs Yehia Al-Gammal indicated that "the main objective of the dialogue" held under the title of "Towards a new social contract for Egypt" is to give the chance for all political forces to reach an agenda of priorities for the coming stage."

Major political parties, however, said that they are not happy with the dialogue. The leaders of Wafd, Tagammu and Nasserist parties said they "had not received an official invitation for the dialogue, not to mention [clarification on] how could this dialogue be fruitful while SCAF is

the one with the final say on political decisions". "This was clear when we were surprised by SCAF forming a committee to amend the constitution without consulting us."

SCAF's new political parties law on Monday also irked many political activists and young revolutionaries. Essam Sultan, a political activist with Islamist leanings, said the new law "took with the left hand what it gave with the right." "The amended law contained many obstacles, such as compelling activists to collect five thousand signatures, rather than one

thousand, and requiring them to publish the list of the names of the party's founders on the pages of one state-owned newspaper. The cost of publishing this list reaches at least LE1 million," said Sultan.

Another irritating development for political activists is that Minister of Justice Mohamed El-Guindy refused to abrogate the newly issued anti-protest law. Young activists insist that "this law betrays the spirit of the 25 January Revolution."

[ahram on line](#)

## The military council is the guardian of dictatorship and corruption

**18 April 2011, by Revolutionary Socialists of Egypt**

The attempts to break up the protest camp can have no other meaning except that the Military Council is defending the interests of the corrupt thieves who stole from the Egyptian people for the past thirty years. The generals who sit at the top of the pyramid in the Army are part of Mubarak's corrupt gang, and it is they who have the task of protecting the system of thieving and corruption after his fall. Now is the time to get rid of them, just as the revolutionaries finished off Mubarak.

After today nobody will be fooled by the slogan 'the army and the people are one hand'.

For the past two months that the Military Council has held power, it has crushed protests and tortured

demonstrators and dragged them before the military courts.

This time however, the Army did not act alone in its attempts to break up the sit-in, but worked hand-in-glove with the police.

This means that the army and the police are 'one hand' against the people, and that their hands are stained with the blood of the revolutionaries.

It therefore falls to the people to get rid of them both, and to create a popular civilian authority which reflects the demands of the revolutionaries and realizes the aspirations of the Egyptian people to live in freedom and dignity.

This will mean bringing Mubarak and his henchmen to trial for the crimes they committed against the people, and the confiscation of all their assets.

Mubarak and his cronies will never be brought to trial while Tantawi and 'Annan and the other generals on the Military Council remain in power in Egypt, as they are part of his regime, and embroiled in the corruption which swamped the country during his dictatorship.

We must continue our revolution until the country has been cleansed and Mubarak's Military Council has been removed from power.

Victory to the Revolution  
Glory to the Martyrs  
9 April 2011

## Breaking the chains of poverty, tyranny and corruption

**18 April 2011, by Socialist Renewal Current**

Arab people are breaking the chains of tyranny, poverty and corruption. We will not surrender. Leaders of the world compete and prevaricate to safeguard the interests of great powers. As for Arab rulers, they struggle to work under the umbrella of the US, the dominant world power. In return, they are left free-handed to accumulate astounding fortunes and take whatever oppressive measures against their people, who suffer from poverty, unemployment and deteriorating living conditions.

Despite its empty rhetoric regarding democracy, accountability and the rule of law, the international community turns a blind eye to state terrorism and corruption by the region's dictatorships. After decades of boiling resentment and discontent, Arab people are

now breaking the chains of fear.

For the first in the region - and perhaps in the whole world - we see millions of people moving together in pursuit of freedom and justice. After the masses of Tunisia and Egypt managed to overthrow their despotic rulers, the flame of revolution has burnt in much of the Arab world, and we hear demonstrators chanting "the people want to bring down regime" in one country after another.

Regimes used all sorts of oppression at hand to force the people to surrender. Thought it was all to no avail. In a case after another, regimes applied the same recipe: using teargas and rubber bullets against unarmed protestors; withdrawing the police and releasing criminals from prisons to

terrify people and loot their property; firing live ammunition into the crowds.

The Libyan regime went further to use mercenaries to fight the people, while the Egyptian one used camels and horses in the fight. Yet brutality is turning people more determined to win the battle. We could see this in Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria, Libya, Kuwait, Morocco, Bahrain, Jordan and Yemen.

The future of the region - and perhaps the whole world - depends on the outcome of the fight between Arab people and their despotic, corrupted and reactionary regimes. Our support to Arab revolutions is the way for a brighter future for our children. Long live Arab revolutions.

Socialist Renewal Current  
20th February 2011

## **Long live the Egyptian popular revolution**

**18 April 2011, by Forum of Independent Human Rights Organizations, Egypt**

### **Roadmap for a nation of rights and the rule of law**

â€¢ Civilian body to oversee the country's affairs for a one-year transitional period, in conjunction with the armed forces, and the postponement of presidential elections

â€¢ Dissolution of the People's Assembly, Shura Council, and local councils

â€¢ Civilian figure to oversee the Interior Ministry and the dissolution of State Security Investigations, a crucial pillar of the police state

â€¢ The provision of public liberties, particularly the freedom to establish political parties, professional and trade unions, and civic organizations; and the dissolution of the Egyptian Trade Union Federation and the General Federation of Civic Associations

â€¢ A new constitution for a civil, democratic state that respects human rights and grants all citizens equal status regardless of religion, belief, or race.

â€¢ No provision of legal immunity for the former president

The Forum of Independent Human Rights Organizations congratulates the Egyptian people for their

successful revolution and the removal of the dictator Hosni Mubarak, who denied dignity and humanity to Egyptians for three decades. The Forum especially salutes the revolution's martyrs and the young people who sparked the uprising, creatively mobilized and organized, and bravely fought to achieve the first goal of deposing the dictator under a coalition of youth leaders. The Forum also salutes the peoples of the world, international rights groups, research centers, and the governments who showed their solidarity with the January 25 revolution from the first moment. The Forum urges nations around the world holding the financial assets of former senior officials to facilitate the repatriation of Egypt's looted assets.

Furthermore, the Forum salutes the role of the armed forces in protecting the revolution and supporting its demands up to the achievement of its first goal. In particular, it applauds the third communiqué issued by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, which stated that the council “will not be an alternative to the legitimacy approved by the people.” As such, the Forum calls on the supreme council to quickly release a timetable for the transfer of power to a civilian body to manage the transition phase to a civil, democratic state that respects human rights, in cooperation with the armed forces, and with the participation of civil society, which can monitor the implementation of the roadmap.

The Forum also urges the Supreme Council to issue urgent directives to Egyptian diplomats abroad, particularly Egypt’s representatives at the UN and the UN Human Rights Council, to withdraw from international coalitions hostile to human rights. Egypt’s continued diplomatic support in Geneva and New York for the worst dictatorships in the world, and its complicity against upholding the rights of the victims of these dictatorships, is the greatest insult to the martyrs of Egypt’s January 25 revolution.

To the civilian body that will assume responsibility in the transitional phase, and to the Supreme Council until such a civilian body is formed, the Forum offers the following proposals:

I. Dissolve the People’s Assembly, the Shura Council, and local councils, which are the product of the most fraudulent elections in Egypt’s history, in order to avoid any challenge to the legitimacy of legislative or constitutional amendments issued by the parliament. Moreover, all officials involved in the administration of elections to these bodies must be investigated.

The Forum believes that holding parliamentary or presidential elections in the current corrupt legislative and political environment will produce results that differ little from the previous elections. Indeed, the next elections must be held after a transitional period of at least one year

during which time public liberties are respected in full, particularly the right to form political parties, professional and trade unions, civic associations, and all forms of media.

II. Take immediate steps to hold accountable those responsible for all crimes committed against Egyptians since the beginning of the uprising on January 25. This entails:

1. No guarantee of immunity should be granted to former president Hosni Mubarak that prevents holding him accountable for any crimes he may have committed, directly or indirectly, during his time in power. Immunity should be revoked if promises have already been made to the contrary.

2. All officials responsible since 25 January for orders to open fire, killing hundreds of demonstrators, and those responsible for the shutdown of internet and mobile phone services, should be referred to trial, starting with the former interior minister and his aides.

3. All officials responsible for the coordinated withdrawal of security forces and the subsequent release of prisoners, which lead to a wide spread intimidation and terrorizing of citizens, and looting and theft, must be held accountable.

4. An independent judicial body for truth and equity should be formed to investigate and receive complaints of corruption and human rights abuses committed before and after 25 January. The authorities should guarantee and provide every facility to ensure the independence and impartiality of the body. The latter should give priority to the investigation of crimes committed since 25 January.

5. Identify and prosecute those responsible for the massacre in Tahrir Square on 2 February and the attacks on the offices of several human rights organizations on 3 February. The Public Prosecutor’s investigation should be transparent and the public should be informed of the findings in a timely manner.

6. The minister of information should be brought to trial for his

responsibility for the misinformation campaigns launched by state-owned media, along with one private satellite channel, designed to smear the participants in the January 25 revolution as foreign agents, as well as his orchestration of a xenophobic campaign of incitement to hatred and violence against foreigners. It should be noted that these orchestrated media campaigns harmed the tourism sector and cost the nation enormous material and moral losses that will take years to recover. The CEOs and chief editors of state-owned papers that participated in these campaigns must be dismissed.

7. Stop all prosecutions, arrests, and harassment of political activists, journalists and foreign correspondents, and human rights defenders; immediately end the military police’s participation in civilian police affairs and their involvement in arrests and detentions; immediately investigate all human rights violations; immediately release all those detained by the military police; and, refer those suspected of violations of the general law to the civil investigating authorities.

III. Take immediate measures to uproot the police state and reinstate the rule of law. This entails:

1. Dissolve the State Security Investigations Services, a vital pillar of the police state responsible for disappearances, brutal torture, arbitrary detention, the sabotage of political parties, the restrictions on human rights groups, and the erosion of Egyptians’ dignity and the rule of law.

2. Appoint a civilian figure from outside the police apparatus to oversee the Interior Ministry and end the Interior Ministry’s hegemony over the Public Prosecutor’s Office and its usurpation of some prerogatives of the Justice Ministry.

3. Issue an immediate declaration rescinding the exceptional state of emergency, which has led to the collapse of sovereignty of the law and the independence of the judiciary, and under which torture, abductions, and extrajudicial killings have increased, human dignity denied, and court rulings disregarded.



4. Any urgent constitutional reform must involve the abolition -not the amendment- of Article 179 of the constitution, which aimed to normalize the state of emergency by legalizing the exceptional powers of the security apparatus under the emergency law to arrest, search, and engage in the surveillance of telephone communications, written correspondence, email, and the internet.

5. Immediately release all political prisoners and detainees and review the status of their convictions, which involves retrials for those prosecuted in exceptional courts before their natural judge or amnesties; and, release those held in administrative detention under the emergency law without charge or trial, and reform penal institutions to bring them in line with international norms.

IV. Adopt a comprehensive program for far-reaching constitutional and legislative reforms that will pave the way for democratization and respect for human rights, in accordance with a specific timetable. This program should include:

#### 1. Constitutional reform

The amendments introduced in 2007 to the infamous 1971 Constitution, damaged it beyond repair. As such, the Forum proposes:

a. Draft a new constitution that will have enshrined in it the separation of powers, end the executive's absolute control over the legislative and judicial authorities, and limit the absolute authorities given to the president.

b. Guarantee the right of all individual citizens to run for the office of president and limit the presidency to no more than two four-year terms.

c. Restrict the authority of the president to declare a state of emergency, ensuring that it can only be invoked for a limited period and only in cases of war, armed internal unrest, or natural catastrophes. In all cases, it should be limited to the affected areas of the country.

d. Establish the civil nature of the state as a state for all its citizens based on the principles of equality and

impartiality toward all citizens regardless of religion, belief, gender, or race. Competence should be the sole standard used to determine appointment to the civil service.

e. Guarantee freedom of religion and belief for all citizens without discrimination and criminalize incitement to religious hatred and sectarian violence.

f. Guarantee the independence of state-owned media from the executive so that it can accurately reflect the intellectual, political, cultural, religious, ideological, racial, and social diversity of Egyptians.

g. Enshrine the sovereignty of constitutional guarantees for rights and public freedoms above all other supplementary legislation.

h. Enshrine the hierarchy of international human rights agreements above Egyptian legislation, making them invulnerable to abrogation, amendment, or suspension by any subsequent law.

#### 2. Legislative reform

a. Abolish the political parties' law (Law 40/1977) and its amendments and adopt a law grounded in international norms that protect the freedom of association, guaranteeing the freedom to establish political parties and gain legal status by notice alone. The regular judiciary should have jurisdiction over the establishment and operation of political parties.

b. Guarantee the right to diversity in professional and trade unions in accordance with international norms; abolish Law 35/1976 on trade unions and its amendments, which imposes government tutelage over trade union activity, erodes labor freedoms, and establishes a unilateral, hierarchical structure that entrenches trade-union uniformity; and, dissolve the Egyptian Trade Union Federation.

c. Abolish Law 100/1993 on professional syndicates and its amendments, conduct elections in professional syndicates, and guarantee the right of unions, syndicates, and trade federations to draft their own bylaws free from

government tutelage and hegemony.

d. Abolish the NGO law (Law 84/2002), dissolve the General Federation of Civic Associations and the regional federations, and refer to relevant articles in the civil code while observing international norms that guarantee the right to association, particularly the following provisions:

â€¢ Recognition of all forms of civic association without restriction or discrimination.

â€¢ The establishment of civic associations by notice only, without the need for a permit.

â€¢ The general assemblies of NGOs must have the sole authority to determine the policies of civic associations, their articles of incorporation, and the composition of their boards.

â€¢ Guarantee the right of NGOs to establish general federations, networks, and alliances without administrative tutelage, as well as the right to join international and regional networks and alliances.

â€¢ Prohibit the dissolution of NGOs or the dismissal of their boards by administrative order.

â€¢ Prohibit the dissolution or suspension of any NGO but by a court order subject to appeal.

â€¢ Guarantee the right of civil society institutions to develop their resources and receive the necessary funding for their activities.

e. Take the necessary legislative measures to ensure freedom of the media by:

â€¢ Ending the control of the executive and its ruling party over state-owned media; taking action to restructure the radio and television broadcasting to strengthen diversity, competition, and free, democratic expression; and, transform the state-owned visual and written media into organizations at the service of the public that enjoy administrative, financial, and programming independence and with representative boards whose members are chosen based on competence and in

consideration of a diversity of views and trends.

â€¢ Grant the authority to license visual and aural media outlets to a national media council, composed of independent figures, which is not subject to the tutelage of the executive. The law establishing this council should guarantee the right of judicial review of any of its decrees.

â€¢ Abolish legislative and administrative restrictions on the circulation of information and the right of citizens to information, and adopt a law that guarantees media workers the right to access and publish information and punishes the obstruction of this right.

â€¢ Abolish penal provisions that mandate prison time for publication crimes; prohibit provisional detention for these crimes, including the crime of insulting the president; and, review provisions in the Penal Code and publications law to ensure that they cannot be used to stigmatize or limit freedom of opinion, expression, or the media.

f. Amend the judiciary law to guarantee the independence of the Public Prosecutor from the executive, prohibit intervention by the Justice or Interior Ministry in the legal process, guarantee that the general assemblies of the courts have the right to refer cases to the competent judges without interference, and uphold the independence of judges' clubs.

g. Amend the law on the National Council for Human Rights to compel relevant state agencies to provide it with the necessary information and reports, respond to citizen complaints referred to them by the council, and reconsider the composition of the council to ensure real independence by appointing at least one-third of its members from independent human rights organizations.

h. Amend Article 126 of the Penal Code on punishment for crimes of torture in accordance with the comprehensive definition of the crime and its perpetrators as included in Article 1 of the UN Convention Against Torture: amend the Code of Criminal Procedure to guarantee

victims of grave police violations or their families the right to file a criminal suit against those responsible for these abuses; and, stiffen the penalties for crimes of torture and prohibit discretionary leniency or clemency in sentencing to ensure the proper penalty for these crimes.

i. Take legislative measures to ensure that civilians cannot be prosecuted before military tribunals and limit the jurisdiction of the military judiciary to military personnel who have committed crimes and violations in their units or during the course of duty.

### 3. Electoral reform

a. Amend the law on the exercise of political rights and Law 174/2005 on the regulation of presidential elections to end the Interior Ministry's control over general elections, including presidential polls, and grant oversight of all elections to one independent judicial body chosen by judges through the courts' general assemblies. This body should be given the authority necessary to fully supervise the electoral process, starting from the preparation, review, and updating of voter rolls, and including the receipt of declarations of candidacy and challenges to them, the drawing of electoral districts and polling stations, the drafting of campaign rules and guarantees of compliance with them and the implementation of the legal provisions that criminalize thuggery, violence, and coercion of voters and vote-buying, as well as the use of religious slogans or houses of worship, public monies, or state facilities to support particular candidates. This body should also be responsible for announcing election results. This requires the establishment of judicial policing under the authority of the body, not subject to the Interior Ministry, to guarantee its directives are implemented.

b. Adopt a proportional, open list system, which can guarantee better representation for political parties and empower social sectors that have long been marginalized in political life.

c. Legalize the right of NGOs to monitor elections at all stages,

facilitate their ability to act independently, end the National Council for Human Rights' monopoly over permits for election monitoring, and accept international monitors for general elections.

d. Reconsider state funding for political parties in general elections to provide funding and incentives to encourage parties to include young people, women, and others besides Sunni Muslims on their electoral lists.

e. Implement court orders that ban police guards from university campuses, end security interference in student activities and academic and faculty appointments, end security and administrative intervention in faculty clubs and student union elections, and uphold the right of students to draft new bylaws for student unions.

V. Draft a clear plan for the gradual activation of all economic, social, and cultural rights to meet the demands of the January 25 revolution, especially a minimum wage and pension standard that is commensurate with the cost of living.

*12 February 2011*

Signatory organizations

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies

Andalus Institute for Tolerance and Anti-Violence Studies

Arab Network for Human Rights Information

Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression

Center for Egyptian woman's Legal Assistance

Hesham Mubarak Law Center

Misryon Against Religious Discrimination

New Woman Research Center

Support for Information Technology

The Arab Penal Reform Organization

The Egyptian Association for Community Participation Enhancement

The Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights

Rights

Assistance for the Prisoners

The Egyptian Initiative for Personal

The Human Rights Association for the

Youth Coalition of the Egyptian Revolution

# Glory for the fallen fighters! Victory for the Revolution!

## 18 April 2011, by Declaration of the Revolutionary Socialists of Egypt

Demonstrations and protest assemblies have had a key role in our revolution's flare up and its continuation. Now, not only do we need the workers participation in the reformation of the rebound regime's destiny through participation in demonstrations, but also by organizing a general strike in all key industries and large corporations.

The regime may be able to withstand demonstrations and sit ins for days and weeks but when the workers use the weapon of strike, the regime will not survive more than a few hours! Strikes must be held in railroads, airports and all forms of public transportation, and in major and minor factories...! Workers of Egypt! Join the revolution's line, for the sake of the courageous, rebellious youth, for the blood of our fallen brothers and sisters, use your power to shape a new society, that honors all individuals equally! Victory is at hand, the eyes of the World are upon us. We will be victorious!!!

**Immediately form  
Revolutionary  
Councils...**

This revolution has gone further than our highest expectations. No one expected to see such great crowds. Nobody expected Egyptians to be so courageous and so bold! No one can ever say it was not us who forced the dictator to retreat. No one can say that nothing has occurred in Tahrir Square.

What we need now is to put into place, social-economic demands, as part of our expectations, so that the person who is sitting in the corner of her/his house will understand that we are fighting for their rights.... We must organize Peoples' Committees so that they themselves may select members of higher councils and lower councils in a democratic form. These councils should form a higher council that will include representatives from all walks of life. We must select the people's highest council to represent all of us in a manner that we trust. We now call upon everyone, to form the People's Councils in Tahrir Square and in all cities of Egypt.

**Revolutionary  
Socialist on the  
role of the army:**

Everyone is asking; is the army with the people or against them?

The army is not a single block. The interest of the soldiers and lower officers are the same as people's interests. But the high ranking officers are Hosni Mubarak's hirelings, selected carefully to protect the regime of corruption, wealth and autocracy. They are an inseparable part of the system. They must be replaced!

This is not yet, a people's army. This is not the same army that defeated the Zionist enemy in October 1973. This army is indivisibly bonded to the U.S. and Israel. It plays the role of protecting Israel, and American interest's, not the people of Egypt... Yes, we want to convince the soldiers of the revolution to continue to work with us but we should not be lulled into complacency by the slogan, "the Army is next to us." Either the army directly represses the demonstrations or, the Army changes the Police structure that plays the role of Mubarak's puppet and brutal enforcer. The time is now, the choice of a free and open society is ours!!!

*Tahrir Square, February 1st 2011*

## Eight key proposals for another Europe

# 18 April 2011, by **Éric Toussaint**

The reduction of public deficits must be brought about not through cuts in spending for social programs, but through an increase in tax revenue as a result of efficient measures against tax evasion, more taxation on capital, financial transactions, personal wealth, and higher incomes. To reduce public deficits, cuts should be made in arms spending, as well as other expenditures that are socially obnoxious and detrimental to the environment. It is by contrast essential to increase spending on social programs, if only to compensate for the consequences of the economic depression. Beyond this protective position, the current crisis should be seen as an opportunity to break away from the capitalist mindset and achieve a radical change in society. The new logic to be developed must turn away from productivism, take the environment into account, remove all forms of oppression (based on race, gender or other arbitrary criteria), and support universal access to common goods.

To achieve this goal we must build an anti-crisis front both locally and at the European level so as to bring together enough energy to create a balance of power that is favorable to the implementation of radical solutions focusing on social justice and concern for the environment. As early as August 2010, the CADTM drafted eight alternative proposals to the crisis in Europe [See <http://www.theCADTM.org/Debt-a-boon-for-creditors-a> This article updates and develops these proposals.] The main point is the need to cancel the illegitimate part of the public debt. To this end, the CADTM recommends setting up an audit under citizen control, which should be combined, in some cases, with a unilateral and sovereign suspension of repayment. The aim of the audit is to cancel the illegitimate part of the public debt and to strongly reduce the remainder.

A radical reduction of public debt is necessary but not sufficient in order to get EU countries out of the crisis. It

has to be complemented with significant measures in various areas.

## **1. Auditing public debt to cancel the illegitimate part**

A significant part of the public debt in EU countries is illegitimate since it results from a deliberate policy by governments that have decided to systematically favor the moneyed classes to the detriment of other members of society. Tax reductions on higher incomes, personal wealth, and the profits of private corporations have led public authorities to increase the public debt so as to compensate for the drop in government revenues. They have also raised the tax burden on low income households, that is, on the majority of the population.

Moreover, the 2007-2008 bail out of the private the financial institutions responsible for the crisis has meant huge spending of public money and a rapid rise of public debt. The decrease in revenues because of the crisis triggered by private financial institutions had to be financed once again by massive borrowing. Such a context clearly shows the illegitimacy of a significant part of the public debt. In a number of countries blackmailed by the financial markets we must add other obvious sources of illegitimacy. From 2008 onward, public money has been borrowed from private banks (and other private financial institutions), which have used the money they get at very low rates from central banks to speculate and compel governments to raise the amounts they pay them.

In countries such as Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Romania, and Ireland, IMF loans were granted on conditions that run against the population's economic and social interests. Worse yet, these conditions again favor banks and other financial institutions. They must therefore be regarded as illegitimate. Finally, in some cases governments have gone against the will of the people: for instance, while in February 2011 a large majority of the Irish voted against parties that had granted

gifts to bankers and accepted the conditions imposed by the European Commission and the IMF, the new government coalition has led the same policies as the previous ones.

More generally, in many countries the legislative branch of government has gotten marginalized by policies enforced by the executive branch after agreements with the European Commission and the IMF. The executive submits the agreement to Parliament who then has to take it or leave it. In some cases, debates without votes are organized on major issues. The tendency of the executive branch to turn parliament into a rubberstamping assembly is getting stronger.

In such a troublesome situation, knowing as we do that several countries will soon have to face a defaulting scenario for want of cash, and that repaying illegitimate debt is by definition unacceptable, we have to speak out loud and clear in favor of the cancellation of illegitimate debt. The cost of the cancellation must be borne by private financial institutions, i.e. those that are responsible for the crisis.

Countries such as Greece, Ireland, Portugal, and ones in Eastern Europe (or outside the EU, such as Iceland), i.e. countries that are being blackmailed by speculators, the IMF and other bodies such as the European Commission, ought to call for a unilateral moratorium on repayment of the public debt. The proposal is gaining popular support in countries that are most badly hit by the crisis. In Dublin at the end of November 2010, in a telephone survey of some 500 people, 57% of the Irish in the poll favored defaulting rather than receiving emergency aid from the IMF and the EU. Default! say the people, was the headline of the Sunday Independent, the island's main weekly.

The CADTM argues that such a unilateral moratorium must be combined with the auditing of public



loans (with citizen participation). The auditing should give the government and public opinion the necessary evidence and arguments to cancel/repudiate the part of the debt that has been found to be illegitimate. International law and the various national laws offer a legal basis for such a unilateral sovereign act of cancellation/repudiation.

Its experience working on the debt question in the South incites the CADTM to warn defaulting countries against insufficient measures such as merely suspending repayment, which can prove counterproductive. What is required is a moratorium without accrual of interest on over-due loans.

In other countries such as France, the UK or Germany, it may not be imperative to call for a unilateral moratorium during the auditing period. Yet an audit has to be carried out in order to determine the scope of the cancellation/repudiation called for. Should the international economic environment deteriorate further, a suspension of payment may be on the agenda even for countries that thought they could not be blackmailed by private creditors.

Citizen participation is an imperative condition to guarantee that an audit is objective and transparent. The auditing committee must include the various public bodies concerned, experts in auditing public finances, economists, jurists, constitutionalists, and representatives of social movements. This will make it possible to decide on the various responsibilities involved in the indebtedness process and to demand accountability of those responsible, whether at a national or international level. Should the current government not agree to debt auditing, a citizens auditing committee must be set up, without the government's participation.

In all cases, it is legitimate for private institutions and high-income individuals, who hold debt securities, to bear the burden of the cancellation of illegitimate sovereign debt, since they are largely responsible for the crisis, and have also profited from it. This is merely a fair return to more social justice. It is important to create

a register of security holders in order to compensate those who have low or middle-range incomes.

If the audit brings up evidence of crimes related to illegitimate debt, their perpetrators must be heavily sentenced to pay compensation and serve prison terms as befits the severity of their transgressions. Public bodies that have contracted illegitimate loans must be held accountable.

As for legitimate debt, creditors should be forced to try and reduce the principal and the interest rates, and to postpone maturity.

Here again, positive discrimination in favor of small holders of public debt securities should insure that they get paid. Moreover, the amount in the state budget set aside for refunding the debt must be capped depending on the economic conditions, public bodies' ability to repay, and the irreducible nature of spending on social programs.

We must take inspiration from what was done for Germany after WWII. The 1953 London agreement on German external debt (which among other measures reduced the principal of the debt by 62%) stipulated that the debt service / annual export income ratio could not exceed 5%. We could define a similar ratio: the amount dedicated to repaying the debt cannot exceed 5% [See Éric Toussaint, *The World Bank: a Critical Primer*, Pluto Press, London (2008), Chapter 4.] of the State's revenues. We must also define a legal framework so as to avoid a repetition of the crisis that started in 2007-2008, including the prohibition of socializing private debts, an obligation to organize a permanent audit of public debt policies, with citizen participation, the non applicability of statutory limitations to crimes related to illegitimate debt, invalidity of illegitimate debt, and so on.

## **2. Stop austerity plans, they are unfair and are only making the crisis worse**

Governments of European countries have chosen to comply with IMF demands and impose strict austerity policies on their populations, with

slashed public spending, including massive layoffs of civil servants and frozen or even reduced salaries for them, reduced access to some vital public services and to social protection, later retirement age. Conversely public corporations have demanded - and received - an increase in their prices, while the cost for getting access to health care and education has risen.

Using particularly unfair higher indirect taxes such as sales tax (VAT) is more and more frequent. Public corporations in the sectors open to competition have been massively privatized. The austerity policies implemented have been pushed to levels not seen since World War II. The consequences of the crisis have thus been made much worse by the alleged remedies, the main aim of which is to protect the interests of capital holders. In a nutshell, champagne for the bankers, and peanuts for the workers, pensioners, and unemployed! But the people are less and less ready to bear the injustice of such reforms, which signify large scale social regression. Those who are being forced to contribute the most to enable governments to pay back creditors are wage earners, the unemployed and low-income households.

Meanwhile, women are the most severely affected, since the current organization of patriarchal society and the economy is such that they bear the brunt of the disastrous consequences of make-shift, part-time, and under-paid jobs. They are also directly affected by the deterioration of public social services. Our struggle to impose another mindset must go hand in hand with a struggle for the total respect of women's rights.

## **3. Establish real European fiscal justice and a fair redistribution of wealth. Ban transactions with legal and tax havens. Fight against the massive fiscal fraud being committed by the largest and most prosperous corporations.**

Since 1980, the rates of direct taxation on the highest incomes and largest corporations have continuously fallen in the European Union. Between 2000 and 2008, the highest personal

income tax rate fell by 7 percent, while the highest corporate tax rate dropped by 8.5 percent. These hundreds of billions of euros in tax breaks have been largely dished out to speculators and the richest members of society, who have seen their wealth continue to accumulate.

Major fiscal reform aiming for social justice must be implemented (decreasing the revenues and personal wealth of the richest so that the rest of the planet can have more), and adopted throughout Europe in order to prevent fiscal dumping. [For instance in Ireland, where tax on corporate profit is only 12.5.] The goal is to increase public revenues, in particular via a progressive tax on the revenues of the wealthiest individuals (the marginal rate for those in the highest tax bracket must be raised to 90%). [This 90% rate was imposed on the rich in the United States in the 1930s under Franklin Roosevelt's presidency.], a tax on personal wealth above a certain amount, and a corporate tax. This increase in revenues must be accompanied by a rapid decrease in the price of every day goods and services, such as basic food items, water, electricity, heating, public transport, and school supplies, which can be accomplished via a substantial and targeted decrease in the sales tax (VAT) applied to these vital goods and services. The fiscal policy adopted should also encourage the protection of the environment by applying a dissuasive tax penalizing companies that pollute.

The EU must adopt a tax on financial transactions, particularly on foreign exchange markets, so as to increase government revenues.

Despite their lofty intentions, the G20 countries have repeatedly refused to deal with legal and tax havens. A simple measure to fight against these tax havens (which drain vital resources needed for the development of people in Northern as well as Southern countries) would consist in adopting a law officially banning all individuals and companies located in a country from making any kind of transaction transiting through a tax haven, with a fine that would be equivalent to the amount of the forbidden transaction. Ultimately,

these financial cesspools must be eliminated, along with the criminal activities, corruption, and white-collar suit and tie delinquency occurring there.

Fiscal fraud drains a considerable amount of resources from the local community and adversely affects employment. Substantial public resources must be allocated to government finance services so they can combat this kind of fraud effectively. The results of their activities must be made public, and the guilty parties must be severely punished.

#### **4. Rein in the financial markets by creating a register of securities holders, and forbidding short sales and speculation in various domains. Create a public European rating agency.**

Worldwide speculation represents several times the amount of wealth produced on the planet. The highly complex nature of this financial engineering makes it totally uncontrollable. The mechanisms it puts into play undermine the real economy. Opaque financial transactions are the rule. To be taxed at the source, the creditors must be first identified. Financial market dictatorships must come to an end! Speculation must also be forbidden in many arenas. Speculation on government bonds, currencies, and food should also be forbidden. [See Éric Toussaint "Getting to the root causes of the food crisis" <http://www.cadtm.org/Getting-to-the-root-causes-of-the>] Short sales must also be banned and Credit Default Swaps strictly regulated. [Short sales allow traders to speculate on the price of a stock, which they expect will drop, via transactions in which they buy then immediately sell stock they did not own when they "shorted" it. German authorities have forbidden these dubious transactions, whereas French authorities and ones from other countries are opposed to this German ban.] Over-the-counter derivatives markets must be closed, because they are veritable black holes, not subject to any regulation or surveillance.

Rating agencies must also be seriously

reformed and strictly regulated. Far from being instruments for making objective scientific estimations, they have become basic devices structuring neoliberal globalization and have already triggered social catastrophes several times. When a country's rating is lowered, the interest rates on the loans made to it are increased, which explains why the economic situation in the country concerned further deteriorates. The complacent behavior of speculators greatly exacerbates the difficulties encountered, which will adversely affect common citizens. The submissive attitudes of these rating agencies in their dealings with the North American financial sector, has turned them into a major actor on the international scene, and their responsibility in triggering and worsening crises has not been highlighted enough by the media.

The economic stability of European countries has been placed in the hands of these rating agencies with no safeguards, no serious means of controlling them provided by governmental authorities. The only way to get out of this impasse is by creating a public rating agency.

#### **5. Transfer the banks to the public sector with citizen control.**

After decades of financial excesses and privatizations, it is high time to transfer the banking sector to the public domain. Governments must recover their capacity to control and frame economic and financial activity. They must also have the instruments needed to make investments and finance public spending by minimizing the need to borrow from private and/or foreign institutions. Banks must be expropriated with no compensation for their owners, and transferred to the public sector where they would be placed under citizen control.

In some cases, the expropriation of private banks would represent a cost for the State because of the debts they have accumulated. This cost would have to be paid for by the banks' major shareholders. The private corporations, which are shareholders of the banks and often led them to the financial abyss in the first place, while making juicy profits, hold part of their

wealth in other sectors of the economy. A levy must be placed on the wealth of these shareholders, so as to avoid making the general public pay for the bank losses. The Irish example is emblematic: the way in which the Irish Allied Bank was nationalized is totally unacceptable, and we must draw appropriate lessons from this very bad example.

#### **6. Re-nationalize the numerous companies and services privatized since 1980.**

During past thirty years many public corporations and public services have been privatized. From banks to the heavy industry sector as well as the postal service and telecommunications, energy, and transport, governments worldwide have handed over entire blocks of the economy to the private sector, losing in the bargain any capacity to regulate the economy. These public goods, which are the fruit of collective work, must be returned to the public domain. The idea would be to create new public corporations and to adapt public services to the needs of the people, in particular to respond to climate change issues, with for example the creation of a public service for insulating buildings.

#### **7. Drastically reduce the amount of time people work to create jobs and increase wages and pensions**

Redistributing wealth in a different way is the best response to the crisis. The share of the wealth produced going to employees has significantly decreased for decades, while the creditors and businesses have increased their profits and as a consequence engaged in more financial speculation. Increasing wages, not only increases people's well-being, it also makes more means available for social protection and pensions.

By decreasing the amount of time people work without decreasing wages, and by creating new jobs, workers will see an improvement in their quality of life and jobs will be given to those who are looking for one. Drastically decreasing the amount of time people work also offers the possibility of putting into

place another pace of life, a different way of living in society that turns its back on the excesses of consumer society. The time saved for leisure activities could be translated into an increased participation of people in their community's political life, more inter-personal solidarity, and also used for volunteer and artistic activities.

#### **8. For a new, democratic European Union based on solidarity.**

Several provisions in the treaties of the European Union, the Euro Zone, and the ECB must be abrogated, such as articles 63 and 125 of the Treaty of Lisbon prohibiting all control of movements of capital and all aid to a State in difficulty. The Stability and Growth Pact must also be abandoned. Furthermore, the present treaties must be replaced by new ones in the framework of a real democratic constitutive process to come up with a people's solidarity pact for jobs and the environment.

Monetary policy must be completely revised as must the status and practices of the Central European Bank. The inability of the political authorities to oblige the ECB to mint money is a severe handicap. By placing the ECB above the governments and thus the people, the European Union made the disastrous choice of placing human interests below financial interests instead of the contrary.

With many social movements denouncing its statutes as being too rigid and utterly inappropriate, the ECB was forced to change its policy in the midst of the crisis and to modify the role that it had been given. Unfortunately, it agreed to do so for the wrong reasons. It did not mean to take the interests of the people into account, but to preserve those of the creditors. This attitude clearly illustrates that the cards need to be reshuffled and another hand dealt. The ECB must be able to finance States directly when their concern is to reach social and environmental targets that fully meet the fundamental needs of their populations.

Today, extremely diverse economic activities, from investing in the

construction of a hospital to a project of pure speculation, are financed in a similar way. The political authorities must at least consider imposing very different costs for each kind of borrowing: low rates should be reserved for investments that are socially just and economically sustainable, while applying very high rates, even prohibitive when the situation demands, for speculative operations which could also be purely and simply prohibited in certain domains (see above).

With a Europe based on solidarity and cooperation it should be possible to get away from the competitive ethos which tends to cause a lowering of standards. The neo-liberal mindset has led to a crisis and has proven to be a failure. It has dragged down social indicators resulting in less social protection, fewer jobs, and fewer public services. The few who have profited from the crisis have done so by trampling on the rights of the others, the majority.

The culprits have won; the victims are forced to pay! This logic, which underlies all the founding texts of the European Union, with the Stability and Growth Pact leading the field, has to be demolished. It has lost all credibility. Another Europe, based on cooperation between States and solidarity between peoples, must become the primary objective. To this end, budgetary and fiscal policies must be coordinated, but not standardized, for there are huge disparities between the European economies. Only coordinating them can bring about a solution which will enable everyone to go forward. Far-reaching policies on the European scale, including massive public investment for job creation in essential public services, from local services to sustainable energy, from the battle against climate change to basic social sectors, must be enforced.

The CADTM maintains that this new democratized Europe must strive to establish non negotiable principles. It must uphold and improve social and fiscal justice, make choices that will raise the standard of living of its inhabitants, engage in arms reduction and a radical decrease in military spending (including withdrawing

European troops from Afghanistan and leaving NATO), choose sustainable energies so as to avoid nuclear power, and refuse genetically modified organisms (GMO). Furthermore,

Europe must resolutely put an end to its "besieged fortress" policy regarding candidates for immigration, so that it can become a partner trusted for its fairness and true

solidarity towards the peoples of the South.

Translated by Charles La Via, Christine Pagnouille and Vicki Briault

# A retrospective look and solidarity news

17 April 2011, by **Pierre Rousset**

Since the 1980s, the Japanese social movement (taken here as a set of activist movements) has been fragmented, sectoralised, often rooted in local realities, but without any ability for national action. Will the current crisis allow a new convergence of multifaceted resistance and the rebirth of a combative struggle offering alternatives across the archipelago as was the case for the last time in the years 1960-1970? It is a vital question.

While Japan emerged as the first non-Western imperialist power and was for a long time the second biggest economy in the world (today the third biggest, behind the United States and China), following its defeat in the Second World War, it was integrated in a subordinate position into the geostrategic schemas of the United States in East Asia.

From 1945, the labour movement was propelled by the Sanbetsu, linked to the Japanese Communist Party (CCP), but social radicalization was blocked as early as 1947 with an aborted general strike. With the beginning of the Cold War, anti-Communist repression and the Korean conflict, it was after 1950 the socialist Sohyo union federation that came to dominate the left of the trade union movement. A decade later, a new wave of radicalization took shape, this time around the military escalation of the United States in Indochina. But it was again defeated in the second half of the 1970s.

## The legacy of the 1960s

Radicalism and defeat profoundly marked the social movements emerging from this period.

### Trade unions

The Sohyo federation was especially strong in the public sector while the very right wing unions linked to the Domei were generally the only ones only able to operate in the large private companies. At the turn of the 1990s, the Sohyo and the Domei gave way to a single federation, Rengo (Japanese Trade Union Confederation, JTUC). This merge was carried out for the benefit of the right. The unions related to the JCP, Zenroren (National Confederation of trade unions NCTU), the socialist left and the far left formed their own federations, which were very much smaller, like Zenrokyo (National Trade Unions Council, NTUC, with some 130,000 members) or the National Inter-professional Union of Workers (NUGW).

### Politics

During the Sino-Soviet conflict, the JCP declared itself pro-Peking and then "neutral", which delayed the formation of Maoist organizations. Thus in the early 1960s, the new left was mostly of Trotskyite or Luxemburgist origin. Very combative, the Japanese radical left was regarded as one of the glories of the anti-imperialist wave of youth around the world. Unfortunately, while weakened by the decline of struggles and subjected to constant police

harassment, it saw some of its main organizations engage in fratricidal wars (uchigeba). Japanese social democracy has never offered a consistent alternative to the reign of the right. As for the CCP, it mainly has a local implantation. The political left has had only a marginal influence in the Japan of recent decades.

### Peasants

Japanese agriculture consists largely of small farms and the right has always sought an electoral clientele here. Nevertheless, one of the main struggles of the period was conducted with farmers, from 1966 to 1978, against the construction of the international airport at Narita, north of Tokyo. Resistance to the dispossession of the peasantry, rejection of the authoritarian development model, denunciation of the role played by the Japan in the air war in Indochina, all combined in the spectacular and repeated confrontations of the radical movements with the forces of repression at Sanrizuka.

### Women

To a large extent, formal equality of rights was recognized for women in the Constitution of 1947, inspired by the US occupier. Nevertheless, the "second wave" of feminism was asserted enough early in Japan, during the student radicalization, focusing particularly on fighting for the reality of these rights in the world of work (in connection with the far left) or in support of women in the home, giving rise to varied traditions: socialist feminist eco-feminist and so on, but not to a broad autonomous and



unitary movement of women.

### **Anti-war**

Rejecting the previous militarism, pacifism found after the Second World War a real cultural background in Japan. It gave birth in the 1960-70s to a powerful radical, anti-imperialist, movement against the Japanese-US security pact (AMPO). With the decline of national mobilization, resistance continued around the large American bases, particularly in the south of the archipelago, in Okinawa (90,000 demonstrators on April 25, 2010).

### **Environmental**

The importance of the ecological question was notably asserted during the 1970s through public health in the context of poisoning caused by wildcat capitalist development. The best known example is that of "Minamata disease", from the name of the coastal region fatally polluted by a chemical plant (Chisso) discharging mercury into the sea, against which a long popular struggle was conducted.

## **In a context of globalization**

Japan is probably one of the countries where the cut-off between the activist generation of the 1960-70s (the "years of fire") and today is the deepest. The continuity of the resistance primarily occurred locally and on many issues: American bases, nuclear plants, social solidarity networks, inter-union networks in industrial areas, environmental protection, lifestyles and so on.

### **Neo-liberalism**

The labour movement proved unable to cope with the neoliberal offensive of the 1990s. Today, the risk is great that the big employers will seize the opportunity of the crisis opened by the tsunami of March 11 and the Fukushima disaster to challenge social rights even more. However, during the period of decline, the radical unions have accumulated a varied experience of organization on a local level whether with citizen's movements or in the leadership of areas abandoned

by the dominant unionism (immigrants, small firms).

Similarly, the peasantry is threatened with virtual disappearance by the opening of borders to free trade in agricultural products. This threat has facilitated closer relations between the Japanese movement Noumiren and Via Campesina at the international level.

### **International**

Other elements of the movement for global justice like People's Plan Japonesia or Attac have emerged, without taking on the same scale as in other countries. Japan has been the activist host of counter-summits, as at the Hokkaido G8 in July 2008. Japanese organizations participate in global forums as well as Asian networks, but this participation is limited by the language barrier (although young people speak Western languages more than their parents).

Japanese movements play no less a pivotal role in solidarity in Northeast Asia. In defence of Taiwanese or Korean or Taiwanese workers for example (the former colonies). Or in the development of a conception of international security from the point of view of peoples and non-rulers, as at the G8 in Okinawa in 2000.

### **In a context of humanitarian disasters**

Japan is at the meeting point of four tectonic plates and lives in expectation of the great earthquake which will destroy Tokyo. The force 9 earthquake of March 11, 2011, was followed by an exceptional tsunami and disaster in Fukushima. For the time being, the only good news is that Japanese earthquake buildings bore the shock well. The tsunami devastated the coasts and the Japanese population is facing a nuclear disaster comparable to that of Chernobyl in Ukraine (1986).

### **Nuclear power**

Despite the memory of Hiroshima-Nagasaki - the biggest of war crimes, committed by the United States - Japan is like France one of the countries where the (civil) "nuclear consensus" of the elites weighs like

lead on society, stifling any challenge. Chernobyl caused a resurgence of the anti-nuclear movement, which has resumed today. This occurs above all locally, including through the resistance of people to the reactivation of closed down reactors, but through citizen protests also, as on April 10 of this year (17,500 demonstrators in Tokyo).

### **Social**

The social consequences of the tsunami (a natural disaster) and Fukushima (a man-made disaster) are devastating: the evacuees are counted in the hundreds of thousands and experience precarity; a number of employees may find themselves without jobs, their businesses have been destroyed or are in the area threatened by radioactivity; farmers and fishers in contaminated localities can no longer produce anything and we do not know to what extent the nuclear crisis will get worse and the radioactivity will spread.

Social movements have learned to act in disaster situations, like the unions of the NTUC during the Kobe earthquake in 1995. But it is the first time since the war that they have had to deal with a situation of crisis of such magnitude. They need our help.

## **Internationalism**

We have known many humanitarian disasters in the world in recent years. After New Orleans in the United States (2005), the Japanese experience today shows that solidarity remains necessary, even when the countries affected are economic powers. Inequalities are magnified in times of crisis and if social movements do not have the means to defend them, it will be the poor who will pay the bill for a disaster for which they are not responsible

We must be able to promote our own concept of humanitarian aid, independent of that of the governments, assistance that responds to the emergency both by sending relief directly to the poor and by raising broader and more sustainable social issues, strengthening organisations which are on the

ground, defending the rights of the

poorest. Militant solidarity, from social movements to social movements, is

indeed for us an internationalist duty

# How bad is the Fukushima fallout?

16 April 2011, by **Yomiuri Shimbun**

The government and plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. have repeatedly said there will be no major health impact “for the time being” and that there will be no “immediate” effects.

But what consequences will the radiation fallout actually have?

The following will examine the impact of radioactive substances on people’s daily lives, and look at how much radioactive fallout has occurred, possible health effects and how to prevent exposure.

How much radioactive material has so far been released into the atmosphere due to the Fukushima accident? Let’s compare the radioactive contamination caused by the current crisis to past nuclear accidents.

Fallout of cesium-137 has been monitored for every 24-hour period since March 18 at observation points in each prefecture, except quake-hit Fukushima and Miyagi. Cesium-137 is an international indicator for radioactive contamination.

Monitoring data has shown the total fallout of cesium-137 in Hitachinaka, Ibaraki Prefecture, for 18 days through Tuesday morning was 26,399 becquerels per square meter. In Shinjuku Ward, Tokyo, the figure was 6,615 becquerels per square meter.

Rain on March 21-22—the first since the nuclear crisis began—brought down a large amount of cesium-137, spreading the contamination to Tokyo and 13 prefectures in and around the Kanto region.

Although many people believe their lives have been free of radioactive contamination, history shows that

radioactive materials were widely dispersed during the 20th century, sometimes dubbed the Atomic Age.

Domestic studies on radioactive fallout date back to 1957, three years after the exposure to radiation of the crew of the tuna boat Fukuryu Maru No. 5 after an atmospheric nuclear test by the United States. One crew member died six months after the incident.

This test took place amid the Cold War when the United States and the Soviet Union conducted a large number of nuclear tests. In 1962 alone, at least 178 nuclear tests took place, dispersing plutonium and other radioactive materials into the atmosphere. In Osaka, 688 becquerels per square meter of cesium-137 was measured in May 1963.

The worst case of radioactive contamination was the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine, then a Soviet republic, in April 1986. About 7 tons of radioactive materials—about 400 times what was released by the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima—were released across the Northern Hemisphere. In Kanazawa, cesium fallout was 318 becquerels per square meter in May that year.

Areas within 30 kilometers of the Chernobyl plant were incredibly contaminated—as much as 1.48 million becquerels per square meter in some areas. Residents in these areas were evacuated. In parts of Germany and other nations, more than 70,000 becquerels per square meter were detected. In Belarus and Moldova, also Soviet republics at the time, and other nations such as Austria and Finland, the average amount of fallout exceeded 10,000 becquerels per square meter.

The level of radioactive fallout in Hitachinaka and some other areas in the wake of the Fukushima crisis is believed to be higher than that reported in the 1979 Three Mile Island accident in the United States, and about the same as that reported in Europe after the Chernobyl incident.

Fallout levels in the Kanto region have been decreasing this month. Daily readings have been about the same as the early 1960s when so many nuclear tests were conducted. Some experts have said these levels pose no threat to people’s health. However, highly radioactive water leaked from the Fukushima plant into the ocean could cause severe damage to marine life.

## Upper limit changes in a crisis

There are two reference levels for the effects of radiation exposure on health—one for normal times and another for emergencies. The everyday yardstick for radiation exposure for ordinary people is set on the safe side.

According to the International Commission on Radiological Protection (ICRP), the annual intake limit for artificial radioactive substances—excluding natural radiation such as from cosmic rays and from medical devices such as X-rays—is 1 millisievert (mSv) for ordinary people.

A becquerel is a unit for measuring a substance’s radioactivity, and is equal to the number of nuclear decays per second. A sievert is a unit to quantify the biological effects of radiation. Becquerels can be converted into sieverts through a formula that factors

in elements including the type of nucleus and type of radiation exposure.

Research on atomic-bomb survivors suggests that the incidence of cancer increases if the radiation dose exceeds 100 mSv. The annual limit of 1 mSv was set on the grounds that if a person is exposed to this level every year until age 80, the total radiation dose will be less than 80 mSv.

But during emergencies, such as an accident at a nuclear power plant, this level is often increased. The Nuclear Safety Commission of Japan has said people should stay indoors if the annual radiation dose exceeds 10 mSv.

The ICRP in 2007 issued an advisory

saying the annual radiation limit for ordinary people can be raised to 20 mSv to 100 mSv during an emergency. The ICRP's suggestion of this temporary level is based on lessons learned from the Chernobyl disaster and other incidents.

"Even if people are exposed to 20 mSv of radiation in a year, they wouldn't experience any symptoms such as nausea or burns. Raising the upper limit could increase the risk of cancer, but if there are other merits, such as avoiding the need to evacuate, it might be a feasible option," according to Yasuhito Sasaki, an executive director at the Japan Radioisotope Association.

Whether to change the annual limit on radiation intake from the normal level

to an emergency level is decided by the NSC after considering the scale of the radioactive contamination and doses in different areas and reporting on this to the government.

Radiation intake limits for workers at nuclear facilities are set at 100 mSv over five years, but this limit was raised to 250 mSv following the accidents at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

The ICRP has also issued an advisory that the emergency exposure limit for rescue and other personnel should be between 500 mSv and 1,000 mSv over five years.

Yomiuri Shimbun

The Yomiuri Shimbun, Apr. 11, 2011:

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/nationa...>

# Declaration of the Workers' Coalition of the January 25 Revolution

15 April 2011, by **Workers coalition of 25th January**

## Egypt

### Declaration of the Workers' Coalition of the January 25 Revolution

Leaders, emblematic figures and other personalities related to the Egyptian workers' movement have come together to examine the current situation. They have affirmed their adhesion to the January 25 Revolution whose slogan is: "Change, Freedom, Social Justice!"

They have also underlined the basic right of the workers to take back the rights which were confiscated from them (the right to strike, the right to demonstrate peacefully) as well as the legitimacy of their fight against corruption, whether it is conducted in relation to the management of their enterprise or concerning the official trade-union organizations.

By their mobilizations, the workers have indeed largely contributed in

recent years to preparing the ground for the revolution. Their struggles were decisive for the defeat of their enemies and the opposition to the regime. Thanks to these mobilizations, the revolution will not cease until victory is won, in other words until social and economic demands are concretized. This is why we affirm our determination to win the following demands:

1. Form the civilian Presidential Council immediately, in order to direct the transition.
2. Bring down the government of Ahmed Chafik (although it is trying to do a quick repair job) and form another government made up of national bodies that are qualified and completely independent of the current regime, until the holding of new elections.
3. Lift the state of emergency immediately.

4. Release all political prisoners immediately.

5. Dismantle the state intelligence and security apparatus, condemn anyone who has taken part in or been responsible for repression and torture against citizens.

6. Bring to justice those figures who symbolize corruption and recover the riches that have been confiscated, in order to restore social justice and to implement the demands of the workers.

7. Implement all judicial decisions arising from the law that have been ignored up to now, as well as the provisions relating to the minimum wage; dissolve the official trade-union organizations and reinstate all workers who have been dismissed.

8. Implement international agreements relating to economic and social rights so as to be able to enjoy trade-union freedoms and fair wages,

to have the right to work in order to provide for one's own needs, the right to social security and health insurance, the right to education and housing, the right to strike and to collective resistance.

Taking all this into consideration, we call on workers to continue to defend their rights courageously. We also affirm that history will not forgive the worker who will not be indignant to the end against the injustice that he or she and their fellow-workers are suffering in this revolutionary period. They must join, as quickly as possible, trade-union, social, cultural and political organizations, until the victory of the revolution.

For a revolution... a revolution until victory!

Change, Freedom, Social Justice!

signed by (in alphabetical order): Bissan Kassab (Revolutionary Socialists), Hamdi Hussein (Workers' Federation of the Egyptian Communist party), Khalid Al-Azhari (Muslim Brotherhood), Khaled Ali (Centre for Social and Economic Rights), Rashad Shaban (Amiriya textile workers), Saud Omar (National Democratic Forum), Seham Shwadeh (Solidarity Group), Shokri Azare (Committee for the Defence of Insurance Funds), Saber Abou Al-Fotouh (Centre of Manual Workers of Egypt), Saber

Barakat (Coordinating Committee for Trade-union Rights and Freedoms), Salah Numan (chemical industry workers), Talal Shokr (Federation of Pensioners), Garib Saqr ("Egypt and Iran" factory), Fatma Ramadan (Movement for Socialist Renewal), Maher Suleiman (Muslim Brotherhood), Mohammed Al-Attar (Mahalla textile workers), Mohamed Abdel-Salam (Coordinating Committee for Trade-union Rights and Freedoms), Naji Rashad (mill workers), Hisham Fouad (Revolutionary Socialists), Haitham Gabr (Movement for Socialist Renewal), Yosri Bayoumi (Centre of Manual Workers of Egypt).

Cairo, February 25, 2011

# Programme of social rights affirmed by the Egyptian people

## 15 April 2011

### Programme of social rights affirmed by the Egyptian people

1. Each citizen able to work is entitled to a job.
2. Any private citizen deprived of employment is entitled to unemployment benefit allowing him or her to live with dignity until he or she finds employment.
3. The monthly minimum wage and pensions must not be lower than 1200 Egyptian pounds (EP), in accordance with the judgement of the Administrative Court, based on national studies. Wages and pensions are indexed on prices. Immediate payment of unpaid annual increases in pensions.
4. In their turn, maximum wages must not exceed 24.000 EP per month, (in other words, 20 times the minimum wage).
5. The total variable bonuses must not exceed 20 per cent of the fixed wages guaranteed by law.
6. Placing under the control of the

Court of Auditors of the payment of individualized wage bonuses into "special accounts", according to the same criteria quoted above.

7. The right to housing: the government must guarantee each citizen housing, with a rent proportional to wages, according to social criteria. Housing must be financed by the state and by co-operatives and not by profit-making companies.

8. The right to public services at cost price (drinking water, sewage, electricity), without the intervention of profit-making companies, private or public.

9. The right for all citizens to quality and effective care, guaranteed by the following measures: immediate doubling of the health budget (from less than 5 per cent to 10 per cent of public expenditure); immediate extension to all citizens of universal health insurance; a halt to privatizations and regrouping of all public health organizations under the

same public agency; sharing of financing of health insurance between the contributions of citizens (1/4) and the contributions of employers (3/4). In the event of need, contributions can be increased by a democratic procedure. On the other hand, the principle of any tax, proportional or fixed, that limits the access of citizens to care is excluded. The state pays the contributions of those Egyptians whose incomes are lower than the extreme poverty line. These policy-holders are thus exonerated from contributions while enjoying the same rights to universal care for all illnesses.

10. The right of every Egyptian to quality and effective education, guaranteed by the following measures: immediate doubling of the education budget (from less than 10 per cent to 20 per cent of public expenditure); an increase in school-building; absolutely free education at all levels, including stopping the conversion of all public schools and colleges from free education to paying of fees. Recognition in the school programmes



of resistance and patriotism, of the heroic acts of the national struggle, rejection of the culture of so-called "peace" with the enemies of the nation.

All political, trade-union and associative forces are called on to adopt these legitimate demands of the Egyptian people, to defend them and work for their implementation.

\* This programme was signed by the Pensioners' Union, the Teachers' Union, the Egyptian Centre for Social and Economic Rights and the Hicham Mubarak Centre for Human Rights.

Cairo, February 22, 2011

## **Foundation of a new independent trade union**

### **15 April 2011, by Egyptian Federation for Independent unions**

A society that allows its people to breathe freely... to freely speak, interact and express itself... a society that allows all people categories and classes to defend their interests and negotiate freely... a society that does not oppress its people, inhibits its ambitions and natural tendencies to develop workers capacities and improve their life conditions.

Workers and people struggled for decades and participated, especially since 4 years, in unprecedented recurrent protest actions to defend their legal rights. They succeeded in their endeavor despite the lack of independent union organization, stolen piece by piece for decades. They succeeded in attracting larges social sectors, and mobilizing greater sympathy among the Egyptian society, workers and union movements.

Workers defended their right to work to face unemployment specter - that devours youth - and demanded to set a new fair minimum wage that guarantees decent living for all workers. They fought courageously to defend their democratic right to organize and create independent union organizations.

Labor struggles paved the way to today's people revolution. That is why Egypt workers and employees totally refuse that the "governmental" general federation represents them and speaks in their name, because it often denied their rights and claims and even issued the famous statement on January 27 claiming to oppose every single protest action during this period.

Therefore, independent unions and committees [RETA, Retired Workers Union, Health professionals Union, Teachers Independent Union] along with workers independent groups in industries declare the creation of Egyptian Federation for Independent Unions and its constitutional body on Sunday the 30th of January 2011 and emphasizes the following:

- 1 The right to work of Egyptian citizens - and binding the government to "unemployment compensation".
2. Define a minimum wage no less than 1200 LE, with a yearly raise proportionate to inflation; guarantee workers rights to bonuses and benefits according to work value, especially

work compensation for those facing work hazards. Moreover, maximum wage should never exceed minimum wage by more than ten times.

3.The right for all Egyptian citizens to fair social security including the right to health care, housing, education "ensuring free education and syllabus development to cope with science and technology evolution", the right for all retired to decent pensions and benefits.

4.Workers and employees right to organize, to create their own bylaws, to remove all legal restrictions regarding this right.

5.Free all detainees imprisoned after January 25th.

The Egypt Federation for Independent unions Constitutional Body invites all Egypt workers to create civil committees in order to defend their workplace, workers and citizens during these critical times and to organize protest actions and strikes in the workplaces, except for vital sectors workplaces, to realize Egypt people claims.

30/01/2011

## **Independent trade unionism asserts itself**

## 15 April 2011, by Chedid Khairy

Having existed for a long time, the current that contests official trade unionism and its structure, which was founded in 1957 as one of the pillars of the military regime, has never completely ceased to exist. It was however rather weak and was often limited to small networks of opposition activists. With the revolution and the major upheavals which the country is going through, the will to build an independent trade unionism (in Arabic *mostaqâll*) has reasserted itself.

Shortly before the fall of Mubarak, the country began to experience an impressive wave of strikes and protests by workers. In the beginning, the reasons for these mobilizations were often economic, around questions of wages, bonuses, work contracts for those in precarious employment... But very quickly, the question of trade-union freedom and the denunciation of official trade unionism arose.

Powerful strikes affect very diverse sectors: the iron and steel industry, textiles, the Suez Canal zone, transport, hospitals, education, not forgetting journalists, bank workers and Imams. Police demonstrated for higher wages, going so far as to set fire to a building in the quarter of the Ministry for the Interior, a real fortified zone in the centre of the capital, known as Lazoughli from the name of the district where it is located. In the official press, denunciations of corruption are numerous. There are even demands for the resignation of newspaper directors (*Al Ahrâm*, *Rose Al Youssef*, *Al Gomhoureya*...). Women take part in strikes, in particular in the textile and health sectors. Sometimes there are more than 3,000 strikes at the same time! There are two burning questions: the insufficient level of wages (a minimum wage of around 70 euros...) and big price rises. Unemployment is also high: it is estimated that there are seven million unemployed, that is to say 10 per cent of the labour force. Four million citizens do not have any social rights.

At Al-Mahalla Al-Kobra, the strike was about wage increases, but the workers also demanded the dismissal of the manager of the company. They obtained what they were demanding, and one of the workers' leaders was appointed as manager. They also obtained payment for the days on strike. They agreed to increase productivity to make up for the hours lost...

The project of setting up an Independent Egyptian Federation of Trade Unions was launched during a meeting on Al-Tahrîr Square on January 30, 2011 in the context of the powerful demonstrations that were taking place and the start of increasingly sharp criticism of the official trade unions and their leaders. That evening Kamal Abu Eita, leader of the independent trade union of land tax collectors, announced the new federation and evoked the fall of state-controlled trade unionism. Slogans denounced the leader of the official Federation (EFTU) Hussein Megawer.

On March 2, the Independent Egyptian Trade Union Federation held its founding conference at the headquarters of the journalists' union. Entitled "what the workers want from the revolution", the meeting brought together several hundred trade unionists from different towns and sectors of activity. The pillars of the project were the autonomous unions that had recently emerged: the unions of land tax collectors, of health technicians, the pensioners' union and the independent teachers' union. Among those participating were representatives of telecommunications workers, textile workers, the iron and steel industry, the Workers' University of Cairo, as well as those from the "new" cities of Al-Sadate and the 10th of Ramadan and from the provinces, like the trade unionists of Al-Mahalla.

The military authorities have tried, very often, to put an end to these struggles. They announce the prohibition of strikes and meetings of workers... In spite of that, this wave is far from being finished. The army is

launching a confrontation with this powerful social movement. It resorts to the media, seeking to convince public opinion that the continuation of strikes and protests represents a danger to the "democratic transition". In the same way, it affirms that it is urgent to get the economy going again, etc. They are trying to discredit the demands of the workers, which are presented as sectoral, therefore in opposition to national requirements. The workers reject such an argumentation and affirm that their demands form an integral part of the demands of the revolution. There is a lot of anger about the nomination of Isma' el Fahmy, former treasurer of the ETUF, as Minister for the Labour Force and that of Samir Sayyad to the post of Minister of Industry and Trade. Sayyad, a former diplomat, is also the managing director of one of the largest paint companies affected by strikes.

The conference proposed two principal demands: the dissolution of the official confederation with the seizure of its buildings, files and funds, and the legal recognition of the new federation. The government was asked to put a stop to recruitment to the official trade-union structures. Furthermore, a precise timetable for implementing these demands was demanded, as well as the establishment of real collective bargaining. An appeal was addressed to trade unions all over the world, asking them to express their solidarity and to support the demand for the dissolution of the official trade unions and their exclusion from international federations.

The interventions of leading figures of the autonomous trade-union current should be noted [28]. They evoked the grievances addressed to the state and their demands. So we heard Ahmed El-Sayyed, president of the Federation of Health Technicians, Salah Abdel Salam, president of the trade union of land tax collectors, El-Badry Farghali, president of the Union of Retired Workers and Mohamed Balah, a

member of the independent teachers' union. Each in their own way, they insisted on the strength of the workers' movement, denounced the betrayals of the ETUF and affirmed the need from now on to rebuild a social system freed from corruption. The revolutionary process is far from being finished and the building of an independent trade unionism is part of it. The example of the battle conducted since 2007 to legalize the union of land tax collectors of was given prominence. Unionization and independent action were the two central ideas.

Kamal Abbas, a former worker in the iron and steel industry and one of those responsible for the Centre for Trade Union and Worker Services [29] denounced the leadership of the ETUF and Hussein Megawer. After having evoked the declaration of the ETUF on January 27 supporting the regime and denouncing the demonstrations, he asked for the seizure of the documents and files of the official Federation and

a judicial enquiry against the corrupt leaders. According to him, the nomination of Ismail Fahmy, the former treasurer of the official Federation, as Minister of the Labour Force, was aimed at protecting the ETUF.

The documents of the new federation combine the democratic spirit of the revolution with economic and social demands. It has received many messages of support and solidarity from trade-union organizations and from international bodies like the International Labour Office (ILO) and the International Trade-Union Confederation. In a sign of the times, the official Federation was officially forced to recognize that it accepted the right for people to form their own trade unions!

It is hoped to bring together the series of autonomous structures which have started to appear in various forms: leagues, unions, trade unions and federations, outside the ETUF. So we find militant groupings active in a

series of companies such as the textile company of Al-Mahalla, the Public Transport Authority which involves bus drivers, train drivers, mechanics, engineers and employees in Greater Cairo, the steelworks at Helwan, the industrial workers of Naha' Hamadi in Upper Egypt. In the same way, the organizers hope to open out to the broad layers of Egyptian workers who have been engaged organizing and supporting the powerful mobilizations that have shaken the country. T

The strength of the mobilizations is so great that for the moment the regime is playing for time. The possibility of an independent and combative trade unionism sinking roots will depend of course on the level of engagement and the ability to influence the situation. The aspirations for democracy and social justice are from now on closely overlapping.

*Chedid Khairy is a Marxist activist involved in solidarity with the Arab region.*

## An internationalist transitional program towards an anti-capitalist Europe

14 April 2011, by **Özlem Onaran**

### Emerging consensus within the anti-capitalist left

A consensus among the anti-capitalist forces for a strategy against the crisis is emerging across Europe around four pillars: i) resistance against austerity policies and all cuts, ii) a radically progressive/redistributive tax system and capital controls iii) nationalization/socialization and democratic control of banks, iv) debt audit under democratic control followed by default. These demands find their echo also among a broader

left opposition, albeit in a descending order according to support. I find it crucial to start any tactical debate within the anti-capitalist left by emphasizing these four pillars as an extremely positive and important starting point to build a coordinated campaign across Europe.

### How about the Euro?

The controversial issue of the Euro in the peripheral countries of Europe must be contextualized in the background of the above common points. There are two positions within the anti-capitalist left: a position,

which promotes the exit from the Eurozone as suggested by e.g. Lapavitsas et al. (2010) or de Santos (2011), and a position, as suggested by e.g. Husson (2011), Samary (2011) or myself (Onaran, 2010a and 2010b), which primarily aims at building an alliance for alternative policies across Europe that could build a bridge to an anti-capitalist transition rather than seeing the currency as the core of the debate. The starting point of this second position is to push for an alternative Europe and changes in the economic policy framework within which the Euro operates. In a recent article, Costas Lapavitsas (2011) criticises the latter approach, and calls the supporters "reluctant Europeanists", i.e. those who are

aware of “class interests”, but are “terrified of the dangers of nationalism and isolationism”. Costas’ expression of “Europeanism, the official ideology that has for long haunted (the Left’s) collective mind” seriously misrepresents the internationalist and anti-capitalist character of this latter approach, which has little to do with an abstract defence of the capitalist EU with its current structures, but is committed to building a bridge from the urgent current demands of the broad opposition movements to an internationalist, ecosocialist Europe of people. Costas’ assertion that “much of the continental Left is still in the grip of Europeanism, and is concerned to develop strategies that have a European rather than a socialist character” seems to place most of the emphasis on the Party of the European Left despite his attempt to distinguish between “ardent Europeanists” and the others in his terms and misses the relevance of the European Anti-capitalist Left –a European front, which brings together around 40 organizations in Europe, and aims at a programme “that can lift the economy out of crisis on the basis of giving priority to people’s needs rather than profits and imposing democratic control over the market,” and stands “for an anti capitalist answer”. [30]

Coming back to the issue of the Euro, tactically, I see the issue of debt audit/default campaign to be a much more important departure point for mobilization than the debate around the Euro. The most important obstacle today to initiate any progressive economic policy in Europe and individual nation states is the speculation on public debt and the governments’ commitment to satisfy the financiers. Public finance has to be unchained via debt default in both the periphery and the core following a process of debt audit.

A debtor-led default is fundamentally different from the current creditor-led debt restructuring plans of the European elite, which are attached with further austerity policies. Debt default is also not just a question of solvency as in the case of Greece or Ireland; but it is also a question related to the origins of the public debt: thus the question is not only

“can we pay the debt?”, but “should we pay the debt?” In Britain the newly generated debt because of the crisis that amounts to 33.4% of GDP raises the question why taxes of working people should be used to pay this debt. The recognition of the need for default is also important given the ecological limits to growth, which poses a constraint to the traditional Keynesian policies of growing our way out of debt. In Greece already activists, academics, and parliamentarians from across the world have supported a call to audit public debts, of which Costas has been one of the important initiators. [31] A similar campaign is about to take off in Ireland, and both initiatives have obvious importance for Portugal and Spain and hopefully for the core countries like Britain. A pro-labour solution of the crisis in the periphery as well as the core requires debt default, and a joint, coordinated struggle at the European level can create a stronger offense to the multinational ruling elite of Europe.

The attack is international: multinational bank and business lobbies are determining the policies of the national governments as well as EU institutions by using boycotting of government bonds as a threat; thus the opposition also needs to be internationally organized. A European network of movements -broad fronts as well as anti-capitalist organizations- could be turned into a leverage to bring together peoples’ opposition to austerity in different countries. An internationalist solution might generate a more powerful front in the core and the periphery compared to national alternatives.

The relevance of a Europe-wide mobilization in the core and the periphery derives from the common interests of the working people. I disagree with Costas that “a radical left alternative would differ across the Eurozone”. The austerity packages throughout the EU are pushing the countries into a model of chronically low internal demand based on low wages. In the past in Germany low domestic demand was substituted by high demand for exports. But it is not possible to turn the whole Eurozone into a German model based on wage suppression and austerity, since

without the deficits of the periphery German export market will also stagnate.

Particularly for the periphery of Europe contraction in domestic demand means prolonged recession, which may turn the problem of debt to insolvency for private as well as the public sector. The existing wage suppression policies hurt all working people alike. The popular discontent in Germany about Greece misses the fact that the German workers’ loss of wages, unemployment benefits, and pension rights created part of the problem. Uncovering this fact along with the idea of unequal distribution as the main cause of the crisis is an important step towards building a progressive alliance and a bridge to an alternative ecosocialist Europe. A pro-labour shift in the balance of power relations in Germany could certainly increase the area of manoeuvre in the periphery as well –not just politically but also economically by increasing aggregate demand as well as relieving part of the pressure on wage suppression policies in the periphery. Similarly the European austerity policies to deal with debt is a package to bail out the European banks, mostly based in the core countries; however these policies bring the countries of the periphery to the edge of insolvent via recession; thus austerity in Greece or Ireland will have consequences for the tax-payers in Germany, France, or Britain, who will again be pressurized to bail out their banks’ losses.

A major debtor-led default will obviously have similar consequences for banks, and precisely therefore demands for socialization of banks under workers’ control in both the periphery and the core form a natural compliment to debt default to end the vicious circle of austerity, deepening crises, and bail-outs. These struggles need to be coordinated as part of a broader campaign for progressive taxation of income and wealth to make the responsible pay for the costs of crisis and to reverse the origin of the crisis, i.e. pro-capital redistribution. Again these demands face broader acceptance by the masses when they are formulated as part of a European campaign for capital controls and tax coordination, since a united campaign is a stronger weapon against the



threats of capital flight by a multi-national and mobile European finance capital. The demands for turning the European Central Bank (ECB) into a real Central Bank accountable to supply the funds for productive green investments across Europe and in particular in the periphery again makes sense when it accompanies debt default and a socialized banking system.

The solution to the problems in the periphery of Europe would also be tremendously facilitated by fiscal transfers within Europe as opposed to isolated national solutions in small countries, which can easily lead to a persistence of underdevelopment. This position is also consistent with the interests of the working people in the core countries: a low wage periphery as an alternative location for MNEs is a treat to the wages and jobs in the core as well.

Furthermore, I do not share the optimism about the international competitiveness effects of devaluation, which would follow an exit from the Eurozone in the periphery. Devaluation means an increase in the costs of imported inputs, and the pass-through effect of import costs to domestic prices in an import dependent country soon erodes the international competitiveness effects. Empirical evidence shows that the initial positive effects of devaluation on exports are offset within a couple of years via inflation in import dependent countries; at the end of the day competitiveness is about real forces of productivity rather than monetary variables like the exchange rate. Furthermore devaluation leads to devastating real income losses for workers.

Last but not least, in the current situation, anti-European and anti-Euro positions are more likely to mobilize nationalist, right-wing currents. Nationalism is certainly a problem among the working class in the core; the far right is also quickly mobilizing the discontent in the periphery. I share the concerns of Michel (Husson, 2011) and the Scientific Committee of ATTAC-Germany (2011) on both economic and political grounds, which Costas seems to disagree. As the Scientific Committee of ATTAC-

Germany (2011) writes, “the Euro is still no “optimal currency”, but given its existence, we need to think of alternative policies to bring together broad opposition movements. As Cédric Durand (2011) writes “in the absence of political perspectives in each country and at the European level, these movements might collapse and leave room for nationalist forces of the most violent and reactionary kind which are reinforcing themselves already everywhere in Europe. The dislocation of neoliberal Europe could then become a nightmare.” This is not about “fear of disrupting the monetary union,” as Costas sees it, but a sober recognition of the consequences of a failure to build an internationalist strategy.

History will show us how much of the mobilization for default in the periphery will find echoes in the core –we may see multi-speed reactions. An anti-capitalist radicalisation in the periphery of Europe is in its early growth phase and simultaneously there are core countries, e.g. France, with mass anti-capitalist parties, which are already discussing the issue of default. It is yet to be seen whether there will be a synchronisation of mobilization or rather significant differences in the speeds of mobilization. Thus we could well start with an internationalist strategy as opposed to putting more hope in nation state level alternatives. Clearly, both are at their initial phases.

Obviously without a major Europe-wide mobilization in both the periphery and the core for debt default as well as institutional and political change, if one or more countries in the periphery succeeds in pushing for debt default and if the existing institutions of the European Union cannot be captured and forms a barrier to progressive economic policy, an exit from the Euro can follow default. No socialist would ask the people of the periphery to stay in the Eurozone at all costs. However, this is a rather tactical issue, and not the crucial starting point. Thus Euro is not a taboo. Furthermore, we should not underestimate the power of the threat of a coalition of peripheral countries to leave the Eurozone. Given the interests of the European capitalists, these countries certainly

have a bargaining power. At this stage it is crucial to work for mobilizing the working people across Europe for a joint struggle and make use of the areas of manoeuvre that may open up, rather than having now a pre-mature and technical debate around the currency itself.

## **An internationalist transitional programme**

A radical transformation in Europe requires a major change in the institutions and policy framework that builds a bridge from the urgent demands of people for decent living standards and a sustainable environment to an alternative democratic, participatory, ecosocialist, feminist alternative. In the following I briefly outline alternatives for such an anti capitalist agenda for Europe. [32]

Along with debt default, a radical restructuring of public finance has to involve a highly progressive system of taxes, coordinated at the European level, on not only income but also wealth, higher corporate tax rates, inheritance tax, and tax on financial transactions.

Fiscal, monetary, and industrial policy should aim at full employment, ecological sustainability, and equality. The reconciliation of full employment with a low carbon economy based on possibly zero/low growth requires three policies: creating labour-intensive public jobs (e.g. social services such as education, child care, nursing homes, health, community and social services), public ecological investments, and a substantial shortening of working time. This complements our aims of creating gender equality.

This programme requires a socialized banking sector under workers’ control. Financial regulation and capital controls are important but not enough.

On the incomes and labour market policy level, there is need for a fundamental correction of the wages in both the periphery and the core of

Europe to reflect the productivity gains of the past three decades. To facilitate convergence within Europe a minimum wage should be coordinated. Higher productivity growth in poorer countries of Europe will help to create some convergence in wages, but regional convergence should be supported by fiscal transfers and public investments to boost productivity in poorer regions. Furthermore a European unemployment benefit system should be developed to redistribute from low to high unemployment regions. This requires a significant Europe budget financed by Europe level progressive taxes.

Last but not least, the coordination of economy-wide vital decisions requires public ownership and the participation and control by workers in the firms, of consumers, and regional representatives in critical sectors such as finance, housing, energy, infrastructure, pension system, education, health, and major productive sectors. Such a

transformation will build the bridge to a democratic, participatory, feminist ecosocialism.

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## Women's rights are now on the table

14 April 2011, by **Leila Hammarneh**

**What is your perspective on the ongoing events throughout the region? What do you think are the potential implications for women's rights?**

I consider what happened in Tunisia then in Egypt, and the impact these events have had on other Arab countries, as a step forward for women's rights. I think that especially in Egypt the revolution clarified that women and men stand side by side. They stood together in protest for 18 days in Tahrir square in Cairo. They were calling for freedom and social justice. And these are the same demands that women have; gender freedom and social justice. It is very important to note that these were peaceful protests. And that the people called for a civil state and a secular

state. All of this in my opinion means that this is a new dawn for women in the movement.

Especially after several tragic years of backlash, during which women's achievements were overshadowed by the dominating attitudes toward women, particularly under the influence of Islamist fundamentalists. In Jordan the tribal lords were aligning against women's rights. But now things have taken a new turn. Women's rights are being put on the table, and we hope that they will emerge as a priority. I feel that there can be no going back to that time in history, that there will be no more backlashes and those who would like to pull the wheel backwards will not succeed. I hope not.

It is our perception, that during the events in Egypt, men and women, particularly the youth were working together. We saw evidence in interviews that we watched over the satellites and on the cable news that young men were supporting women's rights. We want these attitudes and mentalities to prevail and we would like this to be the future of our countries. However, there remains a danger that old mentalities will persist. But, this we feel is our battle and we shall fight it. We will not allow for calls to restrict women's rights to pass.

On 1 February, following widespread popular protests throughout Jordan, King Abdullah II dismissed Prime Minister Samir Rifai and his cabinet and pledged to begin a programme of

democratic reform. Marouf Bakhit was appointed Prime Minister and a new cabinet is to be formed.

### **Are protests continuing in Jordan? What actions has your organisation taken?**

Women in Jordan feel a sense of solidarity with the revolution in Egypt and Tunisia. They have also participated in demonstrations here in Jordan, in Amman. First to express their solidarity with those who have been struggling in Egypt and in Tunisia, and with those who are now struggling in Libya, in Yemen and in Bahrain. Additionally, women have taken to the streets in Amman in order to call for reforms, and in particular legal and political reforms affecting women's rights. Because in Jordan as most of the Arab countries there have been delays in the implementation of women's rights according to international standards. There have been a lot of conventions, policies and public statements for women's rights, but in fact, their implementation has been delayed because of fear of the influence of fundamentalists. Now there is no excuse for delay.

We have expressed this sentiment throughout the past eight weeks during which we have participated in demonstrations calling for quick

reforms and a national dialogue for improvement of the situation of women. The Arab Women Organisation has organised large meetings with the governors in three provinces: Karak, Irbid and Amman in order to trigger national dialogue to discuss women's issues. Because usually during large protests, when people are calling for general reforms, demands for equality and women's rights are overshadowed, and neglected. We will no longer accept for women's issues to be neglected or overshadowed by the big events and big reforms. With the reforms that the people are asking for in Jordan, we are also calling for reforms pertaining to women's rights.

### **What are your views on the challenges to women's political participation in the post-revolution transitions?**

This is a serious concern for us, because we don't want to go back to the era where women were excluded. In Algeria for example, women were active in the liberation movement, they were at the forefront of the revolution, fighting together with men (1954-1962). When the war was over women were sent back to their homes and were not given their rights. This didn't just happen in Algeria, it

happened everywhere. We have learned our lesson!

Women's issues have been neglected for the last 50 years. Now we are more alert and aware that we must insist that women are included in the process, whether we are discussing the writing of a new constitution in Egypt or the new Cabinet in Tunisia or a new government in Jordan. We want women's issues to be considered. When we met with the leaders in Karat, Irbid and Amman in order to stress that women be included in the national dialogue in Jordan we put forward two main demands: 30 percent quota for women's participation in the decision making process, there can be no compromises on this demand, and that all international conventions be implemented, and incorporated into the national laws. In Jordan these are our specific demands relating to women's rights.

And all over the Arab world now women and women NGOs are networking in order to affect their governments. In Egypt and in Tunisia they have done so through petitions, statements and declarations stressing that women must not be excluded. We must not repeat the harm done in the past to the progress of societies by neglecting women.

# **Women will not allow their rights to be ignored during the transition**

**13 April 2011, by Souhayr Belhassen**

Throughout the month of protests in Tunisia we saw a huge presence of women from all walks of life. It was not only those who had lost children, husbands, or other relatives killed during the uprising. We have seen that the flame of calls for democracy and equality has been passed down from our generation to the next. This is just as reassuring as it is moving. This generation has tremendous energy and creativity. They have shown it in

the streets, as they have through social networks and blogs.

We must also recognize the role that women have played for many years in resistance to the dictatorship and repression. It is evident that women will play a full role in the construction of a democratic Tunisia.

It is also the "Tunisian exception" that brought about this revolution: Tunisia

had the first constitution in the Arab world in the 19th century, the first trade union, the first Arab and African human rights organization and a Personal Status Code which, unfortunately, remains unique in the Arab world, which abolished repudiation and polygamy, access to the contraceptive pill and abortion, as well as to education.

*With the recognition of Islamist*

*political parties, is there a risk you think the Personal Status Code risks being challenged?*

No, the rights protected by the Personal Status Code of 1956 are established. There is no going back. Now, we need to go beyond this and achieve full legal equality.

Women are fighting to preserve a modern society in Tunisia. We want the Personal Status Code to continue to evolve towards equality and freedom for both sexes. We want women to have equal rights to inheritance. Today, as in the sphere of education, women want equal participation in political life. This is why women are on centre stage. They know that the future of Tunisia depends on their struggle.

*How can women's rights be strengthened in Tunisia today?*

First and foremost, we want to ensure that the new Tunisian democracy, which we hope to see emerge from this uprising, guarantees the full rights of women and gender equality. We must remain vigilant. We must remember that protecting human rights and democracy means protecting of the rights of women. We must recall the principle that there can be no genuine democracy without gender equality.

We have to ensure that there are women in all the new political bodies.

We must call for parity and, at the very least, quotas of women among those elected. Political parties calling themselves democratic will not be able to do less than the former RCD, the party of the ex-President, Ben Ali), which had established quotas of 30% on electoral lists.

We must also call for the reform of laws that remain discriminatory, starting with the provisions on inheritance.

We need to support the work and struggle of women's associations, like the Association tunisienne des femmes démocrates (ATFD), the Association des femmes tunisiennes pour la recherche et le développement (AFTURD) and the Collectif Maghreb Egalité 1995, partners of FIDH, who resisted during the dictatorship, and have always associated the three words: democracy, freedom and equality. These women's movements are extremely active in the creation of a democratic Tunisia.

Currently they are putting together a dossier of claims that would ensure gender equality and the protection of women's rights in a democratic Tunisia.

*Are there risks that women will be excluded from the transitions in Tunisia and Egypt ?*

It is a real fear. There are already some worrying signs that women are

being pushed aside in the political transitions. It is deeply concerning that women that there is not a single woman on the new Egyptian Constitutional Committee. This is unacceptable.

We must remember history. In Algeria, for example, in the 1950s women participated in the struggle for independence. However, after independence they were largely excluded from political and public life. Today the Algerian Family Code still discriminates against women, polygamy still exists, men are considered "head of the family" etc.. Women have been forgotten in the "post revolution."

Political transition first... women's rights later. We should remember that nothing is guaranteed, in order to ensure that women are not excluded from reconstruction, since women's rights are never considered a political "priority." We should not forget that since women have protested and have sacrificed themselves in the name of these revolutions, they will not allow their rights to be ignored or forgotten during the transition.

FIDH will continue to work alongside its member organisations and partners in Tunisia, Egypt and throughout the region so that memory of women's participation in the revolutions and uprisings is preserved and so that women can obtain equal rights.

## A left strategy for Europe

13 April 2011, by **Costas Lapavitsas**

### Crisis and Austerity

The roots of the turmoil in Europe lie in the world crisis that commenced in 2007. Briefly put, the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers in September 2008 led to a banking crisis, which ushered in a global

recession. European economies were hit by collapsing exports and contracting credit. The worst was averted through state intervention, partly to support banks, partly to sustain aggregate demand. But state intervention led to the next and more severe stage of the crisis, that of public debt. And as the public debt crisis got deeper, it threatened to reignite the

banking crisis.

It cannot be overemphasised, however, that the specific character and ferocity of the European turmoil are due to the monetary union. The euro has acted as the mediator of the world crisis in Europe. From the perspective of Marxist theory, this is hardly a surprise since the euro is a form of world



money and not just a common currency. The euro is designed to act as means of payment and hoarding in the world market or, in the language of mainstream economics, as a reserve currency. It serves the interests of the major states that command it as well as of the large financial and industrial enterprises that deploy it internationally. But, by the same token, the euro has crystallised the tensions and imbalances of European capitalism, acting as the epicentre of crisis. This has been a classic feature of world money since gold played that role and dictated the pace of crises through its hoarding, inflows and outflows.

The euro is an unusual form of world money created afresh by an alliance of states, with Germany at its core. It contrasts sharply with the dominant form of world money, the dollar, which is a national money catapulted into its world role due to the imperial power of its unitary state and economy. For the euro to be able to act as world money it has been necessary to create institutional machinery suited to an alliance led by Germany, a nation state considerably weaker than the USA. Three elements have been instrumental to it: first, an independent central bank in full command of monetary policy and presiding over a homogeneous money market for banks; second, fiscal stringency imposed through the Growth and Stability Pact; third, relentless pressure on labour wages and conditions to ensure competitiveness for European capital.

The institutional machinery of the euro has catalysed the crisis in Europe. Pressure on labour has been most relentless at the core of the eurozone, resulting in rising competitiveness, primarily for Germany. The result was an entrenched gap between core and periphery, reflected in current account surpluses for the former and deficits for the latter. The gap was bridged by huge capital flows from core to periphery which took the form mostly of bank loans. [33]

In the periphery, furthermore, banks engaged in rapid expansion thus adding further to debt. By the end of the 2000s, the periphery had become enormously indebted – domestically and abroad, privately and publicly.

When the world crisis hit Europe, leading to recession and state intervention, it inevitably turned into a crisis of peripheral debt in all its dimensions. In turn the debt crisis threatened to become a banking crisis that could potentially destroy the euro. The response to the crisis by the European ruling classes – of both core and periphery – has cast a harsh light on the entire European ‘project’. Their paramount concern has been to rescue the euro. To achieve this aim, policy has focused on saving the banks exposed to peripheral debt. Thus, the ECB has advanced abundant and cheap liquidity to banks; in contrast, miserly liquidity at high interest rates was made available to states. At the same time, unprecedented austerity was imposed on peripheral countries, while welfare provision was cut and labour conditions were worsened. The costs of the crisis were thus shifted onto the shoulders of working people as far as possible. By early 2011 the class content of the policy to rescue the euro had become crystal clear: first, to defend the interests of financial capital by protecting bondholders and other lenders, second, to promote the interests of industrial capital by crushing labour costs.

These policies have been dictated by Germany, the main beneficiary of the euro. German ascendancy is now stronger than at any time in the history of the European Union. By the same token, the imperial interests at the heart of the eurozone have become transparent. If the current policy to rescue the euro succeeds – and there are grave doubts that it will – Germany will emerge as the undisputed master of the eurozone and the dominant force across Europe. The periphery, meanwhile, will stagnate with high rates of unemployment

and worsening income distribution. Even so, a thin layer of financial and industrial capital within the periphery will probably continue to do well.

The crisis has been a momentous event for Europe. It has forced through rapid social change in favour of capital and against labour. It has also encouraged geopolitical change, turning the eurozone into a German backyard. At the same time, it has put paid to the hackneyed ideas of European partnership and federalism that have provided the ideological cover of the eurozone. The crisis should have thus provided an opportunity for the Left to recover its poise putting forth anti-capitalist proposals to take Europe in a socialist direction. Unfortunately this has not yet happened. Much of the continental Left is still in the grip of Europeanism, and is concerned to develop strategies that have a European rather than a socialist character. Above all, it is in fear of disrupting the monetary union. The result has been the absence of effective Left opposition to the social and imperial transformation currently taking place in Europe.

## A ‘good euro’?

The Europeanist Left clings to the notion that the eurozone could be reformed in the interests of working people, creating a ‘good euro’. Advocates of the ‘good euro’ can be split into two currents, both of which are prominent within the newly formed Party of the European Left but also more broadly across Europe. [34] One current are ardent Europeanists who generally downplay the class and imperial interests at the heart of monetary union. The other current are reluctant Europeanists who, despite stressing class interests, do not fully appreciate the implications of creating a new world money. Both are terrified of the dangers of nationalism and isolationism, should the eurozone collapse. The monetary union might have been ill-conceived, but now that it has become a reality, it

would not be advisable to break out of it. [35]

For reluctant Europeanists this position also leads to what might be called 'revolutionary Europeanism', overthrowing capitalism on the supposedly privileged terrain of European integration. Logically this should also entail creating a unitary (and revolutionary) European state, but this demand is not often stated explicitly. Whether ardent or reluctant, 'good euro' proposals demonstrate considerable convergence. There is, for instance, general agreement that austerity and liberalisation ought to be resisted, and that Europe needs major redistribution of income and wealth. There is also agreement that a coordinated investment policy would be desirable to raise productivity in the periphery and to restructure the European economy.

These are creditable ideas and much of the Left - Europeanist or not - would probably concur with them. The trouble is that they do not deal with the pressing nature of the crisis. By far the most acute aspect of the crisis is the debt of the periphery. It has eventually become accepted across the Left that the burden of debt on several peripheral countries must be lifted for economies to recover. Beyond this point, however, agreement is hard to find. Ardent Europeanists, such as those within the Party of the European Left, tend to favour consensual restructuring of debt (in effect, creditor-led default) which would lower the level of peripheral debt without upsetting the mechanisms of the eurozone unduly. The trouble is that creditor-led default is unlikely significantly to reduce peripheral debt. Lenders are not generally known to welcome losses. Reluctant Europeanists, consequently, tend to favour radical restructuring of debt, often at the initiative of the borrower. But they propose to write debt off unilaterally while remaining within the framework of the eurozone, the main powers of which will have to take the losses.

Quite how this will be achieved has not yet been explained.

Against this background, Europeanists have put forth a variety of specific proposals regarding debt. Here the ground becomes treacherous because it leads to the outer reaches of actual policy-making by the governments of Europe. The proposals have typically revolved around lending by the ECB and issuing Eurobonds, aspects of which are already present within the current policies of the eurozone.

Summarising ruthlessly and across a variety of suggestions, the general idea appears to be that the ECB should expand its current practice of purchasing public debt in secondary markets (and lending against collateral of peripheral public debt.) The ECB should acquire much of the existing debt of peripheral countries and it should also finance the fresh borrowing of eurozone states in the future. It is further suggested that the issuing of Eurobonds - which is already undertaken by the European Financial Stabilisation Facility to obtain funds for lending to countries in difficulties - should be expanded to meet the regular lending needs of eurozone states. [36]

Nothing precludes crossbreeding between these suggestions, including the notion that the ECB should be financing itself by issuing Eurobonds. Such proposals appear as the analogue of the operations of Federal Reserve in the USA, and thus as an important step toward creating fiscal as well as monetary homogeneity within the eurozone. Unfortunately, there are major problems with these proposals, which help explain why they have generally been given short shrift by the eurozone establishment. One problem relates to the losses from bad peripheral debt. If, for instance, the ECB were to acquire existing peripheral debt at a deep discount, the capital of banks would have to be replenished to prevent failure; if debt was acquired at face value, there would probably be substantial eventual losses for the ECB which would have to be made

good. There is a prevalent confusion among much of the Left as to what a central bank can do. The ECB indeed possesses an enormous ability to act as lender of last resort, i.e., to advance liquidity to banks and states. But lender of last resort has nothing to do with handling bad debts, i.e. solvency. Guaranteeing solvency is a matter for the Ministry of Finance which must mobilise tax income to make good the losses represented by bad debts. In the context of Europe this means drawing on the tax income of core countries, and therefore imposing burdens on working people. The ECB has no power to make good the foolish lending that European banks indulged in during the 2000s. Recapitalising the banks means committing tax revenues, a step that would have profound class and power implications

Furthermore, the suggestion that the ECB should systematically acquire peripheral debt and, even more, that it should have an open commitment to finance the future borrowing of eurozone countries would pose a threat to the euro as world money. If the ECB were, for instance, to begin financing the regular borrowing of all eurozone countries, there would be heightened risks of inflation which would lower the credibility of the euro in world markets. There is no comparison with the dollar in this respect. The dollar is the incumbent form of world money that draws on established institutional and customary mechanisms for its acceptability. The euro is a competitor that has not yet developed a firm framework of acceptability for itself in the world market. The German ruling class is unlikely to accept state borrowing arrangements that might jeopardise the global acceptability of the euro.

Similar considerations apply to issuing Eurobonds in order to replace existing peripheral debt. The borrowing difficulties of peripheral states can certainly be managed through Eurobonds, though this would be a slower method than the ECB providing liquidity directly. But confronting the likely losses from bad

debts is an entirely different matter, which requires committing capital from tax income. And that is without even mentioning the additional cost to core countries from borrowing at higher interest rates, if they were to issue Eurobonds jointly with peripheral countries.

Finally, there is a further problem which is often not appreciated. 'Good euro' proposals essentially aim at overcoming the contradiction between fiscal heterogeneity and monetary homogeneity within the institutional machinery of the eurozone. Presumably, if a common fiscal space was created across the eurozone, either through loans by the ECB, or by issuing Eurobonds, the functioning of the euro would become smoother and crises would be eliminated. But the problem is that the financial sphere of the eurozone is not nearly as homogeneous as is often imagined. There is indeed a homogeneous money market, which regularises the terms of bank borrowing across the eurozone, but the ownership of banks remains resolutely national. Similarly, there is no homogeneity in supervising and regulating bank activities, both of which are largely left to each nation state. Consequently, if bank solvency became problematic, banks would only be able to seek recourse to their own state, as happened in Ireland in 2009-10 and Belgium in 2008-9. There are no European mechanisms to handle the losses that European banks would inevitably make if peripheral debt was written off. And nor is there any obvious way in which German or French workers could be made to accept higher taxes to rescue, say, Italian banks. Each state would have to deal with the losses of its national banks. The euro remains a creation of nation states in this regard, and its implications for workers have a clear national aspect.

## A radical left strategy

A radical alternative to the policies currently adopted across the

eurozone should offer a resolution of the crisis that would shift the balance of social forces toward labour and push Europe in a socialist direction. For the Left to develop a distinctive position, it would have to challenge the strategic choices of the rulers of Europe instead of merely focusing on malfunctioning institutional arrangements. The first step would be to acknowledge the class and imperial relations at the heart of the eurozone. Working people in both core and periphery have no stake in the success of the European Monetary Union. On the contrary, the attempt to create a world money that serves the interests of European capital has meant worsening labour conditions at the core and major crisis in the periphery.

A radical alternative should also recognise that the current policy of imposing austerity and promoting German ascendancy has a high probability of failure. The main reason is that austerity leads to recession which worsens the problem of debt. Even worse, the long term prognosis for the periphery is for low growth. Greece, Ireland and Portugal will find it increasingly difficult to service their public debt and will probably have to restructure, or even default. The inevitable losses would impact upon core countries, and the sums are likely to be large. Greece alone, if it is to have decisive relief, would require a reduction of public debt by perhaps 50%-60%, approaching 200 bn euro. Should this eventuality materialise, continued membership of the eurozone would be put on the table, partly by core countries, and partly by defaulting peripheral countries themselves. The rickety structures of the eurozone would then come under even greater pressure. The Left ought to be preparing for such a turn of events, instead of recoiling from it in horror.

The division between core and periphery implies that a radical left alternative would necessarily differ across the eurozone. For workers at the core, particularly Germany, it would be vital to break the

relentless pressure on wages imposed by monetary union. But note that it is fallacy to think of higher wages as a means of rescuing the euro on the grounds that they would, presumably, rebalance competitiveness across the eurozone and boost domestic consumption in the core. There is no capitalist class that would systematically aim at raising the wages of its own workers, since it would then be ruined in competition. If wage restraint was broken in Germany, the monetary union would become a lot less attractive for the German ruling class, raising the issue of its own continued euro membership. After all, Germany has long experience in deploying the Deutschmark strategically to improve its share of world production and trade.

A radical strategy in core countries ought to include further steps that could complement the reversal of wage restraint while preparing for the failure of monetary union. An important element would be control over the financial system. Tax and other impositions to rescue banks from their reckless exposure to the eurozone periphery ought to be resisted. Indeed, the Left ought to be making the case for bank nationalisation that could act as lever to rebalance core economies, assuming that the mechanisms of control over banks would also be changed to reflect broader social interests. Above all, the weight of the German economy ought to be shifted away from exports and toward improving domestic consumption, public provision, and infrastructure. For this, it would be necessary to recapture command over monetary policy from the ECB and to impose controls on capital flows.

In the periphery, on the other hand, the immediate focus of a radical alternative must be to confront the burden of public and private debt. Public debt, in particular, has to be renegotiated with the aim of writing off its greater part. To this purpose there should be debtor-led default drawing on grassroots participation. There are

certainly costs to defaulting and unilaterally writing off debt, including being shut out of financial markets for a period and paying higher interest rates in the future. But even mainstream literature points out that – to its surprise – these costs do not seem to be very substantial. [37]

Debtor-led default would be immeasurably strengthened by establishing independent Audit Commissions on public debt across peripheral countries. They would facilitate workers' participation in confronting the problem of debt, not least by allowing for independent knowledge of the causes and terms of indebtedness. The Commissions could make appropriate recommendations for dealing with debt, including debt that is shown to be illegal, illegitimate, odious, or simply not sustainable.

Debtor-led default in the periphery would immediately raise the issue of eurozone membership, given that the lenders are the core countries. Exit is an important component of a radical Left strategy that could annul austerity while restructuring economies in the interests of labour. But changing the monetary standard is a major shock that would require a broad programme of economic and social change. The most important concern would be to prevent the monetary shock from becoming a banking crisis, for then the repercussions on the economy would be severe. It follows that banks would have to be placed under public ownership and control, protecting depositors, avoiding bank runs, and creating a framework to restructure the economy. Needless to say, it would also be necessary immediately to impose capital controls.

The new currency would depreciate thus putting added pressure on

banks borrowing abroad, but also removing the shackles from the productive sector and boosting exports. Regaining command over monetary policy while defaulting on the debt would also immediately remove the stranglehold of austerity on the productive sector. On the other hand, rising import prices would put pressure on workers' incomes, thus necessitating redistributive measures through tax and wage policy. Finally, industrial policy would be introduced to restore productive capacity in the periphery and to create employment. A concerted effort could then be made to raise the productivity of labour allowing peripheral countries to improve their position in the international division of labour. Naturally, such a dramatic shift in the balance of social forces in favour of labour would require democratic restructuring of the state improving tax collection and dealing with corruption.

A radical left strategy for both core and periphery would comprise transitional measures in the most profound sense of the term. Its precise character would depend on the social forces that would be mobilised to support it and on the types of struggle that would emerge. But the great merit of the strategy is that it could change the balance of forces against capital, creating better conditions to resolve issues of distribution, growth and employment. In this respect, a radical left alternative would create a favourable environment for socialist change by improving the social and economic conditions of workers.

There is no need for such a strategy to lead to isolationism and nationalism provided that the European Left regained a modicum of

confidence in itself and in its historic arsenal of socialist ideas. Indeed, the danger of a nationalist backlash is likely to become worse as long as the Left continues to disappoint working people. 'Good euro' proposals offer no means of stopping the ruthless re-assertion of class and imperial interests in the eurozone. A strategy that confidently detached itself from the failing project of monetary union would provide a basis for solidarity among European people. For that, the Left would have to abandon Europeanism, the official ideology that has for long haunted its collective mind.

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# Women lead fight for land rights in Okara

12 April 2011, by **Riffat Maqsood**



Benazhir Bhutto and Mian Nawaz Sharif, both had promised at the time that if they come into power, they will award land rights to the tenants. The tenants are working on these lands for over 100 years. This promise is not yet fulfilled and the movement still goes on.



Women Workers Help Line has been assisting this movement for long time along with other social movements and organisations. On 6th April 2011, four women were among the 10 main speakers at the peasant convention. Bushra Khaliq member federal committee Labour Party Pakistan, Nazli Javed of Labour Education Foundation, Badaru Nisa of Anjuman Mozareen Punjab Okara and myself as general secretary Women Workers help Line spoke on the occasion and

got very good response.

We spoke of equal land rights for peasant women, against domestic violence and lead role of women in the struggle for land rights.

The AMP, organizers of the event have given a deadline of 14th August 2011 for the acceptance of the demands and warned the government if they failed to implement their promises, we will have no option but to march to Lahore and picket line the chief minister home at Raiwind.

## An ongoing revolution

12 April 2011, by **Jalel Ben Brik Zoghlami**

**Since December 2010 the Tunisian masses have overthrown the dictator Ben Ali and given the signal for revolt throughout the Arab world and beyond. Back in November, this would have seemed impossible... What happened in your country?**

I think that we are in a process that you would call revolution, a social revolution, social, democratic and national. It is an anti-system revolution and it is a revolution for national dignity. In its Tunisian dynamic, as in its Arab dynamic, it is a permanent revolution. Since January one of the essential slogans "and it is not us who have raised it!" has been "Uninterrupted revolution, Ben Ali out!"

The essence of our revolution can be summed up in three slogans: work, freedom and national dignity. It is a revolution which began by the symbolic gesture of a young graduate who immolated himself. He

symbolised these young graduates, without work, who take the road to Italy and Europe before it is closed off. Young Mohamed Bouazizi symbolised these completely crushed youth. After his gesture it was the explosion, the eruption of the masses, above all young people from the "forgotten" deprived regions, "Sidi Bouzid, Kasserine, Gafsa, and so on" and the popular neighbourhoods of the big cities, Tunis, Nabeul, Sfax and Sousse. It was always the youth who began the struggle. The Internet has played a prominent role at the level of the media "in Tunisia there are 1.8 million network subscribers, once again predominantly young people/

**How have these youth in revolt been able to confront the police state?**

When it was said that this revolution had no leadership, it is true. There was no political leadership. But there was a "rearguard", that is points of support for the eruption of the masses.

When the youth revolted and confronted the system directly, they had to confront repression. Then they fell back, to regroup and organise their defence, in the branches of the rank and file structures of the Union générale des travailleurs tunisiens (UGTT - General Union of Tunisian Workers). In these regions, which are not heavily industrial, they found above all teaching trades unionists, who had been students in the 1980s, who had emerged from the student movement of that time influenced by the radical and nationalist left. In the 1990s, the black years of Ben Ali's repression "there were forty deaths under torture, 30,000 political prisoners" they were in the trade union movement, not so much as politically organised activists, but with their political baggage, above all that of the radical left. Who were they? Leaders of our organisation or those close to us, or other groups of the radical left, those of the January 14th Front, which comprised thirteen

parties essentially of the far left and nationalist organisations.

**Your organisation, the Ligue de la Gauche Ouvrière, was founded during the struggle.**

Yes, the Ligue de la Gauche Ouvrière was set up during the revolution. But its activists did not come from nowhere. They were very well known leaders in the trade union, associative, feminist world, known in the political confrontation with the regime, youth leaders known in the cultural movement, well known organisers who were at the head of the movement in Sidi Bouzid, union leaders in primary education or in posts and telecoms. Some of them came to us from the Organisation Communiste Révolutionnaire, the Tunisian section of the Fourth International, which broke up following the repression, because it could no longer go forward in its form of organisation. In 1990 there were 40 sentencings of youths – the oldest was 27, the youngest 16. It was a very hard blow. The OCR was an organisation of revolutionary youth, which had a clear position against the regime and against the fundamentalists, for a popular workers' orientation. It was also clearly opposed to the brutal police state repression of the fundamentalists – it was rare then, even the other friends of the far left and the democrats didn't say it. Let me make it clear, we always struggled against the fundamentalists – who wanted a state which would be anti-woman and anti-worker, who today go hand in hand with the character the most hated by the working class, Mohamed Sayah, a leader of the Néo-Destour who repressed the general strike of February 1978 alongside Ben Ali – but we have never accepted this repressive police state regime.

**You have stressed the role played by trade union militants, the heirs of the student movement of the 1980s who were not in their great majority considered as the political opposition to Ben Ali.**

We don't forget that when the Western media spoke of the opposition in the Tunisia of Ben Ali, they spoke of my imprisoned brother, Tawfik Ben Brik, they spoke of Moncef Marzouki,

when the police broke his glasses... and also of me when I was refused my passport. But they didn't talk about two strikes! Nor of that of the 100,000 primary and secondary teachers, when the Israeli delegation came to Tunisia, nor the general strike of the UGTT. The media talk of a microcosm – a courageous microcosm – but not of the role of the working class. Why? Because this microcosm did not constitute a danger. A successful democratic rally would have a maximum of 250-300 people, of an average age of between 50 and 55!

**What was the role of the trade union movement in the fall of Ben Ali?**

The political history of Tunisia cannot be understood without considering the role of the Tunisian workers' movement and the trade union movement since 1924. It is a specificity in the Arab region. An independent trade union movement has existed since 1924. It was strengthened by the creation of the UGTT in 1946. The regime of Bourguiba, from 1956 to the 1970s, was an alliance between Bourguiba's party (the Néo-Destour) and the leaders of the UGTT. The health programme of 1958, the education programme of 1958 and the industrialisation programme of 1964 were the product of the UGTT programme of 1955 and were applied by ministers who had been the general secretaries of the UGTT. Even the question of women's liberation is closely linked to the workers' movement. The first to demand the total equality of men and women was Tahar Haddad in 1929, very linked to the Tunisian workers' movement and to the leader of the first independent union, Mohamed Ali El Hammi.

What really transformed the relationship of forces in favour of the revolution were the three regional strikes, called by the UGTT. On Wednesday January 12 in the Sfax region, on Thursday January 13 in the regions of Kasserine, Kairouan, Sousse and Monastir and on Friday January 14th in that of greater Tunis. Inside the Administrative Commission of the UGTT, which called these strikes, the union bureaucracy – weakened by the destruction of its historic bases –

was faced with very strong unions led by comrades essentially of the radical left – the primary and secondary education teaching unions, which are very strong, together with nearly 100,000 members, whereas the whole membership of the UGTT is 517,000 members, that of posts and telecommunications, that of doctors and public health, the leaders of the regions of Ben Arous, Jendouba, and so on. The union bureaucracy was obliged to take account of the radical unionists. The revolutionaries inside the UGTT called for a general strike, the bureaucracy had to give way before this pressure and this led to successive regional strikes, allowing the movement to build itself little by little. These strikes led to the flight of Ben Ali which took place on the day of the general strike in greater Tunis.

Today in Tunisia, unlike in Egypt for example, we do not have to organise the working class, we have an organised working class, whose essential sectors are under the leadership of the radical left. Their most high profile representative is a comrade of the Workers' Left League. The dynamic of the working class currently is to fight against this bureaucracy.. That is why the union bureaucracy refused to enter the government, because it was afraid of its radical base. But, without being part of it, it supported the second government, still more linked to the international institutions.

Inside the UGTT there is a big rank and file radicalisation. The general secretary has understood it and has announced he will leave his post at the next congress, in two years. He has said that he will respect article 10 of the statutes – abrogated at the Djerba congress in February 2002 – which stipulates that no member of the executive can hold office for more than two terms. That means that eight of the members of the current executive would have to go. With the revolutionary situation there is not only a big radicalisation but also a huge mood to demand democracy in all the institutions.

**The fall of Ben Ali opens a new stage, the regime is weakened but not overthrown. The Ghannouchi government is weak, but holds on.**

Ben Ali and the RCD have been overthrown. The regime has done everything possible to continue Ben Alism without Ben Ali, to make us believe that the only corrupt people were the Trabelsi and Ben Ali families. In fact corruption is linked to all the dominant families. Currently we face two big problems. First, Tunisia was not a system of civil bureaucracy or single party dictatorship, it was a police dictatorship. The militias are not then the militias of the RCD party and have not collapsed with this party. They are linked to the leaders of the police who had a grip on the parallel market. This leads today to these sort of death squads linked to the police and also to smuggling. Secondly it is a country which is very dependent on the European Union and also Sarkozy's France and Berlusconi's Italy. Ben Ali became in 1987 the representative and baton of the structural adjustment programme, imposed in 1985, with the crisis of the Bonapartist system of the aging Bourguiba. He came to power to confront a strong trade union movement. To apply the SAP, the international institutions chose someone who was head of security during the strike of 1978. Ben Ali was neither Hafez el-Assad nor Nasser, he was not a dictator with his own programme, he was a specialist in repression put in place to force through the programme imposed by the international institutions "the World Bank, the IMF" and by France. Because the essence of the Tunisian economy is closely linked to French capital. In the immediate, it is necessary to confront the debt, there is a schedule of payment in April of 480 million dollars. It is a highly iniquitous debt.

### **What are the current debates in the revolutionary movement?**

We have begun to speak of a transitional programme in Tunisia, of urgent tasks and transitional tasks. Among the urgent tasks there is the total dismantling of the RCD party and the police state institutions, the question of work for the unemployed, the nationalisation of all the properties of the families linked to Ben Ali under the control of the workers, the cancellation of the debt, taxation and so on.

At the same time there is a proposal at the level of the institutions, that is to create a National Congress for the Defence of the Revolution with all the organisations "trade unions, human rights organisations, parties and above all the autonomous committees of organisation which exist in the insurgent towns and villages. The discussion goes from the demand for the overthrow of Ghannouchi and his government" and I believe he will be obliged to quit" to that of the demand for a new government chosen among all the components of the Congress, so that there is a government whose task would be to legislate on the current,, democratic, national and economic questions and to prepare genuinely free elections to the Constituent Assembly. I believe that this is completely realistic. Even if the relationship of forces does not allow the overthrow of this government, this weight of popular representation inside this Congress will weigh on it and would allow proposing, controlling, and blocking and so on. we advance the Constituent Assembly and at the same time a democratic popular workers' government. In Tunisia that could be done in the form of a popular and democratic UGTT government.

We need a congress of the mass movement with a broader representation, not only the UGTT executive but all the union federations and regions. At the same time we need to structure in each region, locality and sector committees genuinely linked to the popular masses. That would give the true popular forces control and initiative.

### **You spoke of autonomous committees of organisation. What form do they take?**

These are structures which have begun to be built in the struggles. First in Sidi Bouzid, in Menzel Bouzaïane, in Agareb, in Thala and so on. Where there were serious confrontations against the police and the repressive administration of Ben Ali. People organised for their demands and to defend themselves against the attacks of the police and against repression. That led with time to a popular organisation and a local leadership.

Afterwards, with the fall of Ben Ali, there were attacks by the militias and sections of the police to spread fear. People organised across Tunisia to defend their neighbourhoods, schools, public services. That led to neighbourhood defence committees. The ruling party ran the neighbourhoods.. When it collapsed, the people were obliged to run the localities themselves, and the offices of the RCD became the offices of the people of the neighbourhood. They met, discussed and as there was a big politicisation, everybody talked about the government, its choices, links with ministers with Ben Ali, with France, with the USA and so on. In all the neighbourhoods the people have chosen to meet in these former RCD offices and to create Houses of Defence of the Revolution. In some neighbourhoods spontaneous forms of organisation endured, and in others a leadership was elected. The village committee became de facto the municipality. It is a process of self-organisation to meet vital needs "to organise everyday life, defend oneself from the militias involved in smuggling, the RCD, the police, and so on at the same time as a will to discuss the social, political and other questions.

As with any form of struggle and self-organisation, it is combined and uneven. It is very linked to the degree of radicalisation. It varies between regions, sectors and times of struggle. But the essential point is that they are beginning to take root in the country. Certainly in Agareb, Thala, Menzel Bouzaïane, some neighbourhoods of Tunis There are forms of self organisation also emerging in the public establishments and institutions, linked to the intervention of trades unionists and workers to get rid of the most corrupt managers and replace them by the most competent. For example at Tunisie-Télécom they have demanded that the 30 % privatised portion of the company is renationalised and that the most corrupt directors with the most indecent pay levels are removed. At the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the workers demanded that the Minister not return to the ministry, because he had given the image of Tunisia as a lickspittle of French imperialism. In the Ministry of Youth and Sports there

was a movement to get rid of the most corrupt. The Ghannouchi government tries to oppose this, talks of anarchy, the danger of collapse of the economy, of the threat of losing the most qualified specialists, but the workers know that they are only the most qualified in corruption! All these so called highly qualified people are there for two reasons - corruption and to be in the service of the structural adjustment programme of the European Union the IMF and the WTO. For this, for sucking our blood, they are super qualified!

#### **The self-organisation you mention has also spread to the media?**

Historically, under Ben Ali, the press was not only controlled by Abdelwahab Abdallah, the Tunisian Rasputin, but was above all under the direction of the special services of the political police, of which neither the head nor the personnel have been changed. Until now the directorates of the governmental or private newspapers have been closely linked to the political police. That goes also for the television and radio. But in many newspapers there are movements, the workers and journalists impose their committees to have more freedom and to control the administration. There are more demands and more attempts at control on the part of the workers and the trade union, in the biggest national TV

channel and also in some newspapers â€” in Sabah, in Al-chourouk. However for the moment, the two private TV channels, above all Berlusconi's NessmaTV, whose boss is closely linked to the political police and the Ben Aliists, have not been affected.

#### **You mentioned the objective of a Constituent Assembly... what is the link between this objective and the self-organisation of which you spoke?**

The demand for the Constituent Assembly was historically a demand raised by a few radical left groups. Even most of the activists of the revolutionary left were not interested. The people had not heard it mentioned before, they didn't even know what it was. The parties and organisations did not talk about it. Since the fall of Ben Ali, the initiative has been taken by the January 14th Front â€” which brings together the essence of the organised forces of the far left, the radical left and some nationalist groups which have links in all sectors and regions and have relations with union militants and young activists. The people began to discuss the Constituent Assembly. In Tunis everywhere, in the factories, schools, neighbourhoods, in Kef, Sidi Bouzid, Agareb, Thala... the people begin to advance the slogan of the Constituent Assembly: "No to Ghannouchi! No to the presidential regime! For a Constituent Assembly!"

I think that this demand, whether successful or not, constitutes the demand which articulates all the democratic demands. It also takes up the social demands. The more it is borne in the popular committees, the more it is linked to these local and regional committees of self-organisation, the more it will be a popular constituent assembly and not that of bigwig parliamentarians.

#### **Finally, what is the situation of the Tunisian revolutionary left?**

Today the essence of the Tunisian radical left is unorganised activists. The existing organisations, a dozen of them, do not represent even 10 % of this left which is very present in the autonomous organisations in the neighbourhoods, the unions and so on. Hence the task of building the party which the revolution needs must be taken on in the very course of the ongoing revolution. That isn't an easy task. The organisations of the radical and revolutionary left are emerging from illegality or are setting themselves up. If they attract activists who have until now been unorganised, they lack material resources â€” office, libraries, means of expression, publications. We hope that all those in the international revolutionary left who are enthused by our revolution will help us. It is urgent. By way of returning the favour!

## **A malevolent campaign by the Government of Punjab against trade unions**

**12 April 2011, by Farooq Tariq**

Trade unionism is being presented as an evil that is opposed to the humanity. This shows the absolute prejudice of the ruling class in Punjab against the workers' rights and their means of organization. This is an effort of the Punjab government to break the young doctor's strike. The Muslim League Nawaz has a record of

anti-workers measures during the last three years. Any union formed during this period has experienced some sort of victimization.

The PMLN has not lifted the ban on labour inspection of the factories. The working class in Punjab has been treated with contempt. And now, the

doctors are facing the same sort of treatment by an anti-worker government that the trade unions are facing for a long time.



## What are trade unions?

Trade unions are organizations that represent people at work. Their purpose is to protect and improve people's pay and conditions of employment. They also campaign for laws and policies which will benefit working people.

Trade unions exist because an individual worker has very little power to influence decisions that are made about his or her job. By joining together with other workers, there is more chance of having a voice and influence.

All sorts of jobs and industries are covered by trade unions. Some unions represent people who do a particular job or work in a specific industry - for example, the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), as its name suggests, represents journalists.

All over the world, there are trade unions of the doctors, for example doctors in Bahrain are protesting

The International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions ratified by the Government of Pakistan confer the rights of freedom of association on the employers and workers. The workers and employers form and register their associations and trade unions in accordance with the law.

Labour Party Pakistan condemns this sort of malicious propaganda against the trade unions and is considering taking legal action against the Health Department for presenting trade unions image in negative terms.

The government is doing its best to break the solid strike of the doctors by recruiting new doctors. Labour Party Pakistan appeals to the newly recruited young doctors to join the strike after joining the department.

Please watch a trade union leader in Punjab telling the victimization of trade unions in Punjab during the last three years.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ArY...>

## This is our land, declare 20,000 peasants

11 April 2011, by **Farooq Tariq**

Okara Military Farms, Punjab, Pakistan, April 17, 2009: I am on the platform of the historic peasant convention at Okara Military Farms on the international day of peasants today. Thousands of peasants are pouring in at the convention with red flags demanding land ownership rights over 68,000 acres occupied by the military establishment - land the peasants have been cultivating more than 100 years.

More than 15,000 peasants [the crowd later swelled to 20,000 - FT] are already inside the huge ground which is covered by tents. Nearly one third of the participants are women and they are most active in the convention.

### Red flags flying

There are hundreds of red flags flying. There is group of dozens of youth who are wearing long red dress with slogans calling for land ownership. There is a group of students from Lahore University of Management. There are private TV channels like GEO, ARY, Dawn, Royal, Dunia, Waqt,

AAJ and some others are covering the event live. Never before so many TV channels covered a program of the peasants.

This rally was preceded by four public meetings at Okara, Depalpur, Renalkhurd and Lahore which attracted over 11,000 peasants.

Mehr Abdul Sattar opened the convention with a firm demand of land ownership. He said Benazir Bhutto and Mian Nawaz Sharif both had promised to us land rights. This is high time for them to fulfill their promises. He demanded to restore all the workers of Okara Military Farms who had their jobs terminated during the movements of the Mozareen. He said that the politicians of the area have tried to take over our movement, but they have not succeeded. This is a movement of peasants and workers, he said.

### Peasant leaders

### killed

Salim Jakhar made a very good presentation in Punjabi language and told that we do not need stud farms but the land we are cultivating. He belongs to Kulyana Military Estate where three peasants leaders were killed and 27 injured by agents by the agents of military officers on April 6, 2009.

After that incident, The spokesperson of PMLN government of Punjab, Senator Pervaiz Rashid, called is to assure us that Mian Nawaz Sharif and Mian Shahbaz Sharif are committed to their promise of distributing land among tenants. Badar Nisa Bibi from Kulyana Military Estate spoke about the women's bravery during the movement. She said we need the land and nothing else. She demanded the arrest of the killers of tenant farmers.

Nadeem Ashraf vice president AMP gave a deadline of May 21 to accept their demands otherwise there will be long march.

## Background

Early in 2007. Salim Jhakar came to the Labour Party office along Nadeem Ashraf, a local union Mayer from Renalakhurd and vice president of Anjman Mozareen Punjab. Salim Jhakar from Kulyana Military Estate Okara wanted to join the Anjman Mozareen Punjab and to start a campaign at his Estate. However, he has never been to any political meeting and was never member of any organization.

Nadeem Ashraf told me that we had the initial discussions but it is better if we have this together in detail. I asked them to explain me in detail the whole issue of Kulyana Military Estate. We had a long chat and here is what came out of it.

## A trap

Some 14,000 acres of land was leased out to former military top officials in Kulyana Military Estate. During the fifties and sixties, the land was allotted on the name of stud farms. The military officials had to breed the horses for the services of the army on these leased out land. Those who were working in these state lands for over 100 years became the tenants of the new owners. Earlier, it was cultivated under the occupation of the Military Farms Administration. It covered 6 villages. There was no school, hospital or even a graveyard in all these villages living under military shadows. In 1985, the former military top officers tricked the tenants to become lessee and changed their status from tenant to lessee. The peasants were happy that they are not paying the market rate contract amount and were paying less than that. It was all a trap. This was during the Zia dictatorship period.

The same manoeuvre was tried in early 2000 in other areas of Okara Military Farms under general Musharraf dictatorship. It did not work and tenants refused to become lessee and movement started for the ownership of the land with a defiant mood and slogan of "ownership or death". Seven peasants died of state repression during the years of

2001-2004. This did not touch the peasants working on contract basis at Kulyana Military Estate and they remain aloof.

Salim Jhakar told us that there were discussions but our elders told us to be happy what we have got. So the Kulyana estates remain silence during the most militant struggle of Punjab peasantry.

We were not hurtful for this behavior but instead asked him what motivated them to contact us now? He told us that the youth like him wanted to start a campaign for land rights and the contract amount is increasing day by day. This has become almost the market rate and we are living a very difficult life and want to do something. "You tell us what to do and we will do it" was his plea. We disagreed and told him to be part of the discussion and we will frame some demands and will start a campaign. Nadeem asked him to organize some study circle of the peasants for us to speak. Nadeem, one of the main leaders of the movement was also a member of Labour Party Pakistan.

## Beginning of the peasant rebellion

This was the beginning of the Kulyana Military Estate rebellion. We discussed to organize a demonstration in Lahore. Salim asked me how many should come. I told him may be around 200 would be ok and we will organize our own mobilization from Lahore. Over 500 came to Lahore for their first ever demonstration in mid 2007. The majority of them were women.

Salim wanted the movement to take up the issue of the ever increasing contract amount while we were arguing for land rights campaign. May be, he was not mentally ready and thought about this demand as too radical which can not be achieved. We had series of meeting and Nadeem started going to Kulyana Estate very often and became a teacher of the area.

He was very keen to attend the meetings. More peasants started to come with him. Salim joined Labour

Party Pakistan and was elected as peasant secretary LPP Punjab at their congress in early April 2008. Salem was in his early thirties and had not been to any college but had completed his school. A very sober and very talkative person, but would love to attend the meetings. I was really impressed by his interest in political discussions and his commitment to start the movement.

The contract amount started coming down as the movement started in the area with AMP committees being set up in all villages. In early 2009, The AMP leadership decided to organize a new movement for land rights with public meetings and peasant convention in all the areas where the tenants were working at Military Farms. The January meeting at Renalakhurd attracted over 2000 and the February meeting at Depalpur attracted over 3000. But the first ever peasant convention in Kulyana Estate on 26 March 2009 was the largest of all with over 5000. Over 1000 were women. It was the best organized peasant convention of all. The seating arrangements were very well done. The security measures were excellent. The sound system was perfect and above all almost all the peasants from the area were mobilized.

Fortunately, one private television channel ARY live coverage forced all the other main channels to send their television crew to the peasant convention on urgent basis. There a lot of red flags. This motivated the speakers to show their best to mobilize and show solidarity with the peasants. It was one of my best peasant conventions where the participants really wanted to hear and also to raise slogans. For many, this was their first ever public meeting where they have gone for themselves. It was revolutionary mood with revolutionary speeches for the demand of the land ownership. I termed the audience as revolutionaries for generations. The women speaker set the mood of women participation and the leading role they have to play.

On March 29, the Lahore peasant convention at Bengali Military Farms was also the largest with over 700 in attendance. Salim Jhakar did not come

but the secretary Abdul Ghaffar came and he spoke very well. The movement for land ownership in all the military farms in Punjab was gaining momentum.

## **The counter-revolution**

Then comes the counter-revolution. At village 28 RB in Kulyana Military Estate, the lease of a 50 acre agriculture land was ended. The contractor of Afsar Khan, a former brigadier of the army who had leased this land wanted to give this land to a tenant whose family was working here for over 100 years. Roushan Shah an agent of the military top officers who had grabbed over 1400 canal land by just occupying it, wanted to occupy this land as well. He abducted one tenant Manzoor in the morning of 6 April with the help of over 30 criminals mostly absconders in different criminal cases. When the local AMP leaders went to resist without any arms and demanded the release of the kidnapped tenant, he opened fire killing three and 27 injured.

I heard the news in Lahore an hour later from Salim Jhakar. We immediately informed the press and spread the news among LPP and supporters of the movement. By the afternoon, thousands of tenants had gathered to block the main GT Road for over two hours. When the top police officers assured the arrest of the murdered on urgent basis, the blockade ended.

I addressed a press conference the same afternoon in Lahore and LPP with the help of the other Left parties organized a joint demonstration of over 200 at Charing Cross Lahore.

## **Visit to Kulaya Military Estate**

Four of us arrived at Kulaya Military Estate on April 8 to express our condolences. Bushra Khaliq, Nazli Javed and Arif Shah from LPP were with me. While we arrived at Chack 18 RB, thousands of peasants were

waiting for us for some time. The main leadership of AMP were sitting there in grief with the loss of the three brave peasant leaders. Salim Jhakar village was not this one but a village next to this village. He was there with his head down but with full of anger. Only few hours before the incident, he called me late at night and asked me if we can send some women comrades to help in organization of women committees in each village. I agreed to speak to women comrades but said that it is the only way to sustain the movement.

We were asked to speak. It was difficult to speak to the bereavement peasants. I said, "we are full of sorrow but not weak, we are full of grief but not frail, we are sad but not feeble. We have lost three but many more are ready to take their place. Those who killed the three, wanted to kill the peasant movement, but the look at you, you have come here in thousands to express your determination to continue the struggle. You have showered the bullets in the mis hope to frighten us but who is at the run? You! And, not us. We are here to stay. They wanted to show that they can kill the movement by bullets and we have shown that ideas can never be killed.

Mehr Abdul Sattar, Bushra Khaliq, Nazli Javed and Nadeem Ashraf also expressed views to continue the movement on a very peaceful but militant manner.

## **Firsthand account of killings of peasant leaders**

We went to the house of Mohammed Abbas and Abdul Rahim, the son and father; both were the first to lose their lives. I was told by a leader of the committee who had still bullets in his head and leg, "we are four local leaders of AMP, and we were all in the front line. We were leading the peasants to demand for the release of the abducted one. We had arms but we decided not to use that. We were going to the place where the abducted leader was kept. The other side had a lot of modern weapons. None of us was afraid of that. Abbas was leading

the way. He was 35, a tall handsome father of four. His father Abdul Rahim was also with him. He was over 70. We were all raising slogans against the gangsters. We were not afraid of the guns. When the gangsters started firing at us, we did not run backward, we were still moving forward. The gangsters were hiding in trenches. So was our courage that we went till the trenches and forced the gangsters to leave the place. They had the guns, we had the courage, they had to run while some of us were hit by the bullets and we were still marching a head. It was a tale of an absolute courage by the peasants to fight the gangsters supported by the former military generals.

There were eight injured and two dead from Abbas' family alone include one of his sister. The whole family was the main basis of AMP in this village. When I saw Abbas' picture, I realized who he was. On March 26, he was on the platform as security in charge. He had a wooden stick in his hand and was very alert who was coming on the platform and why. He wanted us to be in absolute safe atmosphere.

"All of us had the bullets in our front portion and not on our back, a proof how we faced the bullets". The local AMP leader told us. Amir Ali, the third one to die was 45. His brother told us at his house that he always wanted to be in front line. He was very brave peasant leader. He always wanted to fight for land rights. He was over 6 feet tall and every one liked him.

We had brought red flowers for the graves of these brave peasant leaders. We went to the place where they were buried. It was only three graves. There was no grave yard in the whole area.

## **Military banned from villages**

The AMP has decided in a meeting with our presence that no military officers or their gangsters will ever be allowed to enter in these villages any more. Their land cultivated by so called allottees will be distributed among the martyrs, injured and the neediest one in these villages. A place next to the graves where there is still

some crops is been identifies as the new graveyard for the whole area.

The three martyrs have given a new momentum to the movement. The peasants have decided themselves how this land that they have cultivated for over 100 years will be distributed and for whom. They did not need the approval of any officials or the government. They are the government for themselves in the areas.

## New Leadership

Salim Jhakar has emerged without doubt a new leader of the peasant

movement alongside with the old layer. While he was speaking at Depalpur peasant convention, he said in the end, "I stop because I forgot my speech". Maybe he wanted to say that now I finish my speech but he was not a person to make speeches. When I spoke at the convention after him, I told the gathering, "Salem Jhakar may forget his speech but not his fight for peasant rights" this made the whole convention to clap for Salim.

I had a word with him afterwards and asked him not to say what he said, and that he should end his speech without saying that he forgot his speech. At his

home base in Kulyana Estate Peasant convention on 26 March 26 he was more careful. He read a written speech and after successfully finishing his speech without forgetting, he looked towards me with great pride and honor. I was happy that he was making progress.

On April 8, 2009, I saw a totally different Salim Jakhar, he has lost his best fighters but not his fight. It was his suggestion to distribute the land of the army officers to the peasants. He was like the governor of Kulyana Military Estate and we need more such governors to form a government of workers and peasants in future.

# 10 years of the war on terror

## 10 April 2011, by Pakistan Left Parties

As we near the tenth anniversary of the War on Terror, the poisonous effects of American imperialism are everywhere in evidence. Afghanistan and Iraq lie in tatters, their people the victims of the ongoing crimes of their occupiers. The War has been expanded into Pakistan, where US drone attacks have claimed the lives of hundreds of civilians and the Pakistani Army, encouraged and funded by the US, has launched murderous counter-insurgency campaigns in the Northwest, displacing millions.

And now, the US has placed itself at the head of the counterrevolutionary offensive in the Middle East and North Africa, doing its utmost to roll back the heroic, popular revolt against the dictators on whom its power had so long depended.

In this context, the urgency of reviving a strong anti-imperialist movement cannot be overstated. we stand in full support of the efforts of our brothers

and sisters in the US to rebuild the American antiwar movement. On April 10th, there will be solidarity demonstrations in six Pakistani cities, expressing our full backing for the United National Antiwar Committee's national protests in New York and San Francisco.

Today, more than ever, amidst the unrelenting austerity imposed on working people around the world, these wars are clear evidence of the irrationality of the social system in which we live. The US State, even as it continues to squander hundreds of billions of dollars on these criminal wars, is lining up to launch unprecedented attacks on social spending. Not to be outdone, the current government in Pakistan has slashed its development budget and officially cancelled all flood-related reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts, all the while finding room to increase its military spending by an unforgivable 25%.

Thus, let this day of solidarity state clearly that our struggle against these wars is but one part of a common fight against rapacious ruling elites. The mobilisation of thousands of Americans against themurderous policies of their own government is a welcome reminder to those who would tell us that we're locked in a 'war of civilizations'---as the right-wing does in the US, and as it does in Pakistan. We hope that April 9th marks the birth of a revitalized antiwar movement, just as it must also mark the beginning of substantive cooperation between movements in Pakistan and the US. These are urgent times, after all, and they will require nothing less.

1. Labour Party Pakistan
2. Awami Party
3. Communist Mazdoor Kissan Party
4. Workers Party Pakistan
5. Revolutionary Socialist Movement
4. National Students Federation
5. National Trade Union Federation
6. Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee



# A government in continuity... but capable of retaking the initiative

9 April 2011, by **Ahlem Belhadji**

**Mobilisations of some hundreds of thousands of people have finally brought down the Ghannouchi government. A new interim government has been formed by Béji Caïd Essebsi. What does this government represent?**

The second Ghannouchi government, even if it got rid of some former RCD ministers, kept others. It represented continuity with the old regime. On February 24 there was the movement that we call here "Casbah 2" there were more than 300,000 people demanding that Ghannouchi go. On February 27 Ghannouchi and the other RCD ministers resigned.

The kasbah, the left, the National Council for the Protection of the Revolution, the regional committees for the defence of the revolution "everybody demanded a "technocratic" government to lead the country "administratively". But in my opinion the far left committed an error in demanding a "technocratic" government. The January 14th Front made the mistake of not advancing the demand for a workers' and popular government.

This is a "technocratic" government in appearance only, because it is led by Béji Caïd Essebsi, a former minister under Bourguiba, an ex-diplomat and ex-president of Ben Ali's parliament, even if it is true that he said "no" to him. Today his government has come to satisfy the popular demand for a Constituent Assembly which breaks with the old regime. He has dissolved the Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique (RCD, the former ruling party). At the same time, it is a government completely in continuity on the economic and social levels, even more than continuity, because it is still more linked than its predecessors to US and French

imperialism. The satisfaction of the popular demands appears then as a gain, but what kind of Constituent Assembly will it be whose election would be supervised by such a government? There lies the whole problem!

**The government has also announced the dissolution of the security service, Ben Ali's political police.**

They first announced that this service consisted of 200 persons! Then they understood that this wouldn't stand, so they came up with other figures. The known figures indicate that the body of the police comprised 120,000 officers, today they tell us it was 50,000, The situation remains fairly opaque at this level, what is it that has been dissolved? What remains? We don't know!

**He also announced the dissolution of Ben Ali's party, the RCD. What has become of it? What has happened to the many branches of this party which managed the country?**

There are many former-RCD branch offices which are used by the popular committees or by the UGTT or by the self management committees or revolutionary committees. Only the central buildings have been taken over by the state. There were also 12,000 full time employees working for the RCD. Some of them have resumed their functions, at least where they have been accepted, because in many places the people have not allowed them. If the RCD has been dissolved, it has now led to the emergence of three parties, around three of its "personalities" who have requested and have obtained the recognition of these "new" parties. It amounts to a continuation of the RCD.

**Are the banned political parties now recognised?**

There are now 49 parties recognised and the list is going up every day. The Parti communiste des ouvriers de Tunisie (PCOT - Communist Workers' Party of Tunisia) was recognised two days ago. The Ligue de la gauche ouvrière (LGO - Workers' Left League) has not yet requested official recognition, but it is on the agenda.

**So far as the election of the Constituent Assembly is concerned, what are the discussions inside the left, in particular inside the January 14th Front? Is there a stress on the control of the future elected representatives in this Constituent Assembly by the popular committees, or are we witnessing more an electoralist impulse, with each party trying to have "Its" representatives that is to say bending before a form of institutionalisation?**

The two trends exist even if currently there is a push towards institutionalism. At the same time there is the emergence of revolutionary councils in the regions and in the different localities. There are many things being done at the level of self-organisation because the municipalities have been dissolved and the councils, self proclaimed by the people, are in the position of managing local affairs. At the same time, at the central level, to counteract the National Council for the Protection of the Revolution, there has been the creation of the "Higher Committee for the Realisation of the Objectives of the Revolution, for Political Reform and Democratic Transition" already its name expresses fully the difficulty of attributing a clear mission to it. On

this "Higher Committee" 71 persons have been nominated, of which 17 represent associations and 12 political parties, while 42 are individuals.

**Is it an attempt at coordination or centralisation of the local revolutionary committees?**

Not really because there are very few representatives of these local committees inside it. There are one or two people who are directly linked to such committees and at the same time there is the representation of the different parties recognised until now, there is the UGTT and the associations as well as the individuals who have a certain influence in their neighbourhood.

The left is present on this "Higher Committee" which means that the decision to boycott it or not is more difficult to take, because some think that the left has perhaps the possibility of acting so that this body is not completely institutionalised and cut off from the rank and file, that it could influence this "Higher Committee" so that it has links with the local revolutionary committees. Some people on it are from the left or far left.

The great difficulty also relates to the fact that the parties which make up the January 14th Front did not go collectively "as the Front" to discuss this proposal. Some groups, factions or parties agreed to be there independently of others and three parties are represented there officially. The first debates inside this commission concerned the representativeness of its members and the debates are still ongoing.

**Are there attempts at a national coordination or a national congress of the local self-organised committees? Or a discussion on this subject?**

The National Council for the Protection of the Revolution to some extent plays this role of coordination of the local committees. But it has been weakened by the setting up of the "Higher Committee", whose creation has to some extent the aim of replacing it. The main constituents of the National Council "the UGTT,

the Lawyers and League for Human Rights "have gone over to the "Higher Committee". Thus, right now, there is no longer a legitimate national leadership of the revolution.

The January 14th Front which met yesterday "even if it was not able to make a clear decision on its presence on the "Higher Council" "adopted a communiqué requesting a meeting of the National Committees so as to decide together. But we know that the leadership of the UGTT has already decided, that the Lawyers and the League for Human Rights will also join this "Higher Committee". In my opinion the battle for a coordination of the structures of self-organisation will be again perhaps possible at the level of this "Higher Committee" but it is far from being settled, because one senses that the pressure of electoral institutionalism is already strong. In short, it is a time when confusion is great. One is pushed to be part of the "Higher Committee" because the National Council is ceasing to exist.

I think that that in the future it will be necessary to lead a fight both within the "Higher Committee" and outside it and that pretty soon it will become clear that it amounts to an attempt at instrumentalisation, with the aim of counteracting the whole dynamic of the revolution which until now escaped the institutions.

**Where did the initiative for the creation of the "Higher Committee" come from?**

It came as a response to the request of the National Council which wanted to be recognised by the president and to have the prerogatives of legislating - by agreement with the central leadership of the UGTT, which did not consult the unions on this question. For more than a month that there has been no broad meeting of representatives of the structures of the UGTT, which would have been able to decide on its policy. Thus inside the UGTT there has been no possibility of discussing this orientation.

**What should be done now so that the revolutionary committees which exist locally can structure themselves at the regional and**

**national level? What can be done so that at a given time there can be a national meeting, controlled from below, and not a meeting of those who have been named as "leaders"?**

That is effectively the difficulty, because the danger is that the many people who take on responsibility for self-organisation at the rank and file level leave the "high politics" to others. With the announcement of elections on July 24 the Constituent Assembly "whether by a majoritarian or proportional mode of election "the dynamic of self management is undermined. Maybe in this intermediary period "between now and July 24 "the committees of self-organisation can play the role of link between this debate which starts "from above" and what the self-organised masses are discussing. In any case that is the current issue.

I am a member of one of these local councils in the governorate where I work. For the moment this debate is very embryonic there. The discussions of the council concern above all immediate questions and there is no discussion on what seems to be too abstract: the Constitution, political life. What interests and motivates people is what they can do. For the moment they are not thinking about how to go from there to the question of coordination of the councils.

**Are there forms of workers' control developing in the factories?**

For the moment not really. There are some experiences, in the enterprises belong to families linked to Ben Ali, where the workers have found themselves without any management "they have fled "and have taken responsibility for the management of these enterprises. There have also been quite a few farms which have been taken over by the workers, who have expelled those to whom Ben Ali's government had given these state properties. Around 80 big farms are involved. By way of example in one of these farms there are some 500 people if you included the employees and the members of their families. So there is a form of collective management of these farms. In the

educational structures also, in many places, there has been the election of those who direct them – rather than

them being named from above. In public transport there has been a big

strike to change the chief executive who was a member of the RCD. But this is not very generalised.

## Portuguese government asks for a bail-out two days after receiving an order in that direction from the main Portuguese banks

7 April 2011, by **Françisco Louçã**

Louçã mentioned that the government gave up its commitment after having received a command from the main Banks in Portugal, who had decided to strangle the financial support to the state, and pointed out again that if Portugal is in such a difficult situation this is not due to the fact that the Portuguese Parliament decided not to approve the new Stability and Growth Programme, the fourth presented in less than 12 months.

The chairman of Bloco de Esquerda's political commission, Francisco

Louçã, recalled that "in three disastrous economic decisions, which a left wing finance minister would never accept, the government managed to spend three times what is today's current budget": one billion Euros buying useless submarines to a German company, one billion Euros that the Portuguese Telecom did not pay in taxes and 2 billions for the bailout of the Bank BPN whose CEO has been arrested by illegal speculative mismanagement.

Francisco Louçã affirmed that the

Government has not been rigorous and underlined that Portugal has lived a lost decade (governments Barroso and Sócrates), during which the sovereign debt has doubled, sinking Portugal in the third recession in a decade, receding to the economic level of 2002.

Francisco Louçã announced that "the Bloco will present a plan to deal with the debt, to mobilise our capacities, to protect the economy, so that we can concentrate on what is essential".

From [Esquerda Net](#).

## The European workers movement: dangers and challenges

5 April 2011, by **Murray Smith**

There is nothing new about the fact that the European working class is under attack and on the defensive. There has been since the 1980s a systematic drive, increasingly coordinated by the European Union (EU), to impose neo-liberal policies in Europe. The aims have been to lower the cost of labour (wages, benefits, social programs), to remove limits on capital and to open up new sectors of the economy to private capital. So we have seen deregulation of the economy and of finance in particular,

the imposition of "flexible" working practices, an increase in precarious work, privatizations and "reform" of the social state in the sense of undermining universal rights to pensions, unemployment benefits, free healthcare and other programs. Collective bargaining agreements are identified as a structural problem, the weakening of unions defined as an objective (Financial Times editorial, 2010-05-10). Such a weakening has occurred in some countries, but not all. The speed and scale of the attacks

has varied across countries, but the direction is unmistakable. The cumulative effects have undermined, but not destroyed the welfare state that developed in large measure during the post-WWII economic boom.

Now ruling classes are stepping up the attacks. To use a military analogy, they are moving from a war of attrition to a war of movement, making a frontal assault on wages, working conditions, the public sector and social programs.

## A Frontal Assault

There is no doubt that Europe's ruling classes, acting through national governments and European institutions, backed by the IMF and the OECD, are quite consciously using the crisis and the deficits to push through a series of measures. They have the immediate problem of reducing deficits which are the product of governments bailing out the banks in 2008 and of the recession. This left several peripheral economies of the eurozone (Greece, Spain, Ireland, Portugal) with difficulty in borrowing money, with the danger of them defaulting on their debts, which would have serious effects on European banks. At the time of the Greek bail-out, Martin Wolf admitted in the Financial Times (2010-05-05), "It is overtly a rescue of Greece, but covertly a bail-out of banks". That is true not only of Greece. Banks and financial institutions from the big three of the EU — Britain, France and Germany — own more than half the Greek debt, and also more than half of Irish, Spanish, Portuguese and Italian debt. All of that came to a total of over \$2 trillion as of December 31, 2009 (figures from the Bank of International Settlements).

The price of bailouts to Greece and Ireland was the imposition of drastic austerity programs. In the spring of 2010 it was the Greek crisis that sounded the signal for a renewed offensive by EU governments. The conditions which were then imposed on the Greek people were draconian: wage reductions of 10 to 15 percent, in a country where the average monthly wage is 1200 euros; drastic reduction of the workforce in the public sector, replacing only one out of every five workers who retire; measures to facilitate sackings in the private sector; cuts in the health and education budget; further privatizations; raising the VAT, an across-the-board tax which hits the poorest hardest, from 19 to 23 percent; reduced pensions; raising the retirement age to 67. With minor variations, these measures have also been imposed on or adopted by Ireland, Portugal and Spain.

The object is in fact to use the crisis to impose harsher measures on the recalcitrant. This is not only to cut deficits and reassure the markets. It is also to accelerate the offensive that aims to make Europe more competitive in the new international context. This is fundamental. The social state, even weakened and under attack over the last thirty years, has lasted because Europe could afford it and because it helped pacify workers. Now the word is that the game's over. The shift in the balance of economic power, the rise of new non-European economies, is underlining the fact that the standard of living and level of social protection that has characterized Western Europe since 1945 is no longer viable, from the point of view of the ruling class.

In its most drastic form at present, the offensive affects the so-called "peripheral" eurozone economies, and also several countries in Eastern Europe. But it is a Europe-wide assault. We are seeing austerity measures and a major attack on unions in Italy (centred on the FIAT car factories), and in France we saw last year's counter-reform of pensions.

A case that stands out is Britain, where the new Conservative-Liberal Democrat ("ConDem") coalition that came to power in May 2010 has launched an offensive of breathtaking proportions. Taking the need to reduce the deficit as its theme, it has imposed sweeping cuts in public spending — direct government spending, but also the amount of money allocated by the central government to local authorities. This has led to those authorities closing down public services, cutting subsidies to volunteer groups and laying off tens of thousands of local government workers. Massive increases in student fees have provoked equally massive protests. VAT has gone up from 17 to 20 percent. Real wages today are no higher than they were in 2005 - in effect a six-year wage freeze, something not seen since the 1920s. In a parallel move the government has begun sweeping reforms of the health service which amount to the widespread privatization of services and will lead to large-scale job cuts.

## Left Politics in Europe

Faced with this offensive, what has been the reaction of the European workers' movement? In the first place, resistance has centred on the unions rather than on political parties. This is unsurprising when you look at the situation of the political Left. Without exception, the social democratic parties have rallied to the dominant neo-liberal discourse, enthusiastically or shamefacedly and with varying degrees of speed and internal conflict. This is true not only or even especially in theory, but above all in practice, in government. And they continue to do so today.

Three of the four "peripheral" countries — Greece, Spain, Portugal — are presided over by social democratic governments. If we look a little further back we can see the role played in government by social democracy in Germany between 1997 and 2005, as well as in the UK, France and elsewhere. There are some signs of re-positioning to the left in the French Socialist Party, the British Labour Party and the German SPD. However, these moves remain very timid and it is always necessary to look very critically at the left-wing rhetoric of social democratic parties in opposition — it invariably melts away under the pressure of office. Let us not forget that PASOK won the Greek elections in the autumn of 2009 with a left discourse which was in contrast not only with the preceding right-wing government but also with previous PASOK governments. Now, the PASOK government is doing as the EU and the IMF tell it to. Only three of its MPs refused to vote for the austerity programme last year (they abstained, and were promptly expelled from the PASOK parliamentary group). That does not necessarily exhaust the question of these parties. Under the pressure of the crisis and the scale of the attacks on the working class, cracks may appear. But this is likely to be a slow and uncertain process.

What about the forces to the left of social democracy? First of all there are the Communist parties. Some, while taking a position of opposition to



neo-liberalism, operate in a sectarian and divisive way. This is above all the case of the Greek Communist Party. Then there are the Communist parties (in France and Spain, notably) which are part of coalitions/fronts with other forces of the radical Left. Thirdly, there are the traditional far left organizations which in some ways mirror the CPs, ranging from sectarianism to serious involvement in new coalitions and parties. Finally, there are new parties involving forces from different backgrounds (as in Portugal and Germany). In some countries the radical Left, more or less united or divided, has serious weight (Portugal, Germany, Greece and France in particular). But nowhere has it succeeded in supplanting social democracy as the main force on the left.

## Unions

For the moment and for some time to come resistance will be centred on the trade unions, which are recognized as representative organizations by workers. The unions can mobilize. When they issue a call to action workers respond, especially if the unions act in a united way. The two big confederations in Greece, GSEE (private sector) and ADEDY (public), organized seven massive one-day general strikes in the course of 2010. The first one of 2011 took place on February 23. In France, in the movement against pension reform that began in the spring of 2010 and reached its high point in the autumn, the trade union confederations were the backbone of the movement. This was structured around a series of one-day national strikes and demonstrations which at their height put 3.5 million people in the street. In Portugal, the Communist Party-led CGTP confederation organized a demonstration of 300 000 people in Lisbon on May 29, 2010. Then on November 24, a general strike, called for the first time since 1988 by both the CGTP and the Socialist-led UGT, was massively supported, with 3 million strikers out of a workforce of 4.7 million. In Spain, a strike called on September 29 by the CCOO and UGT confederations was supported by 70 percent of workers.

But such one-day strikes are really the limit of what the big confederations will do. And governments know it. So it may be inconvenient, but they can stand it. The main union leaderships are conservative. They don't seek confrontation, they want consultation and conciliation. Their problem is that there is less and less of this to be had, and fewer concessions on offer. So they are pushed into reacting to attacks. Furthermore, many unions are linked to social democracy, formally or informally. So when they are faced with a social democratic government, it is one thing to protest, quite another to engage in an all-out confrontation.

Even quite moderate unions are forced into confrontation by the capitalist offensive. But they are not prepared to fight to the finish, whereas in general the governments and the employers are, making only marginal concessions. Sometimes after protesting the unions can be co-opted into collaborating with the government, as happened catastrophically in January in Spain over pension reform. Nevertheless, to the extent that the main unions do mobilize, they help to open up a space for resistance.

There is a problem of the need for unions to adapt to the new situation, for new leaderships to emerge, at all levels, which are capable of determined resistance to the employers' and government offensive. This implies a certain degree of political understanding of what is at stake. It also implies a democratization of unions which often function in an extremely bureaucratic way, in order to bring them under the control of the rank-and-file members. Such a reorientation and renewal of trade unionism can happen in two ways, by the appearance of new unions and by evolution within the existing confederations. When we look at the situation in each country there are positive signs. In France there are radical unions like Solidaires and the FSU, but there are also significant left currents within the main confederation, the CGT. In Italy the metalworkers' federation, FIOM, part of the main CGIL confederation, is spearheading resistance, on a national level and in particular at FIAT. In

Spain, in reaction to the sell-out over pensions, independent unions organized strikes and demonstrations at the end of January in Galicia, the Basque Country and Catalonia, and there were manifestations of opposition in the CCOO and the UGT.

## Far From Hopeless

There are other encouraging signs. One absolutely key factor is the role of young people. One of the most dynamic elements of the movement in France last autumn was the massive mobilization of school students. In Britain, the attacks of the ConDem government have given rise to what is shaping up to be the biggest movement of university and school students since the 1960s. There are also what can be described as "citizens' mobilizations," for example the growing and increasingly militant movement against the cuts imposed by the ConDem government in Britain, involving trade unionists, neighbourhood action groups and young people.

In spite of the scale of the challenge, the situation of the workers' movement in Europe is far from hopeless. It has been repeatedly demonstrated that workers are ready to mobilize if given a lead. Sometimes and in certain countries the offensive by employers and governments has been halted or slowed down. Opposition has been led by the unions, but it has involved students, young people and ad hoc fronts, sometimes including forces from social democracy.

But in spite of partial victories, the neo-liberal steamroller has continued to advance. The first task is to counter the offensive. Just saying no is not a sufficient response, but it is an essential starting point. The first line of defence is to mobilize against the measures. This is not in general very difficult. It is blindingly obvious that ordinary workers, particularly in the public sector which is everywhere under attack, young people and pensioners bear no responsibility for the economic crisis that has unfolded since 2007. The slogan, repeated in almost identical terms all over Europe, that "it's not up to the workers to pay

for the crisis, the bankers and financiers should pay" seems like simple common sense. The anger is there.

## A Key Weakness

But there is an ongoing weakness of the workers' movement, which gives the advantage to governments and the ruling class. The weakness is political. It lies first of all in the inadequate nature of the forces that are leading the struggle. But it also lies in the absence of a credible, visible political alternative to neo-liberalism. Such a political alternative is not a precondition for resisting attacks in the short term, perhaps even winning battles. But at a certain point the absence of a coherent alternative has a demobilizing effect.

One of the brakes on mobilization and resistance to the new offensive is the lack of a political alternative and indeed disillusion with politics, including and even especially with the traditional Left. This places a heavy responsibility on the radical Left. One of the strongest weapons of the ruling class for thirty years has been the claim that "there is no alternative." It has to be shown that there is one, that

anti-capitalism can move from protest to developing a program that aims to win majority support. This problem predates the present crisis, but the crisis has made it a much more urgent question.

One response on the left to the tactic of repeated one-day general strikes is to argue for an ongoing general strike. That would certainly be the best way to win. The fact that it has not so far happened anywhere does not mean that it is impossible. But there are obstacles - not only the passivity of union leaderships but many hesitations and doubts within a working class that is much more atomized and insecure than it was thirty or forty years ago. And it does not have to be all or nothing. France last year showed that even short of a full-scale general strike the actions of the most radical sections of workers and the youth mobilization, combined with mass demonstrations, gave extra force to the movement, which came close to winning.

The other lesson to be learned from France is that every time a victory has been won, and indeed whenever there has been a serious battle, the battle of ideas, winning over public opinion, countering the government's

propaganda, has been crucial. On this front, political organizations of the radical Left as well as global justice groups like ATTAC have played a key role.

It is useful to cite some positive examples. If we look at the victorious campaign in France against the European Constitutional Treaty in 2005, it was won by a mass political campaign involving forces from both the political and the trade union wings of the workers' movement, along with intellectuals, global justice activists and others. When the CPE (a government proposal for a weaker employment contract for young people) was defeated a few months later, it was defeated by what is best described as a social and political front, involving political parties and trade unions and spearheaded by youth and student organizations. And last year's movement in France saw a similar combination of strikes, street demonstrations and a mass political campaign. These kinds of movements can win, and they are also the crucible in which a renewal of the workers' movement can take place and new political forces can emerge.

*This article was originally published in the Canadian magazine [New Socialist](#).*

## Campaign to suspend the payment of external debt

**4 April 2011, by [Raid/Attac](#)**

We don't need to add to our debt, because Tunisia already has sufficient financial resources to address the current social emergency, as proven by a statement on the part of Mustapha Nabli. The former senior executive of the World Bank, ex-finance minister under Ben Ali and, since January 15, 2011, governor of Tunisia's Central Bank, has announced he intends to allocate 577 million euros from the country's budget to service the 2010 external public debt!

We demand that the Ghannouchi government suspend this debt payment considering the exceptional situation in which our country finds itself and the enormous social needs. This demand is based on the legal argument related to the state of necessity, which allows states in financial difficulty to suspend debt payments unilaterally and give priority to the needs of the population.

It is all the more necessary to suspend debt payments given that a significant

portion of Tunisia's external public debt is actually dictator Ben Ali's private debt, a debt that did not benefit the Tunisian people. During the suspension of payments, an audit of Tunisia's entire public debt (domestic and external) should be undertaken to determine what portion was illegitimate.

Raid Attac/Cadtm Tunisie is calling on all of the Committees for the Protection of the Revolution, as well as the political, social, labor and youth

movements, to unite for the immediate suspension of debt repayment. This is all the more urgent because the Ghannouchi government plans to hand over a large portion of this payment - 410 million euros - by April 2011.

Raid Attac/Cadtm Tunisie proposes to form a collective that will decide on the collective actions to be taken to achieve this goal. Suspending the payment of 577 million euros is preferable to entering into new loan agreements that will deepen Tunisia's

debt ! Suspending the payment of 577 million euros will not hurt Tunisia's creditors; however, making the payment will worsen the already dire situation of the Tunisian people !

Tunis, February 22, 2011

## Global Crisis: A Russian Perspective

4 April 2011, by **Boris Kagarlitsky**

**Deep-rooted changes have happened in Russia as a result of its embrace of neoliberalism. It seems to have affected the entire landscape of Russia, not only socio-political and economic but also all other facets of society. A very dramatic example is the forest fires that raged through much of the summer of 2010. It was reported that in August alone there were 554 fires in an area of more than 190,000 hectares (469,000 acres). Hopefully, in India it can serve as a dramatic lesson and warn people of the dangers of the state completely withdrawing itself and surrendering to market forces.**

The forest fires of this summer were really in a way the moral and cultural turning point. They revealed the state of permanent disaster into which Russian society has moved in the past 17 to 20 years. It will be absolutely wrong to present these fires purely as a natural disaster, which, of course, the government tried to do. Interestingly, no one in Russia was prepared to accept it. Ultimately and ironically, even the government had to accept that it was a man-made disaster. The fires did not result from global warming or climatic change and higher temperatures. Forest fires are common and happen everywhere, but the fact that it spread on such a large scale and became uncontrollable was because of privatisation. Neoliberal legislation in the form of a new liberal forest code led to the privatisation of Russia's forest resources. This also meant that the

state or its agencies could not intervene in these forests.

As a result of the privatisation of forests, structures that existed to deal with such situations had been dismantled and the management structure, technology and equipment that existed earlier were no longer available. Worse, in the current privatised context the fire brigades and fire-fighting agencies under state control could not enter the forests unless invited by the private owners. So you had a situation where once the forest fires started they were not, and could not be, brought under control, a fact that was not at all highlighted in the international media coverage of the forest fires.

Whole villages were wiped out in the range of 2 or 3 km of the fires. People were simply running away and some of them crossed to the Belarus side of the border and discovered that on the Belarus side, where the climate was the same, the temperatures were the same, there were no forest fires and even if there were some incidents they were extinguished immediately, maybe even in minutes. This is because, people discovered, they had retained the old Soviet system of state control over forests, and this meant that the forests were being monitored regularly and managed by personnel from the state forest services, and a close watch was being kept on preventing any such disasters.

There was a famous satellite picture of the forest fires that showed on the western side fires everywhere and on the eastern side no fires; one could

clearly see the frontier as the forest fires raged on the Russian side. That became very important in terms of revealing to the Russian public the total bankruptcy of the Russian elite-controlled state and the level of disorganisation of government at the local level. Even the Central government was shocked by the scale of corruption and insubordination at the local level. Putin then actually went to the villages that were destroyed and seeing the rampant corruption ordered that the reconstruction being done be recorded by video cameras and webcams to reduce the corruption and to ensure that the money given to the local authorities is actually used for the reconstruction of these villages. You know what happened next, most of the webcams and video cameras were stolen. So that was the end of the story. Both the forest fires and the attempts to control the situation became a huge scandal.

**In your book "The Empire of the Periphery: Russia and the World System" you say that even before the collapse of the Soviet regime, under perestroika itself Russia was being reduced to a mere raw materials exporter and its economy was reduced to dependence on raw materials. This was because in the years leading up to the years of perestroika the Soviet Union had already been reduced to a very indebted country.**

Actually, the huge debt was the turning point. Many people see

perestroika as the turning point, but I am trying to show in my analysis that the turning point happened much earlier, in the second half of the 1960s and the early 1970s. In the 1960s it became very clear to society and to the leadership that the Soviet society was in a deep need of transformation, and my point of view is that, ironically, the Soviet system was facing challenges not because of its failures but because of its successes. The system was heading towards what seemed a collapse not only because of the lack of democracy and so on but actually because of its successes and achievements. This is the kind of dialectics of history.

The Soviet system was designed to develop the country rapidly into an industrialised society and economy. So, actually within less than two generations the Soviet society had been transformed from a rural, agricultural, backward and, in many ways, weak society into a tremendous industrial power. By the way, this achievement of becoming an important industrial power was also realised by investments in science and technology and important breakthroughs in this field, including, very interestingly, the successes of Soviet geological science, which was able to show how rich the country was in terms of minerals and raw materials. The latter happened precisely because under the conditions of the Cold War the former Soviet Union had to prioritise access to and supply of raw materials and mineral resources. In the period beginning with the 1930s and into the war period and especially in the 1950s, there was an enormous effort to turn the country into a rich country in terms of resources.

This, however, could not continue running on the lines similar to those of the 1920s. So, in the late 1960s the bureaucracy made a conservative choice to consolidate the system, which needed to be backed by some kind of material feasibility. It was the crisis in 1973 that changed the situation, with an increase in the price of oil and the growing demand for raw materials in the West and around the world. With the sudden income and short-term prosperity due to the oil resources available within the Soviet

Union, the Soviet leadership believed it could buy everything the country could not produce. For example, in matters relating to Soviet science and technology outside of defence and the military, the policy of the government was: if there was a problem with technology, simply buy it from abroad for oil; if society is short of consumer goods, get them from abroad, and so on.

The problem at that point was that the Soviet Union was reintegrating into the global capitalist economy not as a successful industrial country with high scientific development, which it was, but as a producer of raw material, which meant a semi-colonial type of reintegration.

In my book, I point to the fact that much of Russia's history is imperial elite self-colonisation. The price that Soviet society paid during the elite self-colonisation period was very high. They were unconscious of the problem and did it spontaneously. But the problem was this logic of self-colonisation developed its own structures and outlook that reshaped the elites and their behaviour. So, by the end of the 1980s and in the beginning of the 1990s, it was a conscious effort of the elites who wanted to become a part of the global system and a part of the global bourgeoisie, sacrificing much of the achievements of the Soviet period, in order to obtain a good position in the club of the global elites. As one Russian politician said, our dream is to become members of the board of directors of the company called 'The World'.

### **Did Gorbachev represent that elite?**

Gorbachev was not conscious of what he was doing, but his entourage was truly conscious. Yeltsin was very conscious. That is why they had to replace Gorbachev. He was moving in that direction spontaneously, but not consciously. But what they had to sacrifice was not only some of the social achievements of the Soviet period, many of the achievements of industrialisation and the status of superpower, but the Soviet Union itself. So the country disintegrated.

### **The Collapse and after**

**You deal with that period of the collapse in your book. I am referring to the period of the collapse in 1991, especially the sudden and dramatic change in wage levels in Russian society compared with what they were in Soviet society. You provide figures in your book on the kind of differences in wage levels. The other important reference you make is on what was happening in the scientific world. As you mentioned earlier, in the Soviet period the scientific intelligentsia played a key role in knowledge power, in innovation power, within the constraints of the Cold War. In that very short period of less than a decade, two types of scientific intelligence emerged, one hooked to the West and privileged and the other completely cut off and impoverished. I see many parallels to India. I want you to elaborate about the collapse in 1991.**

After 1991, the opening up of the economy was accompanied with the crass ideological belief that products that are not needed by the world market don't deserve to exist at all. In a certain sense, if you extend that a bit further, what the Russian elite did was to say that people who are not in demand in the world market do not deserve to live at all. I am not exaggerating. The ruling elite, whether it be in government, the corporate executives, the oligarchs, thought and functioned exactly in this manner.

These goods were nevertheless needed by those people who used them and by the people who produced them, as they created employment and subsequently development. In that sense, when our products are not marketed at the global level, it does not mean that the products are not necessary. However, the complete opening up of the economy and the elimination of all sorts of protection for industry led to the destruction of much of the industrial capacity.

Further, much was achieved through the combination of open markets and a high exchange rate for the rouble. At first there was hyperinflation that led



to the almost complete destruction of popular savings, while the elite faced no problem as their privatisation was not based on sales but on giving the assets away to their friends. The actual savings of the people were destroyed, but [this] did not damage the process. Then, the hyperinflation led to the elimination of competition from the bottom, in the process of privatisation and the opening up of the economy. People, apart from the elite, could not use the advantages of the open market policy though they were minimal; even within that approach people were at a disadvantage. After they wiped out the popular savings, they started increasing the price and stabilising the rouble, which meant that those who had accumulated resources and had started accumulating money/capital were now in a favourable position.

It was a very conscious policy of depressing a large section of society while creating good conditions for the newly emerging bourgeois-upper class to create a society that is more socially differentiated compared to the Soviet society, which was very egalitarian. However, the side effect of this policy with an open market alongside a currency that was overpriced was that the industry was becoming less competitive, which meant that the only thing you could sell was natural resources such as minerals and oil, which had a worldwide demand. Other resources were facing losses. For example, during that time, coal mines were running at a loss and the World Bank gave Russia a \$500-million credit to close the mines in Siberia. In 1998, just before the devaluation of the rouble, Russia was asked by the World Bank to buy coal from Australia, as it was cheaper, though Russia had large coal deposits. They gave the \$500-million credit to shut down the Russian mining industry! But, fortunately for Russians, the World Bank money was stolen by some people in the Ministry or government and nothing reached Siberia where it had to be spent.

A few months later, the government asked for more money from the World Bank, but this time the Bank refused as it insisted on being told what happened to the initial credit

provided. At that time the rouble crashed; it used to be six roubles to a U.S. dollar, but after the crash it was 12 roubles and a few months after that 24-30 roubles to the dollar. By the way, Moscow Times reported, with a glint of pride, that the Russian rouble was now the fastest falling currency in the world. Right after the crash, one suddenly discovered that Russian coal was competitive; the very same mines, workers and managers all of a sudden, given the devaluation of the rouble, became very productive and profitable.

When you say that particular people and products are not capable of competing on the world market, among other things, it is not about the products, people's skills or the way they work, it is completely independent of its people. It is, on the contrary, how financial institutions operate, like how they fiddle with the exchange rate of the currency. So, the Russian economy suffered both from the open markets and from the policy of financial stabilisation, which inflicted even more damage. We ended up losing 40 per cent of our industrial capacity of the 1990s. A disastrous figure, it was one of the worst-known historical disasters in peacetime; to make matters worse, the lost industrial capacity was never recovered. Even though the first decade of the 21st century was considered a successful decade with a lot of economic growth, it did not lead to Russia recovering much of its industrial capacity.

## Social compromise

**The way in which Russian capitalism emerged, based on the Soviet Union's managerial system, and the subsequent events of the 1990s and the emergence of an oligarchic capitalism are in a sense similar to the way in which oligarchic capitalism is developing in our societies also. This is true for much of Asia, including India, and we can see how Indian and Asian democracies have also become oligarchic democracies. In the context of the rise of oligarchic capitalism in Russia post the Soviet Union, can you briefly cover**

## **the transition from Boris Yeltsin and Victor Chernomyrdin to Yevgeny Primakov?**

There are two stages, the first was when Yegor Gaidar and the most extreme free marketers ran the country for less than two years and were forced to leave. Their political positions started weakening even before the conflict of October 1993. Chernomyrdin emerged earlier, but Chernomyrdin initially didn't have enough power to change the logic of the transition. So by 1994, a new compromise was made between the industrialists/managers and the new financial oligarchy that emerged out of the party structures and the Youth Communist League [Komsomol] structures, and they managed privatisation together. While the party people ran the show in general, specific financial structures were often devolved by junior partners from the former Komsomol. Both groups of people were extreme free marketers and neoliberals, while the industrialists were a bit more moderate as they did not want the destruction of the industries.

In the period between 1993 and 1998, when privatisation was achieved, the property was divided between the new oligarchs and the party managers, but the permanent looting of the country's resources led to economic crisis of tremendous scale and left the country in a bad shape. And in 1998 the rouble crashed, and that led to a sudden forced shift to some kind of Keynesian policy that Primakov and the others tried to represent. [It was] a social compromise involving the most realistic, progressive elements of the Russian managerial class to try and save as much of industry as possible, and they succeeded in doing it.

So, the Primakov government was the most successful government in post-Soviet Russian history as it managed to reverse the trend and the economy started growing. However, it was like any other reformist, social democratic government that did not have a strong power base in the trade unions, in the labour movement. Immediately after they technically fixed the capitalist system or did their jobs, the capitalist system did not need them anymore. So Primakov was fired and after an

interim period, an interregnum, Putin was made the new top manager.

## Putin's Bureaucracy

Putin tried to give neoliberalism a bureaucratic face, not a human face but a bureaucratic face, trying to use with maximum efficiency the traditions and methods of Russian bureaucracy to manage the transformed economy, which became neoliberal. It can be perhaps called neoliberalism with a bureaucratic face.

Talking of Putin, why the bureaucracy was important must be understood. A powerful bureaucracy was required as the oligarchs were becoming dangerous to themselves. Just as children when they are playing with matches or scissors or knives, and when you take it from them they get upset, the oligarchs behaved in a similar fashion when Putin was actually protecting them from their own stupidity and irresponsibility.

The Russian elite largely understood this and backed Putin, while some individuals disapproved. Those who continually misbehaved were thrown out. Specifically [Boris] Berezovsky, [Vladimir] Gusinsky and [Mikhail] Khodorkovsky, continued to strongly disapprove. They managed to force Berezovsky to leave the government and go into exile. Gusinsky was arrested, released within days, and forced to go to Israel as he was running a propaganda campaign against Putin. As for Khodorkovsky, who was very aggressive and desired to become the Prime Minister and was trying to organise a coup d'état, he was arrested. However, it was not for his political intrigues or for an attempted coup d'état but for not paying taxes, like Al Capone.

**When you talk of the technocratic elite in the policy sense... and your reference to the scientific intelligentsia that it believes that if you privatised, liberalised and took away the so-called yokes of government we will be moving fast... On the other hand, the technocratic elite thinks that with**

**technocratic reforms (bringing in greater digitisation of government services and so on) things would happen. In this context, in your book you say that "the scientific intelligentsia saw themselves in the 1990s as a potential counter-elite". You also quote Alla Glinchinova, senior researcher at the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences, which is so apt in our Indian context. She is quoted as saying, "Some perceived the liberal slogan of privatisation in the name of freedom, progress and the overcoming of stagnation as a path to weakening and doing away with informational and administrative inequality and privileges. Both elites put their stake on economic and technological change, expecting positive results for themselves." Can you tell us about the scientific intelligentsia in the Russian context?**

There was some sociological research done in the remaining scientific development centres of Russia, like Dubna and Chernogolovka. The research shows the deep concerns of the researchers themselves and that the scientific and technical intelligentsia was deeply divided into two segments. The people who are involved in a kind of marketisation drive and who think that marketisation will let them have a chance to get more money for their creativity and intelligence, and the others who are deeply opposed to that kind of approach.

There are some people who research on certain things that are marketable, but who consider it wrong to do scientific research only for the markets. But now, with the launch of a new scientific project by the government [called] "Skolkovo", a letter was sent to about 700 Russian scientists abroad urging them to come back to Russia alongside offers of a lot of money if they came back. Initially many scientists were interested, but not a single scientist has agreed. A Russian Nobel Prize winner, Dr. Game Novoselov, responded for all those who refused by saying, "All you're saying is about money and we are not interested in the money, we are

interested in science. If you offered us real scientific opportunities to achieve something for the country or for humanity, we could be interested/attracted."

This difference of vision shared by the people shows that the government does not care about science or research; they just want a few famous scientists back in Russia, a form of public relations exercise. They think that you can buy anybody by just offering money. This is a turning point for much of this community who are saying, "If we are scientists, it is about science, not money." The Skolkovo project is clearly failing, and its failure reveals an important point about what is happening to the intelligentsia with the shift towards research of some substance, away from the market.

## China and the US

**Turning to the world economy, I want to draw your attention to China. What is China's role in propping up the U.S. economy, as it seems to be playing a major role?**

Jayati Ghosh made a very important point recently, that China and to a certain extent India are becoming hostages of their own export-oriented economies given the lack of new markets. Their market space is actually shrinking. They are reaching a situation when to continue exporting to the West they have to start subsidising the West directly or indirectly. China can look technically as being in good shape. However, the problem is that it is actually not, and to continue moving in its current economic path China has to do a lot to save the American economy, unless there is a structural change. All the current measures to save American consumption will be short-term and will not solve the problem in the long run.

Ferguson, a conservative English historian, coined the term "Chamerica" and said that it was a marriage of convenience. It is like a marriage between a hardworking man (China) and a lazy but prestigious woman (America) who spends the hardworking man's money. Ferguson

thinks that this marriage will last. I, however, have my doubts.

**How much global economic clout do you think China has, and how much of this clout will it use to ask for changes in the global economy and in the global system?**

The problem is that China does not seem to want major changes in the global system. China is looking to get a higher status within the current global system and not [seeking] the transformation of the global system. China, as far as I understand, is not interested in the role of a hegemon, not because it is not ambitious but because the Chinese look at the world in a different way. They consider it unnecessary to accept all the problems, pains and difficulties connected to the role of hegemony. They are satisfied with the role of regional dominant power and being at the same time an increasingly important global economic power. Why should China try to imitate American takeover, it is not of interest to its national elite to become a global hegemon.

China is not trying to shape or change the global system, but is just improving its status, position and role within the system. That is exactly the contradiction. Having a higher role within a system that is going down is a very dangerous strategy because it means more trouble with a higher status in the system. This is slowly happening, as China has to spend more money on certain issues it is not interested in, as it cannot avoid them.

**In your book, you make the distinction between orthodox Marxism's analysis of what is happening to the global capitalist economy and the world systems approach, while indicating that both are important. Can you elaborate on where you see the difference between the two?**

This has been developed further in my next book *From Empires to Imperialism*. Capitalism can be defined in two ways, either it is a mode of production or it is a system. For example, if it is a mode of production then the key aspect of it is the possibility of exploiting wage

labour. If it is a system where the key element is accumulation (and, by the way, Karl Marx gives enough material for both definitions), you can accumulate through exploiting non-wage labour, slave/serf labour.

It was a very important correction that was made by Michael Pokrovsky, a great Russian historian, that there are two types of capital as well: production/industrial capital and trade capital. Trade capital has a model of accumulation that does not necessarily need much of wage labour, while industrial capital can only exploit wage labour, otherwise it is not capital. In that sense, the real division is within capitalism, because there are two types of capital.

Today they are interconnected; we do not have corporations that are purely trade corporations and purely production corporations, there are both. But still, even within these corporations, one or the other function is dominant. In that sense, neoliberalism is exactly the domination of the trade function of capital. And my point of view is that this contradiction just reflects the reality. It is not the contradiction within Marxist analysis; it is the contradiction within the reality of capitalism that Marxist analysis reflects. The only point is that we have to make it conscious. So we have to say there is a contradiction within these two aspects.

**Where would you see the role of global finance capital in this?**

The aspect that was absent in Pokrovsky's analysis, which I tried to fix and recently came to the conclusion which I am still working on, is that finance capital makes alliances with one or another type of capital, thus making this particular kind of capital dominant. So, at one point, when trade capital is dominant and doing well then financial capital goes into the trade capital, disinvesting the production very often.

But then, once this model goes into crisis, the financial capital that is the most flexible element moves back into alliance with production/industrial capital, and thus fluctuates. In that sense, financial capital can become

hegemonic; it controls and shifts the alliances.

My understanding of the current crisis is that at some point the alliance between the trade function of capital and financial capital will be somehow weakened. And financial capital will move back to supporting more productive forms of capital, which will also mean a return to some kind of neo-Keynesian approach. However, the point is whether it will work out. When you move from one form of capitalism to another, opportunities open up for an attempt to go beyond capitalism; it is not just about transforming the world but to propose and successfully practise some non-capitalist or post-capitalist solutions.

They appear repeatedly during specific moments of crisis when the balance of forces within capitalism fades, such as the Russian Revolution, the situation after the Second World War, and later specifically in Latin America when the revolution happened in Venezuela. It was possible because the crisis started in Latin America before it started elsewhere. Latin America, however, was left alone because the United States was busy dealing with the geopolitics of the Middle East [West Asia]. So, these are specific moments where the balance of forces shift and alternatives are needed anyhow. The model currently running is unsustainable and needs change. There is always an opportunity that during this change you can go beyond capitalism.

**What is the special emphasis that you place on [Nikolai] Kondratiev's analysis, what is commonly referred to as Kondratiev waves or cycles in looking at the periodic crisis of world capitalism, with reference to the current context?**

The idea of Kondratiev that I find the most exciting is the idea of reconstruction. That at some point capitalism goes through a process of reconstruction, so the model changes. He does not specify why and how it changes, but at some point you are going to come to some kind of a break where you have to build a new model, and he says this is the period when

there are wars and revolutions. So I think this idea of reconstruction is more interesting than Kondratiev cycles as such.

Economists still debate whether Kondratiev cycles continue and on the length of the cycle. Ironically, Kondratiev cycles are the more problematic aspect of his theory and the less developed aspect of his theory than the concept of reconstruction as a necessary stage of development when one model is replaced by another. Therefore, to me the concept of reconstruction is central in my reading of Kondratiev.

**Why does it figure so little in the analysis of the world system?**

That is exactly the weakness of the

world system analysis. In my new book, the introduction will be devoted mostly to the crisis of the world system theory or world system analysis because I think there are big problems with the world systems analysis, partly reflected by the last works of Andre Gunder Frank (ReOrient) and Giovanni Arrighi (Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the Twenty-First Century). In my opinion, these are very bad as scholarly works; they reflect the weaknesses within the world system theory, which was actually moving away from Marxism and gradually dropping its links to the more traditional Marxist analysis, for which at the moment they have to pay the price intellectually.

This kind of analysis was essential to

correct some of the shortcomings of classical Marxism, but it was in no way a methodology to replace Marxist analysis, but rather to supplement it. Once the world system theory tried to replace Marxism rather than supplement it, it discovered many of its own weaknesses, contradictions and gaps within itself, which it failed to refill. That was the decline of the world systems analysis, which is now the problem, and intellectually it is declining, is producing less and less material of value to understand and respond to the current crisis in global capitalism.

From *Frontline*, Wednesday, January 12, 2011. Boris Kagarlitsky's ZSpace Page:  
<http://www.zcommunications.org/glob..>

# Climate change and food sovereignty caravan

**3 April 2011, by Bangladesh Krishok Federation**

The majority of this population are poor and dependent on agriculture, and are thus more vulnerable to tropical cyclones, storm surges, floods, and droughts. For example, in 2004 severe floods destroyed over three quarters of food crops, and left 10 million people homeless. There is also a desertification process occurring in the northern districts of the country. Finally, the coping capacity in Bangladesh remains limited due to the relatively poor physical infrastructure.

These trends were confirmed by the Bangladesh Krishok Federation (peasant farmer's organisation, BKF) and Bangladesh Kishani Sabha (peasant women's organization, BKS) who organized 31 workshops in different parts of Bangladesh from 17th December 2009 to 27th January 2010.

Those workshops were organized to assess the impact of climate change. Peasant communities commented on the increasing length of hot dry periods; decreasing water table levels;

increased incidence of flooding; changes in weather (such as cold periods and fogs) causing failure of crops; increased cyclone activity and high tidal inundation causing salination of rivers and soil; and changes in the frequency and character of the Monsoon disrupting traditional farming practices.

Further, in Bangladesh, food security for peasants has been undermined by issues such as unequal land distribution (especially landlessness) and lack of credit.

As a result, there is an urgent need for both education concerning climate change amongst the peasant population and mobilisation of the population around key issues such as access to land and food sovereignty. Food sovereignty has been recognised by peasant communities and movements as one of the most important practices that enable peasant communities to both mitigate, and adapt to, the effects of climate change. Food sovereignty implies control over territory and biodiversity;

self-governance; and ecological sustainability and has acted as a point of encounter, common interest and solidarity. As a result, the BKF has been actively involved in the international farmer's network, La Via Campesina (LVC), whose opposition to dominant responses to climate change has combined a commitment to the importance of localized forms of agriculture, and food sovereignty.

The BKF and BKS are planning to organise a Climate Change and Food Sovereignty Caravan during late 2011, in order to begin to address these pressing issues, and seeks funding in order to support such an important initiative. Representatives from the BKF participated in the "Trade and Climate Change" caravan that preceded the COP15 mobilisations in Copenhagen in 2009 and also participated in those mobilisations as a member of LVC.



## Aims of the Caravan

The Caravan will be organized by the Bangladesh Krishok Federation and Bangladesh Kisan Sabha who will be the host movements in Bangladesh. The broad aim of the caravan is to address the key issues of climate change and food sovereignty, because there is an ongoing and urgent need to

(i) inform and mobilize vulnerable peasant populations throughout Bangladesh in order to respond to the threats of climate change; and

(ii) build upon international solidarity networks concerning climate change

and food sovereignty, such as those nurtured within La Via Campesina of which the BKF is a participant.

In particular, the purpose of the caravan will be to deepen and extend networks of grassroots movements in South Asia and build international solidarity around specific campaigns concerning issues of climate change and food sovereignty. Food sovereignty is one of the most important practices that enables peasant communities to both mitigate, and adapt to, the effects of climate change. Moreover, it also represents one of the most important solutions to the threats that climate change poses for the planet. The caravan will include a gender perspective on these issues throughout its duration. It is expected that there will be

participation from grassroots movements from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

The focus of the caravan will be on

(i) movement to movement communication, learning, and the sharing of experiences, skills and strategies, for example concerning sustainable farming practices, and traditional and indigenous knowledges;

(ii) education of communities about the effects of climate change;

(iii) holding training and workshops; and

(iv) conducting rallies. For example, it is expected that along the route of the caravan, seeds will be planted as a key symbol of food sovereignty.

## Petition campaign success

### 3 April 2011, by **NSSP**

Marching to meet the IGP after assembling in front of the Fort railway station a delegation consisting of Fr. Sakthivel, women's leader Sandya Ekneligoda, senior lawyers SG Punchiheva and Srinath Perera, Former Provincial Council Chairmen Abu Yusuf and Dr. Vickramabahu Karunaratne handed over the petition to the IGP on March 24th .

They explained to the police that though complaints have been made to the relevant police stations about the assault and violence made by an organized pro government gang on 7 Dec 2010, and sent detailed letters by registered post to the IGP and DIG Gampaha, no investigation has been conducted as far as they are aware. In their complaints Suresh Kumar Gunarathne, son of the Deputy Minister of State Resources & Enterprise Development, Sarath

Gunarathne has been named as the leader of the gang.

The IGP has called for reports sent by the Negombo head quarter police, and after going through all documents admitted there is lapse in the investigations. He has also admitted to the delegation of activists that the assault was a serious incident with severe damage to a vehicle carrying passengers.

He said that the investigation was immediately withdrawn from the Gampaha region, which is in Minister Gunaratne's electorate and entrusted it to Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Eric Perera, Director Special Investigation Unit (SIU). Also he directed the SSP to immediately discuss details of coordination with witnesses and to proceed with the investigation. Furthermore we were

promised that since it is now directly under the IGP in the Colombo head quarters, the investigation will be free of any undue influence.

Dr. Vickramabahu who said that they "exchanged relevant information in a subsequent discussion with the SSP of SIU" expressed hope that the IGP Dr Balasooriya, a chemistry graduate who did research in to narcotics, honours his pledge.

Video

<http://www.youtube.com/user/Abhayan...>

Petition

[http://www.petitions24.com/to\\_igp\\_in\\_sri\\_lanka](http://www.petitions24.com/to_igp_in_sri_lanka)

On ESSF: Sri Lanka: On the attempts to assault Dr. Vickramabahu Karunaratne

# The road from Sidi Bouzid to Algiers

2 April 2011, by **Karima Bennoune**

On Saturday March 19, a group of about a hundred stalwart demonstrators stood on the Place de 1er Mai (First of May Square), at the now weekly gathering called by one section of the recently bifurcated CNCD. They included activists from opposition political parties, women's rights advocates, and people who were just plain fed up with their lot. This small but resolute troop was surrounded (and vastly outnumbered) by policemen in blue jumpsuits who pushed them around, and attempted to make them simply go away. At one point these cops encircled a small group of women, including a 62 year old wearing a long robe who says she recently lost her housing, and forced them out of the square altogether. Their grievances will be much less easy to dislodge.

I am sorry to see fewer people demonstrating now than in February, and ask an expert on the protests, the journalist Madjid Makedhi [38], who has covered many of them for the El Watan newspaper, why this is the case. He says the diminished numbers are entirely understandable in light of the massive security presence that has been mobilized to counter the marches. There is even a helicopter overhead. And, as if to underscore his explanation, as we talk he is forced to move from place to place by policemen, all the while explaining that he is a journalist. According to Makedhi,

'Algerians have been separated from politics by these security policies of the government. Today ordinary Algerians can only think about their daily lives, about taking care of their children, and trying to have enough money to satisfy the needs of their families.' But he is quick to point out that, "the fact that people are trying to live a normal life does not mean that they refuse change. It is not that they are against these efforts, it is that the government has installed fear in

Algeria.'

Still, the activists refuse to give up.

Cherifa Kheddar, the prominent women's rights advocate I saw arrested on Feb. 12 [39], has been at every single Saturday protest since then. She was in the First of May Square again on March 19 with her sign calling for the abolition of the gender-discriminatory family code, and carrying a bag full of similar placards for others. However, the authorities ripped them all up. Finding herself empty-handed, she then raised her hand in the victory sign, and asked,

'Are you going to try to take my fingers away from me now?'

Why were they still here? Yacine Tegua, from the leftwing opposition party known as the Mouvement Démocratique et Social (MDS), explained to a group of journalists:

'We are sick of seeing young people having no prospect but to kill themselves. Today, we have workers who are threatening to commit collective suicide. We can either get together and express ourselves democratically and develop collective solutions, or we can leave people facing a wall, facing death.'

His concern took me back 48 hours to my visit to Sidi Bouzid, the town about three hours south of Tunis that gave birth to the Tunisian revolution [40]. This remote city with its bustling main street and omnipresent trilingual revolutionary graffiti ("Stand up for your rights." "Stay strong, Tunisia. The world is proud of you.") was the setting for the desperate catalytic act of Mohamed Bouazizi [41].

Bouazizi was the - now-legendary - unemployed man who set himself on fire in front of the provincial headquarters when the produce he

sold to support his family was confiscated and he was slapped by an official. He died on January 4, and thereby launched a now truly transnational revolutionary moment. A young man in Bouazizi's neighborhood tells me he not only poured gasoline all over himself, but drank it before setting himself alight. Looking at the terrible pictures of the 26-year-old completely bandaged in hospital, you can only shudder to think how much he might have suffered. When I visit Sidi Bouzid, Mohamed Bouazizi's picture adorns the public square downtown. And it is right here that I find (left) other young people on March 17 - three months to the day of the now world-famous self-immolation - with desperate eyes and urgent appeals, seemingly an entire generation of Bouazizis, possessing diplomas that have still not translated into jobs, on hunger strike since March 14 in a tent.

These same young people had started the Tunisian revolution when they took to the streets in December after the suicide, but are still waiting for that same revolution to concretely improve their own lives. They still call for "bread, freedom and dignity." ("el khobz, el houria wa'l karama") Importantly, the revolution does mean that they can now express their agony freely, and are allowed to remain here in the public square. Nevertheless, many of them told me:

'I am ready to die.'

Will governments in North Africa - and beyond - save this generation of would-be Bouazizis?

Unfortunately, regional self-immolation did not begin in December 2010. In both Tunisia and Algeria, I am told that people have been setting themselves on fire in protest for the last two years [42]. Mohamed Bouazizi, however tragic, brave and fateful his action, was not the first and

certainly not the last...

Just three days after my trip to Sidi Bouzid, on Sunday March 20, I spend the day in Algiers at a protest (right) of teachers and the new National Committee for the Defense of the Rights of the Unemployed. About 600 protestors lined both sides of the street near the seat of the Presidency for hours, singing, chanting slogans ("hukuma degage" or "government out," borrowed from Tunisia; al hukuma dar al ajaza, "the government is an old folks home"; al shaab yourid iskat el chomage, "a bilingual rendering of "the people want to bring down unemployment"; and still other slogans calling on the national and international press to broadcast their demands). They sing "miyat wa khamse wa khamseen milliards" ("155 billion") [43], the song written by Amazigh Kateb about the foreign exchange reserves Algeria has from selling its natural gas. As the blogger Amine Menadi from Collectif Algerie Pacifique told me:

'This country is rich but its people are poor.'

Everyone has demands today. The demonstrating teachers want better working conditions. The protesting jobless want decent jobs. On the other side of the street, waving their Algerian passports, stood a group of now unemployed workers who fled Libya during the current conflict and want to be assisted by the state. More than anything, they all want to be heard. The members of the National Committee for the Defense of the Rights of the Unemployed were supposed to gather at the iconic Martyrs Square [44]. However, when I arrived there this morning I found it entirely shut down by policemen, and learned by phone that in the face of this blockade, they decided to join the teachers up the hill in the Golfe region of Algiers.

At the new location, there were as many policemen in riot gear as there were demonstrators. They lined the street in front of the protestors. (bottom photo) I wonder what the young policemen must be thinking as they stand in the street all day with their youthful counterparts. Fadia Babou, a serious 24 year-old

unemployed woman in a corduroy jacket who used to work for a radio station, tells me:

'Really, the young policemen are living in the same situation we are.'

In recent weeks, there have been multiplying manifestations of discord – communal guards marching, wounded veterans sitting in, doctors on strike, community meetings demanding change. Many more are planned. One of the young teachers tells me the problem is that each sector is demonstrating separately and there is currently no structure available to bring them all together. He is not hopeful about this as he says all the political parties are discredited and no single forum appeals to everyone. Notably, both the teachers and the unemployed have come from around the country to be here. Some have travelled over night by bus from Mostaganem, a seven-hour journey. I interview one of them, Dalila Touati (left), a young woman with long blond hair and a degree in physics, who was arrested this past Wednesday March 16 for distributing flyers calling on people to attend this very demonstration, an act which she says was considered tantamount to inciting revolt [45]. She spent 24 hours in custody, was repeatedly questioned by police, and is supposed to appear in court on March 26. Dalila is moved to tears as she tells me she is not political and simply wants decent work for everyone. Her words take me back to the tent of simmering youth in central Sidi Bouzid, when she pleads that young people not have to kill themselves but instead be given the possibility to build a future.

Standing next to her, a 28 year- old man also from Mostaganem says,

'We thank the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions for the fact that there is no police violence here today. The authorities know this situation could explode anytime, and might just do so if a cop touches a demonstrator.'

But he also notes that only one woman came with the group of ten present today from Mostaganem because they were frightened by Dalila Touati's arrest. He says that everyone will go to her court appearance. I hope he is

right. Her unassuming bravery merits widespread solidarity. Later in the day, I am told that some of these protestors are planning to spend the night on the sidewalk, refusing to give up the fight. They have taken the lyrics of Bob Marley, via the message of the graffiti in Sidi Bouzid, to "stand up for your rights" seriously [46]. However, Algeria's road ahead may be quite different than that of Tunisia or Egypt. The lingering nightmares of the 1990s, when some 200,000 died in a terrible civil war with the fundamentalist armed groups, are partly responsible for this. According to this week's Jeune Afrique, the distinction is also partially due to the fact that much more freedom of expression is possible here than in Ben Ali's Tunisia and this provides something of a pressure valve [47]. The possible impact of the nearby conflict in Libya is a wild card. And Algeria possesses the resources to buy off sectors of the society, for a while at least.

However, one of the biggest obstacles may be a lack of popular belief in the possibility of change.

On March 19, I attended a discussion at the Chihab bookstore of a recent work about Ali Boumendjel, an important figure in Algeria's independence movement . Boumendjel, a lawyer, died in French custody in 1957 after 43 days of torture. Author Malika Rahal says that generation of activists was able to make the sacrifices they did because of their conviction that another future, beyond colonialism, was possible. Today, notwithstanding recent events in neighboring countries, the belief in the real possibility of an alternative future is shaky.

I interview Boumendjel's niece, the distinguished professor of medicine and women's rights activist Fadila Chitour [48]. At the Feb. 12 demonstration in Algiers, she was thrown to the ground and trampled during a police charge. Today she explains to me that many Algerians suffer from what she calls wounded memories, from the sense that so many deaths in the country since independence – in the protests of October 1988, in the Berber spring of 2001, in the terrible 1990s – have

been in vain. Hence, there is a pervasive feeling that making sacrifices now will not change anything. This profound disillusionment with politics, which echoes Makedhi's assessment, makes rallying the population to protest much more difficult than elsewhere. Dr. Chitour is, however, persuaded that change will come to Algeria. She asserts:

'It is ineluctable.'

The optimism expressed by some at this last set of protests - by a brightly smiling young teacher in hijab, by those who traveled over night at a high cost relative to their means to attend - bears witness to this. However, the big question for Chitour

is not whether change will come or when, but how:

'Will it be by peaceful means or not?'

She says that Algerians are terrorized by the idea that blood could flow in the streets again. And so, she and the other members of the CNCD will keep organizing their peaceful protests every Saturday trying to make sure that grievances are channeled non-violently. Meanwhile, the Committee of the Unemployed will meet soon to assess its next move as well. My fervent hope is that the leaders of Algeria will heed the calls of the peaceful protestors, while that is possible. This will require amongst other things responsiveness to the

youth, unity in the opposition and a seizing by all of this "moment of grace" as the Tunisian human rights activist Alya Chamari described this spring across North Africa.

Is there a road that leads from Sidi Bouzid to Algiers?

That remains to be seen. Still, I cannot forget what Chamari says when I ask her if there is a message for Algerians, and others, from the Tunisian revolution:

'You must never lose hope. And you must count on your youth.'

From IntLawGrrls (a short version of this post appeared in *The Guardian*).  
<http://intlawgrrls.blogspot.com/201...>