



IV436 - May 2011

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Camp Barcelona: V for victory

30 May 2011, by **Esther Vivas, Josep María Antentas**

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

Police provocation? Error of calculation? Whatever the case, the movement has achieved a major political victory. The image of a nervous Felip Puig responding to journalists at his appearance before the press was a clear sign of the political and policing fiasco of the Catalan Government. More than the formal “reconquest” of the square, the

triumph in the face of this first repressive attempt has given even more strength and energy to the activists and has only increased the sympathy they enjoy from the majority of the population. After a loss of media centrality last week, once the municipal and regional elections were over, the police attack on the camp in Barcelona has again given an important visibility to the movement of “los indignados”.

More than 12,000 people, according to media figures, went to the plaza Catalunya on Friday evening. Before, at 5 pm, several thousand took part in a march against public health cuts, convened by the platform of “indignant,” health workers, departing from the monument to Columbus and culminating with a triumphal entry into the plaza Catalunya. Without a doubt, the assembly held at the end of the day was the biggest since the movement began. The most prominent slogans conveyed a very clear political message: “We won’t move from Plaza

Catalunya!”, “Felip Puig resignation”, “Here begins the revolution!”. The concentrations in the camps in the rest of the Spanish state have been also more numerous over the past few days. Anti-repressive solidarity has given new impetus to the movement, after a week in which tiredness had accumulated.

It is impossible to know how long the camps and assemblies in the squares will last, but this is not a temporary or isolated movement. It is the tip of the iceberg of an accumulated social unrest that is beginning to become a mobilization. The camps and occupations of the squares should not be analyzed as ends in themselves. They act now simultaneously as symbolic reference points and base of operations, a lever to propel future mobilizations and a loudspeaker to amplify ongoing struggles. Throughout the week, several sectors in struggle have participated in the activities of our particular “Tahrir square” in Barcelona, including: collectives in

favour of the right to decent housing and families under threat of eviction, workers from Telefónica in the fight of the announcement by the company of 6,000 lay-offs and students and university workers in protest against cuts in higher education, whose mobilisation on Thursday May 26 was more than impressive taking into account that we are at the end of courses and on the eve of exams.

Almost two weeks after 15M and the beginning of the camps the movement

of our small "May 2011" faces several challenges. The first, to continue territorializing, building the assemblies in the neighbourhoods and cities and encouraging popular self-organisation. The second, to increase efforts to seek ties with the working class, workplaces in struggle and combative trades unionism and thus keeping the pressure on major unions, baffled by a movement that they did not expect and which radically challenges their orientation towards social dialogue. The third, completing the momentum of the camps with a unifying date of powerful mobilization

in the Spanish state as a whole and, as far as possible, at the international level. Hence the need to start working on June 19 as the date for global mobilization launched by the Barcelona camp.

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

28th of May, 2011

May Day - fighting for denuclearisation

30 May 2011, by Terry Conway

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

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

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

threat, and unemployment problems.

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

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

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

Mr. Yutaka Suzuki, president of the Onahama Area Council of Unions,

presented his relative's serious state of damages, and said: "my cousin of fisherman is still missing. These are our actual situation, from which we have to start our rehabilitation efforts."

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

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

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

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

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

NUGW Iwaki Freedom Union of Workers

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

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

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

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

Dismissed workers came to our labor counselling desk, and our union and

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

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

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

Workers should unite!

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

Let's wage our struggle against outrageous offensive dismissals!

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

Workers should unite!

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

We cannot accept any rehabilitation without employment!

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

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

Workers should unite!

Let's demand public and lifetime healthcare for those who are

oengaged in the radiation-exposure labor!

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

Let's demand decommission of all the nukes!

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

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

Let's fight together for decommission of nukes!

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

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

Solidarity Message to the May Day Rallies

Northeastern NTUC

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

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

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

The weak people in the stricken areas, like hospitalized patients, in-home patients, and people in the nursing homes, now live in extreme anxiety under rampant aftershocks and suffer from the continuous "second damage." Not only sooner relief and recovery of living conditions, but revitalized hope, solidarity, and symbiosis to survive are required as well. Along the coast areas which used to be one of the most abundant fishing ground in Japan, countless houses, together with fishing industry, marine-product industry, agriculture were destroyed, and so many public institutions were lost that local government faculty was vastly damaged.

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

hence demand the DPJ government to tackle with its all might and solve the nuke plant disaster as soon as possible.

It is obvious that the pro-nuke position of the previous successive LDP(Liberal Democratic Party) administrations and the business elites, should be condemned. The president of Japan Business Federation had praised the Japanese nuke plants, saying that Japanese nuke plants are so excellent that they can survive the tsunami,' and, after the disaster, the president is quoted as saying that the safety standard of the government was too loose' and that the government should take responsibility for the compensation of the nuke plant disaster': he is protecting TEPCO and radioactive industry and defending the nuke-energy policy. The truth is that there have been researchers who cautioned against danger of the big earthquake and tsunami, and, in particular, the danger of the Fukushima No.1 Power Plant have been pointed out by many people. We should not allow the politicians, business circle, and commentators to evade the responsibility on the pretext that the disaster was beyond anticipation.'

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

Let's not allow the politically motivated move to take advantage of the rehabilitation' process. We should counter those proposals which seek to 'take this chance to change the agriculture of the Northeastern region in accordance with U.S.-led TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership) frame' or 'reconsolidate the current local governmental system of prefectures and municipalities into larger administrative units.' Let's advance various kind of activities to protect livings and jobs of workers who are exposed to massive dismissal by rampant shutdown, bankruptcy in the stricken region, and increasing arbitrary dismissal by the excuse of the disaster nationwide. Lastly, we would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to plenty of encouragement and support from Japan and the world over. We know it will take long time and much effort from now on, but the people in the stricken areas have risen up in the ruin and started to rebuild their livings, labor, industries and communities. We Northeastern-ZENROKYO share the sense of despair and hope with stricken residents and will proceed onward. In sincere hope for successful May 1 Rally and Unity of the Workers of the World.'

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

“Nothing will be as it was before”

27 May 2011, by Miguel Romero

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

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

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

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

What sectors are at the base of the movement?

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

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

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

The success of the demonstration of April 7th led the organisers to call another, for May 15. Meanwhile another group appeared: "Democracia real ya" ("A real democracy now!"). Its platform was very weak politically. At the social level, they condemned unemployment, the dictatorship of the market, and so on. But at the political level they described themselves as "neither right nor left". On the radical left, this initiative appeared as very suspect, because today in the Spanish

state we face a very aggressive right. Moreover, nobody knew the initiators of this group.

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

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

Sympathy from the people was huge. The rallies every evening at 8 pm swelled: 15,000, then 20,000 people. Immediately, the electoral campaign was completely transformed. Rallies were organised in more than a hundred towns. A town like Valencia, which is rather right wing, saw a rally of 10,000 on May 20. This hasn't been seen for a very long time. Recently there were 15,000 demonstrators in Barcelona, 30,000 in Madrid - so many that access to the square was no longer possible.

The rally on Friday was forbidden by

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

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

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

A lot of women are involved in the movement but the feminist movement is absent as are feminist demands: there are many posters or cards relating to May 68, but not one on a feminist question. It is worrying. It is perhaps a result of the fact that the

feminist movement in Spain has over the past 30 years turned around specifically women-related questions. The word "woman" is even absent from the Manifesto. The same goes for the young immigrants: there are many in the movement, but not in the coordination. All the spokespersons are native to Spain [2].

How do you see the perspectives of the movement?

Barring a surprise, the elections will give a big victory to the right, who will win in numerous regions and municipalities, and thus a defeat for the PSOE. It will be interesting to see the results of Izquierda Unida (IU). IU has tried to appear as the political expression of the movement. It is very opportunist, because IU is an institutional left, and not anti-capitalist. The polls give IU 6 to 8% of the vote. If they gain more than 8%, it will be an effect of the movement. IU plans a meeting with the leadership of the movement. There is a certain danger there. IU has no possibility of hegemonising the movement, because it is not an activist organisation, but rather a sectarian and institutionalist one. But the institutional weight could appear interesting to the leadership of the movement, who could believe that they will thus have a voice in Parliament. That would represent a risk for the independence and radicalism of the mobilisation. The unions have also requested a meeting. In fact, the movement has become a political reference for everyone.

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

In Portugal, the big demonstration of 250,000 was not followed up. Here, the originality is that of a movement in

an electoral period, whose most popular slogan is "PSOE, PP, la misma mierda es" (PSOE, PP, it's the same shit"), and which becomes a reference point for the majority of people. The enthusiasm is huge. The (correct) idea is that "nothing will be as it was before", that all will be better than before. For our current (young, non-sectarian, non-doctrinaire, closely linked to the social movements) it is an opportunity. But to continue will be difficult.

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

Has there been any input from trade union sectors?

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

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

There is certainly an echo of the Arab revolutions from the viewpoint of the occupation of public space and the means of communication. The courage of the demonstrators is also something which has been impressive. But while a comrade has spoken to me of "Tahrir Square in Barcelona" we should not exaggerate: there is no comparison from the viewpoint of the toughness of the struggle!

How should anti-capitalist activists act?

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

future". On the contrary, we were completely outside "Democracia real ya", like all other political currents. We have then participated in the drawing up of the Manifesto. We have very good relations with the non-

sectarian autonomous current, which is very present in the movement. In a general way, it is necessary to be very prudent and reserved, notably in relation to self-affirmation: flags, stickers and so on.

"Raise our wages and pension!"

25 May 2011, by **Farooq Tariq**



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

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

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

Mukhtar Bukhari, president of the Workers' Action Committee of the privatized Habib Bank, demanded

from the Chief Justice of Pakistan to hear the pending case against the privatization of the Bank. He said that 2300 workers of Habib Bank are fighting against termination of their services from the bank.

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

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

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

behalf of over 10,000 workers mainly from Christian community.

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

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

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

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

Niaz Khan, general secretary pf the Itehad Carpet Workers Union and general secretary of the National

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

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

Mustansar Javed, president of the Railway Workers Union Workshop division representing over 20,000

workers, demanded an end of contract system and permanent jobs for all employees.

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

be more dharnas in Islamabad on 27th and 28th May.

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



Great East Japan Earthquake/Tsunami and Fukushima Nuke Disaster:

25 May 2011, by Japanese Revolutionary Communist League, National Council of Internationalist Workers

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

Our comrades of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures, sufferers of the disasters themselves, have been in full mobilization for varied activities to support disaster-hit inhabitants, to oppose the dismissals of workers ensued from the earthquake/tsunami, to campaign for preventing deterioration of nuclear damages and decommissioning the nuke plants, and

to struggle for rehabilitation of local communities. Comrades and co-workers of non-stricken areas have participated in the on-site activities. Their campaigns and activities are now becoming a part of the currently expanding popular mobilization against the nuke-energy policy and for denuclearization.

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

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

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

The other half of the international

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

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

May 17, 2011

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

Cheques:

Cheques to ESSF in euros only to be sent to:

ESSF

2, rue Richard-Lenoir

93100 Montreuil

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

Building the political left in Quebec

23 May 2011, by **Bernard Rioux , Sébastien Bouchard**

The political configuration of Quebec

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

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

The official opposition is formed by

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

Democratic Action of Quebec (ADQ) is an “autonomist” party, in other words neoliberal and nationalist without being independentist. This party was momentarily the main official opposition party in 2007, after having used the question of “reasonable compromises” [5] to promote its xenophobic discourse. ADQ is present in certain regions. We should also note that we are witnessing a rise of the Right in various forms, backed up by

radical right-wing radios, neoliberal “think tanks” and supported by the concentration of the media in two great monopolies. The core of its discourse is centred on a phobia for public debt, the “generational shock” (the legacy of the debt and the payment of pensions) and on the waste of public money by the state.

Lastly, Quebec Solidaire (QS) is a new left party, which we will describe later. Gauche socialiste (Socialist Left, GS) [6] is one of the collectives (tendencies) recognized within Quebec Solidaire. We should underline here the historical disjunction between the existence of important social movements and the absence of a left party in Quebec since the end of the Second World War. The rise of social struggles in the period 1995-2005 made possible the emergence of a political alternative to the Parti Québécois.

Quebec less

affected by the present crisis

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

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

The dynamics of the social movements

The rate of unionisation in Quebec is 40 per cent and the trade union movement is powerful but not very combative, particularly since the defeats of 2003 (anti-trade-union law) and 2005 (decree imposing working conditions on state employees). The leaderships more or less formally support the Parti Québécois and its federal equivalent, the Bloc

Québécois. They refuse to give their support to the building of a left party and advocate, on a national and local level, dialogue with the state and the employers in the implementation of neoliberal policies. The principal confederation, which represents 500,000 workers, has an enormous speculative pension fund managed by an army of financial product sellers. This situation pushes the main organization of the Québécois social movement to defend the rentier interests of the financial bourgeoisie and to depend on the tax incentives granted by the government to the pension fund, not to mention questionable relations between certain trade union officials and elements of the grey economy. The public sector unions, in spite of a strategic framework which aimed at negotiating before having the right to strike, were able to keep their heads above water, mainly thanks to a Liberal government discredited by corruption.

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

The neoliberal offensive takes mainly the form of budget cuts and increasing charges for public services. The people's and feminist groups, as well as the student and trade-union

left, have established a Coalition opposed to the increase in charges and the privatization of public services. While refusing to join this coalition, the big trade-union and student confederations have created the Social Alliance, which organizes actions along with the Coalition.

The building of the political left

Since 1994, two processes of fusion of left political parties have made it possible to unite most of the left of the trade union, student, people's and feminist movements and most of the left political groups [7]. Quebec Solidaire is the result of this process of convergence. Gauche Socialiste [8], the section of the Fourth International, took part in this process from the beginning.

In the 2008 elections, Quebec Solidaire succeeded in getting a member elected to the Quebec parliament - Amir Khadir, who has been recognized as being the Québécois political personality who is most appreciated by the population. The opinion polls indicate a constant rise in voting intentions, which oscillate at present between 9 and 15 per cent. This however over-estimates the real vote, which is confronted with the logic of the "useful vote" in the electoral system of British origin (first past the post).

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

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

An original and democratic process

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

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

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

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

A congress on the economy, ecology

and workers' social rights

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

The Sixth Congress continued to define the political physiognomy of Quebec Solidaire, around the following fundamental orientations:

? democracy must also be economic democracy

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

? determination to defend and radically extend workers' rights

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

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

The economy must also be democratic

Democracy cannot stop at the gates of the workplaces. How can we speak about democracy if citizens do not

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

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

Quebec Solidaire defends the energy sovereignty of Quebec. The energy sector must be taken charge of by the public sector. Quebec Solidaire aims at making possible the transition towards another energy system, which must include as a priority energy-saving and renewable energies. That is why Quebec Solidaire will put an end to the exploration and the exploitation of fossil energies such as the oil of the St. Lawrence Gulf and shale gases. It will also eliminate nuclear power and will stop the exploration and the exploitation of uranium mines.

The energy strategy of the Quebec state must be democratically established by the community, within which the workers of the sectors concerned will express their opinion. Quebec Solidaire recommends reducing greenhouse gas emissions

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

A radical extension of workers' rights

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

Quebec Solidaire will defend an active and effective policy of full employment, including measures of positive action for women, handicapped people, visible minorities and indigenous people.

The minimum wage will be increased substantially. The use by employers of involuntary part-time work will be strictly limited and the right to move on to full-time employment as soon as possible will be ensured. The working week will be reduced to 35 hours and then to 32 hours, with an alternative possibility of prolonging holidays. All

of this will be done without loss of pay, with proportional hiring of new workers, without intensification of work and with strengthening of the conditions limiting overtime work in workplaces.

The transversal character of the fight for women's equality

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

Strategy of construction

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

Debates which,

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

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

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

But to conclude, it should be underlined that the respect shown while engaging in debate, which characterized the whole of the congress, without exception, showed

that the proclaimed desire of Quebec Solidaire to conduct politics in a different way is not a vain formula. It

also made it possible to reinforce the coherence of a party which has many challenges to take up, but which

increasingly demonstrates that it is being built as an essential instrument of an overall emancipatory project.

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

23 May 2011, by David Packer, Ralph Blake

There is much to admire and agree with about Michel and Ozlem's analysis of the roots of the crisis and we have offered a similar analysis [9]. There is also much to agree with on the solutions to the crisis: full public control and ownership of the banking system; progressively taxing the rich and wealthy and corporations; opposing all the austerity measures that Europe's ruling class is trying to impose on the working class, students and poor of the continent; and a debt audit to identify the source of the debt, its legitimacy and where the debt is held.

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

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

There are several problems with this approach.

The anti-capitalist demands that they propose are not compatible with membership of what is essentially a neo-liberal institution such as the EU. If any country followed such a programme they would be thrown out.

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

Membership of the Euro does not protect the working class from epoch-defining defeats - quite the opposite. The Euro is the umbrella that the ruling classes are using through the EU, together with the IMF, to impose a massive austerity attack on the European working class to make them pay for the crisis. If it succeeds then the European working class will have suffered an historic defeat. As we have pointed out previously they do not

face up to the fact that the contradictions of the Eurozone mean it cannot be reformed but needs to be broken up. [10] The Marxist economist Ernest Mandel pointed to these likely contradictions and consequences in 1992. [11]

Nor does the general demand for a debt default recognise the diverse sets of circumstances across Europe. Where this is a credible demand in the smaller near bankrupt economies, Greece, Ireland and Portugal, we can support it, but in most of the major economies of Europe a default is first of all not necessary, as there is sufficient wealth through the banking system and in the rich corporations to avoid one, and second It fails to recognise the likely effects the general call for a default would have if implemented on the global financial system - a second credit crunch and depression as happened in the 1930s. That historic crisis was mainly due to major European governments' defaulting on their debt. [12]

There is no recognition of the effect a default would have on jobs, rapidly creating mass unemployment, and on the working classes' pensions as the bulk of these pensions are invested in government debt. That is why a debt audit is vital: Toussaint's six demands for Europe [13] address some of these shortcomings with dispensation for public holders of the debt. But it does fail to recognise the effect that a generalised debt default across

Europe would have on the financial system.

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

As Ernest Mandel stated : "For revolutionary Marxists, this, conflict is a typical inter-imperialist competitive struggle in which the working class has no reason for supporting one side against the other. [2] To the policies of both sides, they must counterpose the struggle for a Socialist United States of Europe, for a really unified Europe which could effectively surmount the antagonisms bred by capitalist competition; that could only be a Europe which has abolished both capitalist property and the bourgeois state. It is not by accident, moreover, that the present crisis in the Common Market coincides with a slackening of economic expansion which could be the preliminary signal of an opening recession in all capitalist Europe". [14]

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

More importantly, membership of the Euro has not protected counties from financial speculation; quite the

opposite is the case. The financial markets can see the contradictions in the Euro that we have pointed out. They have seen that the peripheral countries would need a bailout and bet against their governments and corporate bond and share markets until the point of the bailout is announced. They can also see defaults coming and are betting now that these will happen.

Greece was the subject of derivative manipulation to hide its deficit to meet the budget conditions to enter the Euro. The investment bank responsible for these derivatives tipped off its hedge fund clients about the cover up and they speculated against Greek debt. [15] The way to end speculation is in fact to leave the Euro and deal with debt swiftly either through default as in the case of the peripheral countries or in the case of the major economies through taxing the rich and taking control and ownership of the banking system and setting out an orderly plan for dealing with the debt.

Without full control and ownership of the banking system even a debt default by a country like Greece would see a freezing of credit, leading to a deeper recession and big losses to workers' pensions because the majority of a country's debt is held by domestic banks and domestic pension funds.

In fact sections of the European ruling class [16] are setting the scene for defaults by the periphery countries because they realise that the losses will be mainly borne by these countries themselves and the effects across the European banking sector would be minimal. They think it better to have an orderly default rather than spook the markets with a sudden one.

Many capitalist economists think the break-up of the Euro is inevitable and countries such as Greece would be better outside it. [17]

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

control.

Ozlem advocates improving productivity in the periphery countries as a solution that is shared with the ruling class as they seek to heap the blame for the crisis on the periphery countries' working classes for not working hard enough. Portugal's problem is not that it is uncompetitive but that it came into the Euro with its currency at too weak a level. This has seen its economy under perform compared to the major European economies and unemployment rise since it entered the Euro. [18] Leaving the Euro would see its economy become more competitive and allow it to fully utilise its food production potential. Becoming self-sufficient in food and improving its competitiveness would boost exports and reduce the amount of imports making it less vulnerable to importing inflation. This of course would not in itself be a long-term solution for the working class.

But those who say leaving the Euro would leave to economic isolation by the EU erecting trade tariffs misunderstand their use. These tariffs are in general a reaction to other major trading blocs e.g. the USA and China putting up barriers to European trade. [19] This argument also ignores the fact that states such as Britain while outside the Euro still have the Eurozone as their major trading partner. But a country leaving the Euro would be moving in an anti-capitalist direction and would seek to develop different trading relationships with other countries which are moving in a similar trajectory based on an exchange of goods to meet basic needs.

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

This is not to say that independence from the Euro and the EU will solve the problems of these economies, but it will create better conditions: a weakening of pan-Europe capitalism, greater clarity and transparency, for the working classes in these countries to begin to deal with their own ruling classes. Rather than being an

isolationist policy leaving the Euro and breaking up the European Union while putting forward radical anti-capitalist solutions will lead to more, not less international solidarity across Europe. Self-determination is essential for real international solidarity. It will inspire workers in other countries to follow and lead to the break-up of what is the major neo-liberal block in the world.

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

To stay in the European Union and the Euro the periphery countries in particular will see immigrants blamed for the austerity and very high levels of unemployment, which is already happening, while in the major economies we will see a strengthening of the political right as their populations face cuts to fund bailouts of the periphery countries. These are the contradictions of the Euro that are not sustainable.

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

Debt is not just an issue in the periphery but across the larger European economies too. The EU is now swinging into fighting inflation by raising interest rates – the first amongst the major mature economies

to do so. The EU is dominated by the needs of Germany that has benefited from being a major manufacturing economy and by Chinese demand for engineering goods to be used in infrastructure projects. The German ruling class has improved the rate of profit by attacking German workers' wages and conditions.

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

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

These demands should include:

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

and society;

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

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

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

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

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

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

This is the way that we can begin to create a real internationalist Federal United EcoSocialist Europe based on the institutions and relationships created by the working class and their allies through their struggles against the neo-liberal austerity policies of the European Union and the Euro. It will be based on new equal relationships and forms of power. Not ones based on the rule of Europe's finance capital and its multinationals.

Revolutions arrive too late or too early, but

always when they're not expected

22 May 2011, by **Joseba Fernández, Miguel Urbán Crespo, Raul Camargo**

We have no fear

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

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

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

The balance that has emerged from the break in the Spanish economy is an appalling one. Financialization of the middle classes, the "wealth effect" and the stupefying dream of an "ownership society" and "social ladder" had worked perfectly, as

illusory mechanisms for the peaceful evolution of this country's developmental model. However, the bursting of the various bubbles that gripped the Spanish economy has blown up this scheme of fictitious capitalism. A society partly euphoric at the credo of growth has been transformed into a society without social handles to grip. And, without venturing into psychological holes, it has gone from a citizenship based on networks of trust to a society suspicious of the social and political institutions on which the regime sits.

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

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

learning for new activists, etc.

The winding up of the unions' oppositional, conflictual approach and the major unions' decision to commit to social dialogue and agreement presumed an inability to take advantage of a real political opportunity to intervene from these actors, an inability to follow a different model — the accumulation of forces in a social response to crisis. The damage caused by the pact over pensions to the morale of many activists, and the real (and deserved) delegitimation that the union leaders have suffered as a result explains why they cannot be perceived, at this time, as effective instruments through which the "general malaise" can be interpreted and channelled.

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

generated part of the discourse that today is drawing in more sectors of the now-mobilized.

Imitation effect and resistance in the world of the dispossessed

This lack of practical references, symbolic and identity-bound, has held back the possibility of social responses in recent months. Knocking at our door have been other people's experiences and new forms of self-organisation, in the form of riots, rebellions and revolutions. It was the Portuguese youth in their struggle against the IMF; Italian students against Berlusconi, job insecurity and cuts in education; the Greek trade unionists and youth against debt and EU blackmail; universities occupied and mobilized in the United Kingdom; France rebellious and insubordinate against the loss of social rights. And there have been, like an unexpected miracle, the uprisings for dignity and against tyranny in the Arab nations. The youth of Tunisia and Egypt and many other countries, their social and political organizations, have in recent years heroically resisted economic and political dictatorships and have shown that it is possible to reach heaven by direct struggle, even in the worst conditions. And somehow, it is we who were afraid!

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

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

Youth: an empty signifier yet full of content

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

Again, as already happened in the cycle of 1968 although in a completely different conditions [20], the youth, in various pockets of resistance, are acting as a true "tactical vanguard" in the context of an overall movement. We don't enter an opinion here on such thorny issues as the concept of "generations" itself or on the available objective and subjective conditions for the mobilization of youth today. We simply assert its importance as an initiator of social antagonisms. And it is very uneven across demographic (Arab v European) and political (policies at movement level) contexts.

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

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

that has, more recently, dared to mention the risk of a "lost generation" in Spain.

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

Something has changed since 15-M. In Madrid you can breathe the atmosphere of mobilisation. Of what is (or should be) a demonstration: take to the streets, connect with ordinary people, expand the space as you can. Lose the fear. That we were told weeks before on posters of "Youth Without Future" [21]. And it was collectively shouted in the streets of Madrid (and in many other cities): "Without fear". A fear that only we can shake off from the common, from the community. The great triumph of neoliberal politics has been its penetration into individual problems (in fear of work, of the future, of banks, of social disconnection). Only through collective channels, away from false individual solutions, can fear give way to other states of mind. And part of that fear has shaken us. That is the lesson that, collectively, we have lived. Surely, it has been the experience that many people do not participate in the rituals of protest and various expressions of the Left. And that is a gift to the radical Left: the possibility of politicization of new layers.

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

The tension between organization and spontaneity is shown, again, insoluble and false. There is no scope for strengthening the mobilization and grounding of organised experiences

without a space for spontaneity; but there also isn't room for it without prior organizational work that is also open to the unexpected.

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

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

And if it's exciting for the number of people who have gathered (the largest demonstrations against crisis since the General Strike), it's because most of the speeches are typical of words that the Left has been insistently repeating long before the outbreak of the crisis: the dictatorship of the markets and banks, against the social cuts, against this model of "democracy". And that is a victory: socializing on the street are the flags of the anti-globalization movement, of students, of teachers and health workers in struggle over recent years, of honest and militant unionists.

One might say that the narrative is not finished, is not complete. Of course not. It lacks many things: analyses of environmental destruction, of the energy crisis, of the finitude of the planet. Also of patriarchy and the crisis of care. Or a story on

immigration, immigration law or CIEs. That is what is missing. And many other things.

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

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

The answer to this phenomenon of institutions and accommodation of the Left is symptomatic of the very success of the movement. [22] The stigmatization of the protests, the labels put on them, their underestimation and repression, are all palpable evidence of the concern they are causing. Some progressive intellectuals' voices have asked us to be indignant and react. When we do, we should not offer alternatives to anti-systemic violence. It's always the same story with those stuck in being "politically correct".

The outlook for what comes after 15-M

is uncertain. Of that there is no doubt. We know that more, however, will come on 22-M: more social cuts, less democracy.

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

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

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

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

We shouldn't let it pass us by.

17 May 2011

This article was first translated and posted on this [blog](#).

Rebellion of the indignant

20 May 2011, by Esther Vivas, Josep María Antentas

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

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

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

The current outbreak did not, however, start from scratch. Years of work on a small scale of alternative networks and movements, initiatives and resistance of more limited impact had kept the flame of contestation alive in this difficult period. The general strike of September 29m 2010 also opened a first breach, although the subsequent demobilization by the leaderships of the CCOO and UGT and the signing of the social pact closed the path of trade union mobilisation and furthered if possible, the discredit and lack of prestige of the biggest unions among combative youth and those who have launched the camps initiative.

Indignant!

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

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

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

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

Along with the belief that "this is possible", that things can be changed, loss of fear, in a time of crisis and difficulties, is another key factor. "Without fear" is precisely one of the slogans most heard these days. Fear still grips a large majority of workers and popular sectors and leads to passivity or xenophobic and unsympathetic reactions. But the 15M

mobilization and the camps expanding like an oil slick are a powerful antidote to fear that threatens to dismantle the schemes of a ruling elite at the forefront of an increasingly delegitimized system.

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

The spirit of anti-globalization returns

The dynamism, the spontaneity and the thrust of the current protests are the strongest since the emergence of the anti-globalization movement more than a decade ago. Emerging internationally in November 1999 at the protests in Seattle during the WTO Summit (although its antecedents go back to the Zapatista Chiapas uprising in 1994), the anti-globalization wave quickly came to the Spanish state. The consultation for the abolition of the foreign debt in March 2000 (held the same day as the general elections and banned in several cities by the Electoral Board) and the big mobilization for the summit in Prague in September 2000 against the World Bank and the IMF were the first signs of this, particularly in Catalonia. But the mass movement really arrived with the demonstrations against the World Bank Summit in Barcelona on June 22 and 24, 2001. Just ten years later we are witnessing the birth of a

movement whose energy, enthusiasm and collective strength has not been seen since then. It will not, therefore, be a nostalgic tenth anniversary. Quite the contrary. We are going to celebrate it with the birth of a new movement.

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

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

The current movement is also inspired by the most recent and important international reference points of struggle and victory. It can be situated in the wake of movements as diverse as the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia and the victory in Iceland, placing their mobilization in a general

struggle against global capitalism and the servile political elite. In the Spanish state, the 15 M demonstrations and now the camps, in a simultaneous example of decentralization and coordination, generate a shared identity and symbolic membership of a community.

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

Towards the future

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

these two days building the camps at a mass level is essential.

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

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

Egypt's unfinished revolution

19 May 2011, by Mostafa Omar

The sheer number of those participating in the uprising, as well as their percentage compared to the total population, is unprecedented and astonishing. It is estimated that between January 25 and February 11 at least 15 million people out of a population of 80 million"more than

20 percent of the population"took part in the mass demonstrations and mobilizations that forced Mubarak to resign. A friend of mine in Cairo reminded me"and he was probably bragging a little bit"15 million protesters is a number that exceeds the total number of people who

participated in all the protests that took place in all the countries of Eastern Europe at the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

It is true that young people led the charge on January 25, and it is true that most of the four hundred martyrs were under the age of thirty, but from

day one young people were not alone in the streets. From day one, the Egyptian uprising was a popular revolution. From day one, millions of workers and government clerks, poor peasants, and poor housewives took part in all the mobilizations across the country.

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

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

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

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

But in a city like Alexandria the protesters did not adopt a Tahrir Square strategy. They did not wait for the police to attack. The protesters came out every single day in the tens and hundreds of thousands from every

neighborhood and street to confront the police; they fought back against police bullets and tear gas over and over again until they defeated the police.

I listened online to an amazing tape of radio communications between the police headquarters in Alexandria and police commanders in the field trying to deal with the flood of angry protesters in the ten minutes before the city fell to the revolutionaries. In the tape police officers are begging headquarters for reinforcements to deal with what they described as massive, dangerous crowds of ten, twenty, and thirty thousand people closing in on them everywhere in the city. Headquarters is helpless because all of the officers in the fieldâ€”literally all of themâ€”are asking for reinforcements. Headquarters advises officers and units to retreat to precincts. The officers respond: “Sir, protesters are burning the precincts.” The tape dramatically ends with the commander at headquarters asking an inferior officer for an explanation for the police defeats. The officer simply told him: “Sir, it is over. The people are in the saddle.”

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

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

I read in books about great revolutions for social justice. I read that millions who were involved in those revolutions not only change

oppressive social institutions but they also rediscover their humanity in the process. I must say that I am lucky to have witnessed this process of social and human transformation firsthand in the few weeks that passed in Egypt. I have seen and talked to so many people who tell you that they feel proud of what they did; they feel that they are no longer strangers in their own country; they feel human for the first time in their lives.

I have never seen so many millions in Egypt look more proudâ€”so proud of what they and other revolutionaries have accomplished, so proud that they have done what they themselves never believed they could do. People look more relaxed and at peace and you can see it on their faces. They tell you: Gone are the days when we felt helpless and little, gone are the days when the police could humiliate us and torture us, gone are the times when the rich and the businessmen think they could run the country as if it was their own private company.

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

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

trial.

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

The arrests and trials of some high-profile corrupt officials were and still are a great source of euphoria for millions. But many ordinary people also realize that they made the revolution not just to punish a few figures in the old regime, they revolted in order to change the whole regime.

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

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

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

In other words, immediately after Mubarak fell, an intense period of social and class struggle opened up in the country. Millions of workers and students began to try and shape the outcome of the revolutionary uprising

through a series of daring and brave new rounds of struggle. I want to give you a sense of some of these struggles and I will start with the unfolding workers' uprising.

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

The Council was definitely correct to be concerned. Starting February 12, hours after Mubarak quit, workers all over the country—every single day, in the public and private sectors—have been striking, protesting, or sitting in. Oil workers, teachers, nurses, bus drivers, janitors, journalists, pharmacists, all the way to clerks in posh country clubs have been organizing and protesting.

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

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

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

Two weeks ago, near my house in

central Cairo, I witnessed one of those militant strikes firsthand. Twelve hundred government printing workers who produce school curriculum books went on strike to protest low salaries (an average of \$100 per month), the outrageous salary of the CEO (\$60,000 per month), disrespectful treatment at work, temporary work contracts, and terrible healthcare provisions. Three hundred workers attempted to rush the building to get to the CEO's office, but an army unit stopped them. So, the strikers laid siege to the company building and locked their corrupt CEO in his office on the fifth floor for thirty-six hours. The army officer in charge, along with a union representative, negotiated all the workers' demands with the CEO for twenty-four hours. The army officer forced the CEO to concede 90 percent of the workers' demands so he could disperse them. The CEO caved in. The army officer and the union representative came down and announced the settlement. The strikers were ecstatic and almost dispersed.

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

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

I want to briefly take a look at the students' initiatives and struggles. When the army finally opened schools and universities, millions of students, teachers, and university

professorsâ€”many of whom were part of the January 25 uprisingâ€”opened a new front of struggle. In one university after another, mass student and faculty rallies are taking place to elect all college presidents and deans in order to get rid of all those appointed by Mubarak. In some universities, students are camping out *À la Tahrir* to win their demands. And in all colleges, the students forced the government to finally implement a year-old court order to remove the secret police from all campuses.

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

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

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

interior, or chanting to remove the governors.

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

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

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

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

More recently, the army refused to draft a new constitutional declarationâ€”and insisted on forcing people to vote on nine amendments to the 1971 dictatorial document. Moreover, the army brutalized protesters at Tahrir Square on March 9 with electric batons and tortured those it arrested for hours in its field headquarters in the Egyptian Museum. I have to be honest, for a few moments towards the end of February into the first days of March, there was a widespread feeling of anxiety among

millions who supported the revolution that all was not going well, that the revolution was under siege at bestâ€”or that the counterrevolutionary forces were actually winning at worst. Fortunately, a deep reservoir of revolutionary aspirations and readiness to struggle to win our demands turned things around in a matter of seventy-two hours.

First, mass demonstrations and an unrelenting popular opposition forced the Council to dismiss the Mubarak cabinet on March 3. On March 4, while millions were celebrating this victory, revolutionaries laid siege to the headquarters of the secret police in Alexandria and shut it down. The next day, protesters marched on secret police headquarters in city after city. In some places, protesters occupied these buildings, freed political prisoners in torture chambers, and walked out with tons of secret documents detailing repression and torture.

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

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

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

It was not only a great victory for

Christians who have been systematically discriminated against for decades. But, more importantly, widespread solidarity from Muslims with Christian protesters at the television building and elsewhere in the country reignited a sense of common destiny and so far has defeated the counter-revolutionaries' divide-and-conquer schemes.

Whither Egypt?

The next few days and weeks in Egypt will witness a continuation of the social and class polarization that erupted after February 11. On the one hand, the Supreme Council and the new Cabinet have escalated their antirevolutionary rhetoric and measures. They are supported by large sections of the frightened middle classes and, of course, the wealthy.

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

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

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

Incredibly, in their demagogic effort, the Muslim Brotherhood formed a de facto bloc with their former jailers, Mubarak's National Democratic Party, which is discredited but yet to be dismantled—the only other political

group in the country to support the army's proposals. In other words, and to the benefit of the old regime, the fundamentalists are attempting to polarize the country on religious lines and thus weaken the incredible unity between Muslims and Christians forged since January 25.

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

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

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

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

The mood in Tahrir Square and elsewhere was militant and ecstatic. People came with signs, banners, and chants that put the generals on notice.

The protesters gave the Council an ultimatum of one week to arrest the former president Mubarak and put him on trial for corruption and murder. In Tahrir Square, tens of thousands attended a popular trial for the deposed dictator presided over by well-known radical judges.

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

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

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

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

Meanwhile, workers continue to build new independent unions, breaking

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

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

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

Political parties

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

The once-banned Muslim Brotherhood and disparate Islamist groups are scrambling to form new political parties. The leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood has announced that it will form a political party similar in outlook to the Islamic Welfare Party in Turkey. The Brotherhood has struck a tacit alliance with the Supreme Council and offers itself now as a force for stability and law and order. To prove its allegiance to the Council, the Brotherhood refuses to support

workers' strikes and also declined to support the April 1 mobilization, calling for patience and more time for the Cabinet. The Islamist fundamentalists are also mobilizing a reactionary campaign to Islamize society. Its supporters are denouncing women who do not wear the headscarf and demonizing Christians. Whereas the Brotherhood assures everyone that it will respect women and minority rights, the fundamentalists are calling for the implementation of strict Sharia laws, such as cutting off the hands of those who steal.

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

Similarly, workers and the left are also initiating their own organizations and parties to fight for workers' demands and a radical democracy. For example, hundreds of militant trade unionists have come together to initiate the Workers Democratic Party. Also, hundreds of socialists, progressives, and unionists are forming a broad left party called the Socialist Popular Alliance.

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

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

regime.

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

Conclusion

It is fair to say that most of what the Egyptian revolution achieved in democratic changes after February 11 can only be attributed to massive popular pressure and courageous mobilizations of thousands of revolutionaries such as the marches on the secret police headquarters or the April 1 demonstrations.

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

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

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

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

Haiti's humanitarian crisis

19 May 2011, by **Roger Annis and Kim Ives**

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

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

An election outcome foretold

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

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

Critics also said that the minimal infrastructure for holding a fair and representative vote did not exist, at least during the crucial first round, namely, an accurate voters' list, adequate mechanisms for voter registration, voting-day facilities allowing people to cast their vote with relative ease, and the presence of security and observer personnel at

polling stations to guard against abuses and irregularities. [23] Indeed, some 1.5 million Haitians in the West Department where the earthquake struck still have no real address, living in about 1,300 makeshift tent and tarpaulin camps.

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

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

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

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

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

The period that began with the military coup of September 1991 is best described as one of the most prolonged and intense periods of counterrevolution anywhere in the world. For the last twenty years, the most powerful political and economic interests in and around Haiti have waged a systematic campaign designed to stifle the popular movement and deprive it of its principal weapons, resources and leaders. The January earthquake triggered reactions that carried and that are still carrying such measures to entirely new levels. [24]

From Duvalier Dynasty to military coups and intervention

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

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

Washington and the Haitian bourgeoisie, working through the Armed Forces of Haiti (FAH) and death squads, tried violence and every trick in the book to control that process, including drowning in blood an attempted November 1987 election and staging a pseudo-election two months later that was almost universally boycotted.

The founding of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in the United States in 1983 signaled a

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

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

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

Resistance to FAdH rule erupted in mass protests, aerial leaflet drops, and anti-coup pamphlets and radio broadcasts. Giant pro-democracy demonstrations and conferences grew in Haitian diaspora poles like New York, Miami, Montreal, and Paris. Tens of thousands of refugees took to the high seas in wooden sailboats destined for Florida; most were intercepted by the U.S. Coast Guard. Haiti was becoming ungovernable, and its puppet governments an embarrassment. To counter brewing revolutionary projects, stem the tide of refugees, and reestablish stability for U.S. investors, the Clinton

administration gambled that it could use Aristide to front for the neoliberal reforms it sought to implement in Haiti. Surrounded by 22,000 U.S. troops, Washington flew Aristide back to Haiti on October 15, 1994, the first time anywhere it had reinstalled a president previously ousted by a U.S.-backed coup. But Aristide did not follow the Clinton script for privatizing state industries. Worse yet, in 1995 he abolished the Haitian army, depriving Washington and Haiti's elite of their principal lever for controlling Haitian governments since U.S. Marines ended their 20-year occupation in 1934.

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

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

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

The three powers—who named themselves "Friends of Haiti"—nurtured both vocal and violent oppositions, ranging from

paramilitary "contras" assaulting people and government facilities from protected bases in the Dominican Republic to concocted and sometimes phantom groups dressed up as representatives of "civil society."

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

Ten lost years

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

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

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

- ? Imperialist powers, notably Canada and France, who bring money, police, soldiers, and lots of political experience in the business of neo-colonial rule.

- ? The UN Security Council, which provided authorization for the coup

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

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

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

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

Despite international aid conferences and agreements such as the Interim Cooperation Framework (CCI) of 2004, Haiti's agricultural production continued its precipitous decline under the coup regime. Light manufacturing, profiting from Haiti's less than \$1 a day labor (which economists like Oxford's Paul Collier argue is Haiti's greatest national asset) also declined. "Everything is broken in Haiti," said U.S. attorney Thomas Griffin following a visit to the country in late 2004 that produced the first comprehensive look at human

rights since the coup. [25] "Haiti's people churn inside a hurricane of violence," his report said. "Haiti's security and justice institutions fuel the cycle of violence."

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

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

Why Haiti?

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

But it's not the search for oil reserves, potential tourist enclaves, plentiful cheap labor, or pots of gold that drives imperial policy (although the country does have gold reserves now being exploited in these recessionary times

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

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

"People who do not understand U.S. foreign policy think that control over Haiti does not matter to Washington, because it is so poor and has no strategic minerals or resources. But that is not how Washington operates, as the WikiLeaks cables repeatedly illustrate. For the State Department and its allies, it is all a ruthless chess game, and every pawn matters. Left governments will be removed or prevented from taking power where it is possible to do so." [26]

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

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

Bolivarian Venezuela has also earned a special place in the hearts of Haitians. Its aid and assistance to

Haiti over the past decade and since the earthquake surpasses anything that the imperial powers have offered, including new power plants in Cap Haïtien, Gonaïves, and Port-au-Prince. With little advance notice, Hugo Chávez received a hero's welcome by tens of thousands in the streets of Port-au-Prince when he made his one visit to Haiti, in May 2006.

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

Haiti's unique history, language, and culture can mislead the casual observer to exaggerate its isolation from its Caribbean and Latin American neighbors. Sadly, its history as a victim of imperial interference and intervention is very much a shared one. The 2009 coup against the elected president of Honduras is only the latest of imperial interventions past and present bearing all the same trademarks as Haiti's 2004 coup. [27]

Since the earthquake, we have seen a continuation of the same failed policies in Haiti, including the militarization of aid response by the governments of the United States, Canada and France in the critical weeks following January 12. [28]

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

The political side of the post-earthquake intervention has also advanced. The November election was nothing less than an orchestrated play to ensure that a pliant president, legislature, and senate would be duly installed. In December, the Organization of American States

(OAS) effectively supplanted the CEP as the "final arbiter" of the November 28 election. It arbitrarily excluded Jude Célestin from the second-round presidential vote and placed Michel Martelly on the ballot in his place. The move was not even submitted to a vote among the members of the CEP. Only four of the CEP's eight members approved the move, instead of five, the majority constitutionally required.

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

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

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

November 28 vote.

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

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

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

"We must build roads, erect dams, participate in the organization of the State, the judicial system. The UN says it has no mandate for that. Its mandate in Haiti is to keep the peace of the graveyard." [29]

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

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The Latest Fibs From World Financiers

19 May 2011, by Patrick Bond

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

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

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

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

Playing both roles, the likes of Ncube have not changed their neoliberal tunes, they simply hold up a small sliver of (desperately entrepreneurial) Africans engaged in petty commodity exchange as the hope for the future.

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

yet most subsequent elections were tainted.

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

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

The broken ICT techno-fix

One basis for Afro-optimism today is the availability of cellular telephony in many areas formerly off-grid for communications. Of course, similar high hopes for raised productivity through technology leapfrogging led to the last quarter-century’s microfinance fantasies. But it has become clear in recent months in India (with its 200,000 farm suicides) as well as the the microdebt mecca of Bangladesh that there was too little economic space to allow women to borrow at high interest rates so as to compete in glutted petty commodity markets.

The Bank’s most recent policy paper argued, “Success of Information and

Communications Technology (ICT), especially mobile phone penetration, shows how rapidly a sector can grow. It also shows how the public sector can set the conditions for the exponential growth of a vital industry that could transform the continent.”

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

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

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

â€¢ Africa continues to lag behind other regions both in terms of the percentage of people with access to the full range of communications services and the amounts and manner in which they can be used – primarily as a result of the high cost of services;

â€¢ the cost of wholesale telecommunication services as an input for other economic activities remains high, escalating the cost of business in most countries;

â€¢ the contribution of ICT to gross domestic product, with some exceptions, is considerably less than global averages;

â€¢ national objectives of achieving universal and affordable access to the full range of communications services have been undermined either by poor policies;

â€¢ as a general trend across the continent, while the voice divide is decreasing, the Internet divide is increasing and broadband is almost absent on the continent;

â€¢ the fixed-line sector continues to show no signs of recovery as most countries experienced negative growth between 2006 and 2008.

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

As for internet, they report:

â€¢ broadband uptake trails even other developing regions in the world with a penetration rate below 2%;

â€¢ low penetration rates are mainly a result of the prohibitively high costs of Internet services;

â€¢ the landing of several undersea cables and a number of terrestrial fibre investment projects have led to a significant reduction in the costs of accessing the Internet. In some countries, the drop in wholesale prices has not, however, filtered to end-user prices;

â€¢ digital literacy and the affordability of access devices like personal computers, is expected to remain a challenge.

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

Macroeconomic mumbo-jumbo
Given this reality across the board, there are practically no micro-

economic successes to speak of. So the current Afro-optimist wave is a tsunami of macroeconomic propaganda, led not by African politicians and their northern helpers, but by resurgent multilateral development banks.

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

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

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

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

And African central banks should raise interest rates, says the IMF: "Monetary policy remains looser than desirable in many countries in the region, even before the recent surge in fuel and food prices." Normally with higher prices on imported oil and grains, a lower interest rate would compensate to boost weaker domestic economies. But no, the IMF's main fear is always inflation, since the institution represents bankers, who fear the erosion of the value of their main asset, money.

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

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

Popular protest as antidote

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

These raised expectations are absurd. In a low-profile study published in February, three IMF economists (Gonzalo Salinas, Cheikh Gueye, and Olessia Korbut) at least recognized

(while disagreeing), "The apparent stagnation of SubSaharan Africa (the poorest region in the world) in an era of freer markets has fueled strong criticisms against market reforms. Indeed, condemnation of economic liberalization has become part of mainstream development thinking, and several commentators urge African countries to accelerate growth by modifying their comparative advantage on natural resources."

Given how disastrous globalization has been for Africa, a "far left movement" is long overdue, to democratize societies (as is underway in not only Tunisia and Egypt but Swaziland, Uganda, Zimbabwe and other countries), to preserve natural

resources (especially fossil fuels) and rethink the merits of extractive industries, and to meet basic needs and balance local economies through domestic ("import-substitution") production.

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

From Counterpunch:
<http://www.counterpunch.org/bond051...>

The Euro Pact: when the kidnapper rescues you

16 May 2011, by **Daniel Albarracín**

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

These recipes will further economic depression and submit us to the dictatorship of creditors; and those who had been responsible for the

crisis will be its beneficiaries. The same policies that have deepened divergences and uneven development in Europe, far from being corrected, will be deepened. And public debt will increase. Who is saving who then? The chickens are cooped up with the fox.

There is no easy alternative. We have two options: rescue and adjustment measures, or attack of the "markets" on the public debt. How to break out of this tragic dilemma? Little Iceland disobeyed: it rejected social adjustment measures, it has not returned the debt to the creditors, it has prosecuted the perpetrators of the crisis, and has nationalized banking while rejecting the "bailouts" demanded by the creditors, and it is coming out of recession! In addition, while the interest rates on public debt issued by Greece and Ireland have risen after their respective bailouts, those of Iceland have experienced a significant decline.

The European Trade Union

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

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

But tackling the crisis for the benefit of the majority would require even more far-reaching and bold measures: rejection of the measures of adjustment and socialization of the

debt; public audit of the conditions in which the public debt was issued, acquired, and financed; restructuring and cancellation of socially unacceptable debt so that creditors bear the main burden of the crisis; relaunch of public banks; and re-fiscalisation of the income from capital, by investing new public revenues in socially useful initiatives and sustainable energy transition, with effects of economic recovery and the generation of employment.

We need a profound change in

European policy to promote not only a strong regulation of financial markets, but also international tax harmonisation based on direct and progressive taxes, as well as increased wages and social rights. The management of the deficit and the debt should be prefigured with a criterion that ensures countercyclical investment policies in the recession we are going through, something that the Euro Pact prevents

We need to find a path towards a supra-national alliance which is

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

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

Class struggle in a “haven of peace and social progress”

13 May 2011, by **Murray Smith**

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

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

Deindustrialisation

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

On a world level, 80 per cent of exports consist of material goods (including iron and steel) and 20 per cent services (including financial

services). Luxembourg is exactly the opposite: 20 per cent of its exports consist of material goods (of which steel still represents 37 per cent) and 80 per cent services. Financial services alone account for more than 50 per cent of exports. This compares with 30 per cent for Switzerland and only 10 per cent for Singapore. Luxembourg has 0.007 per cent of the world's population and 0.095 per cent of world GDP. It has, however, 15 per cent of exports of financial services: 17th place in the world; 65th place for material goods (source: WTO). Within the EU, with 27 per cent of exports of financial services, Luxembourg is second only to the United Kingdom. [30] Speculative capital in Luxembourg represents 50 times the country's GDP, while the funds held by the banks represent 30 times GDP. Luxembourg has a larger share of investment funds than any other EU country. In particular it holds an incredible 85 per cent of the cross-border trade in Europe in UCITS collective investment funds. [31] The sums involved run into trillions of euros. (One example of a Luxembourg-based UCITS fund was LuxAlpha, the principal European antenna of the Madoff scam.)

The growth in the financial sector is not particular to Luxembourg, although Luxembourg provides an extreme example of it. On a European level, it reflects on the one hand a certain process of deindustrialisation in the advanced capitalist countries, with a shift of material production towards emergent economies and the growth of the services sector. But the financialisation of advanced capitalist economies is above all an expression of the tendency for profits to be directed towards finance because of the lack of sufficiently profitable productive investment. And of course the vast sums of money that are placed in the Luxembourg financial sector do not come from Luxembourg (or only to a small degree), but from all over Europe and the world. And Luxembourg does everything it can to attract this capital. Taxes on business, at 21.1 per cent, are the lowest in the EU (EU average 44.2 per cent). [32]

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

certain European countries. This problem is considered by the IMF to be serious" (April 5, 2011).

Working-class composition

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

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

Migrants play a key role in the Luxembourg economy and social structure. In 1980, the number of those paying social security contributions, a good indication of the size of the workforce, was 158,000. Non-Luxembourgers already represented 33 per cent of the total. Today the workforce is 349,000, a 120 per cent increase. And whereas the

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

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

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

Trade unions

The trade unions in Luxembourg are relatively strong. A comparative study in 2003 listed Luxembourg among a dozen or so European countries where trade union membership was rising. The four Luxembourg trade union groupings cited in this study showed growth of more than 40 per cent between 1993 and 2003. [33] A recent study shows an overall level of unionisation of 41 per cent, which places Luxembourg seventh in the European table, according to the OECD. [34] This percentage refers only to workers resident in Luxembourg, whatever their nationality, not to frontaliers, but the latter are also organised in Luxembourg unions. The two main union confederations at least are actively engaged in recruiting them and have offices in the regions of France, Belgium and Germany adjoining Luxembourg. Over a longer period, reflecting the transition from industry to services, the level of unionisation has actually decreased, from 64 per cent in 1970-71, indicating that union membership, while increasing, has not kept pace with the rapid expansion of the service sector and particularly of finance. However, at 39 per cent, the level of unionisation in the banking and insurance sector is still quite significant.

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

be delighted. If it is not capable of playing this role, it would be better if it did not go into government. Moreover, it would come into conflict with us."

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

Luxembourg social model

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

(Dei Greng) cannot be characterised as being on the left – they represent what might be called "eco-liberalism". They govern the municipality of Luxembourg City in coalition with the DP. There is also a somewhat eclectic populist party, the ADR.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Haven of peace and social progress?

In Europe on the whole there is a sharpening of class relations, a sustained offensive against the social gains, rights and standard of living of the working class, young people and pensioners. [35] Clearly, the speed and intensity of this offensive varies from country to country. Luxembourg may seem like a haven of peace and social progress. Someone arriving from say, Britain, might well think they'd died and gone to heaven. But although things have so far moved more slowly here, the direction is unmistakable.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Austerity

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

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

Resistance

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

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

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

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

Dei Lenk (The Left)

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

a split and the creation of the New Left (Nei Lenk) in the early 1990s. The principal leader of Nei Lenk was Andre Hoffmann, who was later elected to parliament for Dei Lenk in 1999. The other main component of Dei Lenk was the Revolutionary Socialist Party, the Luxembourg section of the Fourth International.

When Dei Lenk was formed the KPL initially participated, but subsequently withdrew, though some of its members remained. In 2004 the KPL and Dei Lenk both stood candidates and the split vote led to no one being elected. Dei Lenk had to wait till 2009 to win back a seat, again with Andre

Hoffmann, who enjoys great personal popularity.

Dei Lenk is still a small party, with about 300 members. (But that figure has to be taken in a Luxembourg context. In 1964, the KPL, with several MPs, had, according to the US State Department, only 500 members. [