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Why agreements with the Troika are odious

31 August 2011, by **Éric Toussaint, Renaud Vivien**

Any loan granted on the condition that policies violating human rights be implemented is odious

As claimed by special rapporteur Mohammed Bedjaoui in his draft article on succession in respect of State debts for the 1983 Vienna Convention: "From the standpoint of the international community, an odious debt could be taken to mean any debt contracted for purposes that are not in conformity with contemporary international law and, in particular, the principles of international law embodied in the Charter of the United Nations." [1]

It is obvious that the conditionalities imposed by the Troika (massive layoffs in the civil service, the dismantling of social protection and social services, reduction of social budgets, increase in indirect taxes such as VAT, the lowering of the minimum wage, etc.) violate the UN Charter. Indeed, among the obligations contained in this Charter, we note, in article 55,

"higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development [...], universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion." Consequently, austerity measures and debts contracted in the context of these Troika agreements are void since anything that is contrary to the UN Charter is deemed nugatory. [2]

Beyond the violation of economic, social and cultural rights resulting from the implementation of such anti-social measures, what is flouted by the Troika is people's right to self-determination as covered in article 1-2 of the UN Charter and in the two 1966 Conventions on human rights. According to article 1 of both conventions: "All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural

development. All peoples may, for their own ends, freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources without prejudice to any obligations arising out of international economic co-operation, based upon the principle of mutual benefit, and international law. In no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence."

The Troika's interference in debtor States' internal affairs, with a complete disregard for democracy, is blatantly obvious. Troika creditors sent a clear warning that elections in Ireland and Portugal were not to challenge these agreements. See, for example, an article in the French daily *Le Figaro* on 9 April 2011 that recalls the demands made on Portugal by the EU and eurozone finance ministers at a meeting in Budapest before the general elections in Portugal: Preparations (for the austerity measures) must start at once with a view to an agreement between parties in mid-May, and allow for an immediate implementation of the

adjustment programme as soon as the new government is formed (...) ministers have clearly explained that they do not wish to have to reconsider the commitments attached to this aid, whatever the election results. [3] In the case of Greece, the austerity programme agreed on with the Troika was imposed in 2010 without even being ratified by Parliament whereas it is an obligation under the Greek Constitution (article 36 paragraph 2). [4]

The Troika's contempt for the sovereignty of Greece, Ireland and Portugal was made possible by the financial plight of these three countries (the first eurozone victims of the debt crisis, though undoubtedly not the last). In this respect the validity of the agreements can hardly be argued on the grounds of free consent. In law, when one party in a contract is not in a position to exert its freedom of choice the contract is void. How does this principle apply in the present case? As they cannot reasonably contract long term loans on the financial markets, since interest rates are between 12 and 17%, these countries' governments had to turn to the Troika as lender of last resort. Taking advantage of the plight of the Greek, Irish and Portuguese authorities, the Troika managed to enforce policies that can only have negative consequences on the countries' economic recovery, given the procyclical nature of the measures adopted (that is to say, they reinforce factors that lead to lower economic activity).

The massive privatizations in key sectors of the economy (transport, energy, postal services, etc.) that the Troika have imposed make it possible for private foreign companies to take control and consequently limit the sovereignty of these States and the right of their people to dispose freely of their wealth and natural resources. Although a State does have the right, by agreement, to alienate part of its sovereignty to a foreign entity, such transfer may not, under pain of violating international law, jeopardize its economic independence, which is a key component of its political independence. [5]

Through its conditionalities the Troika

not only violated international law. It also abetted in the violation of these countries' national laws. In Greece, in particular, what is happening is truly a legal coup. For instance several provisions of the 3845/2010 law drawn up to implement the austerity measures violate the Constitution, in particular the provision suppressing the legal minimum wage. The abandonment of Greece's sovereignty is further aggravated by the clause in the Troika agreement that provides for the application of Anglo-Saxon law and the jurisdiction of the EU court of Justice in case of disputes. The State thus relinquishes a fundamental prerogative in its sovereignty, namely the territorial competence of its national courts. At the same time, the Greek law implementing the austerity measures stipulates that arbitral sentences (that have constitutional value) granting wage increases in 2010 and 2011 be declared void and unenforceable. In short, as jurists Katrougalos and Pavlidis have written, State sovereignty is limited in a way very similar to the international financial control enforced on Greece in 1897 as a consequence of its bankruptcy in 1893 and of Greece being defeated in its war against Turkey.

Any loan based on an illicit and immoral cause is odious

The legal foundation of the illicit and immoral cause to challenge the validity of agreements can be found in several civil and commercial national legislations. It takes us back to a question raised by the doctrine of odious debt: who benefits from the loans? In the case of agreements signed with Greece, Ireland and Portugal, it is obvious that the European private banks that granted totally irresponsible loans to these countries are on the winning side, even though they have a large share of responsibility in the debt crisis. Indeed the bailing out of private banks by public authorities after the financial crisis burst in 2007 led to the steep rise in the public debt of these States. In this respect we can at least describe the cause of the agreements with the Troika as being 'immoral' and claim unjust enrichment of private banks (a general principle in international law according to article

38 of the Statute of the International Court of Justice). [6]

The unjustified enrichment of private banks is even more blatant when we consider that they derive huge benefits from public authorities, given the discrepancy between the interest rates of approximately 4% they demand from the borrowing States to buy 3 or 6 month securities, and the 1% interest rate at which they were able to borrow from the ECB up to April 2011, before it was raised to 1.25 and then 1.5%. [7] We can also speak of unjustified (and illegal and abusive) enrichment for countries such as Germany, France and Austria, which borrowed at 2% on the markets and then loaned at 5 or 5.5% to Greece and 6% to Ireland. The same can be said of the IMF, which borrows at a low interest from its members and makes loans at much higher rates to Greece, Ireland and Portugal.

The measures announced by EU leaders on 21 July 2011 were a clear admission of the unjust enrichment they are responsible for, and of the fraudulent nature of their policies. They eventually announced that the interest rates asked of Greece, Ireland and Portugal would be reduced by 2 or 3%. This reduction in interest rates to approximately 3.5% for loans over 15 or even 30 years is a clear acknowledgement that the rates demanded were unaffordable. If they are reducing them now, it is because of the enormity of the disaster they have helped to create, and the fear of contagion.

What gain is there for Ireland, Greece and Portugal in making such agreements with the Troika? None at all, except a little financial breathing space... to be used to pay back their creditors. In the mid and long term, such austerity policies will make the economic situation worse since they are part of a snowball effect. In fact the burden of interests on these new debts increases while the measures dictated by the Troika result in reduced economic activity since there will be less demand as living conditions deteriorate. It can thus be said that the IMF behaves in a wilfully harmful way, given the massive gap between its discourse and reality.

Indeed in Article 1 of its statutes, the IMF defines one of its main purposes as “to facilitate the expansion and balanced growth of international trade, and to *contribute thereby to the promotion and maintenance of high levels of employment and real income and to the development of the productive resources of all members as primary objectives of economic policy*” [8] and also, “to give confidence to members by making the general resources of the Fund temporarily available to them under adequate safeguards, thus providing them with opportunity to correct maladjustments in their balance of payments *without resorting to measures destructive of national or international prosperity*.” [9] Similarly we can assert that the action of the European Commission and of the ECB wilfully harms the countries concerned.

The measures imposed by the IMF, the ECB and the EC also cause these countries to be trapped in the vicious logic of indebtedness since they will have to keep borrowing to be able to repay. They are consequently looking at a period of ten, fifteen or twenty years of austerity and increasing debt. [10] The OECD survey on the Greek debt [11] published on 2 August 2011 reckons that the public debt which amounted to 140% of GDP in 2010 should be back to 100% in ... 2035.

Faced with such a predicament, if they wish to serve the interests of the population, these governments should repeal the agreements with the Troika, suspend repayment of their debts at once (with a freeze on interest) and organize audits of their

debts with citizen participation. These audits will determine which portion of the debts is illegitimate and must therefore be unconditionally cancelled. The remaining part of the public debt must be reduced through measures aimed at those who benefited from it. Lawsuits must be brought against those responsible for the damage. Obviously, complementary measures will have to be taken, such as the transfer of banks to the public sector, radical tax reform, and the socialization of those sectors that have been privatized in the neo-liberal process. [12] These are vital measures, because the cancellation of illegitimate debts, though necessary, will not be enough if the logic of the system remains in place.

Translated by Christine Pagnouille in collaboration with Judith Harris

One year after floods: Women continue struggle to rebuild life and livelihood

30 August 2011, by **Bushra Khaliq**

The devastation caused by the 2010 floods was worst in Pakistan’s history; almost 2,000 deaths, nearly 20 million displaced or affected and one-fifth of the country went under water. The deluge inflicted unprecedented catastrophic damage on a country already reeling from the effects of US-led war on terrorism. A year later, the picture is dismal.

Although many flood refugees have returned homes, little is known to the world about their miserable conditions and stories of struggle, to combat the horrific effects on lives and livelihoods. Particularly the women who are the worst-hit still facing multiple challenges after one year. Their work burden is multiplied. While husbands and male members in poor families, being daily wagers, are struggling to find sources of livelihood, women remain busy in rebuilding their damaged shelters and

dwelling. In small villages and hamlets, one can find these women doing brick work and plastering their mud and half cemented houses. The brave ones who have done the reconstruction work are out in the fields to assist their tilling husbands. Rest or respite seems rare thing to them.

Their lost possessions have been replaced at higher costs or not at all. Many marriageable girls who lost their dowry and valuables are making fresh start to make it again to get married. To address the issue a new culture of collective marriages is gaining ground, which was earlier unknown to these areas. Unfortunately, the phenomenon is giving rise to another social trend of early girl marriages. The custom of girls’ early marriages is already present in Pakistan, however the post flood conditions have given new

impetus to this trend. It must be stopped and the only way to tackle it is to initiate women focused anti-poverty programs in the area. For instance, any scheme to allocate state land and distribution of livestock among poor women in area will be helpful in addressing the issue.

Another particular problem is women health, which is generally ignored. Although during flood, pregnant women had opportunity to avail facilities of ante-natal and post natal care, provided through emergency medical camps, when the moment relief phase was over, these women were left in conditions, much vulnerable to reproductive-related diseases. Moreover, women and children are also facing nutritional problems on account of non-availability of proper healthy diet. Those who lost their livestock are in fact deprived of milk and permanent

source of livelihood.

The compensation money from the government has been unevenly distributed. Widows and female-headed families faced discrimination in distribution of Watan cards (relief money) and rehabilitation programs. Despite tall claims the Government has failed to decrease the rising vulnerability level of poverty among women after one year. While donors promises of some \$600 million in aid have not arrived. As a result squeezing livelihood options coupled with price hike are impacting the poor families and women in worst manner.

Last month when I revisited Dera Shahwala, a small village of district Muzaffargarh, one of the worst-hit areas in southern Punjab, things were not much changed since my first visit soon after floods. Though work on roads, embankments and water courses/channels is evident, the issues of provision and restoration of livelihood resources are yet to be resolved. One of the main sources of livelihood for poor landless women in this area is cotton picking. With loss of the crop they could not find the

alternative. In some cases where land is permanently overtaken by the rough sand there will be no crop at all, making peasants resourceless on the one hand and depriving women cotton pickers of their livelihood on the other hand.

A flood affectee, here, Myriam Bibi recalled that flood water washed away everything in the house and she lost most of what was inside and now lives in a newly erected small room while her children were sent away to stay with relatives. She is rebuilding her house brick by brick with the help of her husband who contributed his free time after day's labor. The work is progressing slowly, and for the most part the house remains a roofless ruin. "Relatives and friends help us, but not everyone is so lucky. It is very difficult to rebuild our life," she said. "I don't see in the coming two/three years that I will have my house completely rebuilt."

Aysa Bibi, a young mother of five and wife of a farm worker, said floods, however 'natural', were profoundly discriminatory, when where they hit, they impact different people with

different degree of misery. Some people were more affected than others. "We lost our dwelling and the only cow; now we cannot purchase the new one. I cannot provide milk to my children. Whatever money we had, is spent on reconstruction of our home."

Another resident, Zohra Begum said her 7-member family moved in the immediate aftermath. "We have a small piece of land where me and my 16-year-old daughter have to work longer hours to assist my tilling husband. We owe debt to our relatives and we have to repay it. My two children who used to go school are now supposed to be at home to look after the siblings. When we first got here there were facilities for us. But they have since been taken away. Now people just come and talk and talk but they do not give us any help."

False rumors of massive floods are also leaving residents on edge. People have sleepless nights in some areas near Indus. "It is a mental torture when we are hearing that there might be another monsoon flood," said 36-year-old Parveen, who is still struggling to rebuild her damaged home.

A Brief History of the present crisis

29 August 2011, by **Hillel Ticktin**

I have left out two issues discussed in Critique, that of the case against the falling rate of profit as the only or fundamental cause and why the ruling class has opted for austerity. [13]

The Marxist theory of crisis has languished in the post-World War II period, largely because there was no real crisis until now. As Marx famously put it: "The world trade crises must be regarded as the real concentration and forcible adjustment of all the contradictions of bourgeois economy." [14]

Today there is a real structural crisis of the system itself, not just a particular cyclical downturn/upturn. The latter have occurred a number of

times in the postwar period, most recently and notably in 1981-5 and 1989-93 followed by the so-called dot.com crash in March 2000.

The last of these, however, was different in that recovery was very limited, and greatly affected by 9/11 and the wars that have followed. The crisis of 2007 is effectively its continuation. But the difference between previous downturns and that of March 2000/2007 is not just in the length of recovery, the depth of the downturn, and the global reach of the downturn.

More fundamentally, the difference lies in the longterm change in class relations with very high levels of

longterm unemployment, combined with direct forms of attack on the standard of living of the working class whether through housing, taxes, wages or benefits. In Great Britain the attack has been total. In Ireland and Greece it has not only been total, but unremittingly vicious.

We are indeed living through a period in which the contradictions of the bourgeois economy are being released, after being mediated in the postwar period by the Cold War and latterly through finance capital.

Historically, capitalism since the late 19th century has successively used imperialism/finance capital, war, repression/fascism, then

Stalinism/Cold War combined with the welfare state “and finally, a return to finance capital” as strategies for containment of the forces threatening to supersede capitalism.

I will argue here that these forms have either ceased to exist or have imploded, forcing the bourgeoisie to return to the classical forms of capitalism.

Background: The Turning Point

The crucial turning point came in the seventies when it became clear that the welfare state/full employment made capitalism unstable. Workers who are given lifetime tenure of employment with rising wages demand control over their work and over the society. Since workers are the majority of society, even the bourgeoisie can see that they cannot be held back under conditions where the fundamentals of capitalism are contained. Apart from force “which normally remains in the background until the system itself is directly threatened” capital, as self-expanding value, uses the form of commodity fetishism (“consumerism”), both ideologically and practically, as its preferred direct means of control.

The increasing role in organization of the economy by governments and corporations has eroded the myth that firms cannot be consciously planned rather than being run by the omnipotent capitalist. At the same time, the public sector and the welfare state cannot be run on the simple basis of value (i.e. profit-making) itself. The attempt to run education, health, prisons, etc. on the basis of value alone does not work. The fact that the bureaucratic alternatives are often poorly run does not alter this point.

The United States has diverged in having less of a welfare state and a smaller public sector than Western Europe, but the difference is one of degree. The role of a huge military sector, which is in essence a nationalized division of the economy outsourcing much of its production, together with a bureaucratic health machine controlled by insurance companies, performs much of the same functions in adding to the

consciously regulated capitalist economy.

The role of the Federal Reserve Bank and the Treasury has been underlined since the downturn. The anger shown against both illustrates the way in which capital cannot avoid being consciously targeted today.

Not surprisingly, the bourgeoisie has tried to turn the clock back with increased marketization. The second form used to control workers, then, is that of the reserve army of labor, which had been effectively abolished in Western Europe in the postwar years. The restoration of mass unemployment has been more difficult, although essential to the restoration of capitalist stability.

By the 1960s and the '70s, to return to the initial point, the working class was demanding both concessions and greater control over corporations and the economy. In country after country there were strikes and demonstrations which led the capitalist class to reassess its postwar strategy. Capitalism adopted a series of measures, which have become well-known as neoliberalism but are better understood as the consequences of the turn to finance capital.

The Analysis

Marx's references to the contradictions of the capitalist economy and society provide the real starting point of any analysis of the downturn, but are particularly relevant at the present time. It was Trotsky who argued that we all live in a transitional period between capitalism and socialism. That does not mean that we have socialist forms, but it does mean that the capitalist forms are undergoing rapid and uncontrollable change, which the capitalist class is doing its best to roll back.

Put another way, the combined growth of governmental organization of the economy/society, large corporations, monopoly, and the increasing role of bureaucracies of insurance companies, large corporations, and the public sector reflect the increasing socialization of the economy/society, but in a fracturing capitalist

framework.

The effect is that the dominance of value (a profit-driven “free market”) is limited in its scope, and decision-making often more important, but the capitalist class has been trying to roll back history. It talks ad infinitum about SMEs (small and medium size enterprises) and the so-called middle class. It tries to privatize everything possible and impossible. The problem is that these measures do not have the desired and expected effect: The middle class is increasingly squeezed and proletarianized, small business is controlled by big business and its independence is illusory, and privatization is limited by governmental regulation.

From this point of view, the switch to the dominance of finance capital took the apparent form of a series of bubbles, followed by a huge bubble which imploded. The reality was that the bubble was a delaying tactic to avoid the inevitable downturn. Alan Greenspan was neither mistaken nor an idiot, as he knew that raising interest rates prematurely would have aborted the upturn in the 1990s and during the early years of the new century.

Capital was transferred out of the value-creating sectors to finance capital. Some of it was exported, leading in a particular instance to the Asian bubble of 1997, but most of it was used for speculation. Leverage buyouts morphed into private equity, and mortgages were re-sold as CDOs (“collateralized debt obligations”) while greater risk was offset by CDS’s (“credit default swaps”). Translated into value, these so-called “derivatives” amounted to a transfer of value from industry and from wages/salaries.

All crises end up with a banking crisis, since the indebted capitalist or worker tries to get increased loans that ultimately they cannot repay. Raising interest rates at this point bursts the bubble.

Causation Behind the Crisis

Some Marxists attribute the crisis to underconsumption and others to the falling rate of profit, and yet others to

disproportionality (imbalances which constrict the paths for productive investment). A fourth view puts particular stress on the financial failure as the fundamental cause. A fifth view combines all four. All crises, in my view, combine all these elements but there is always a trigger and a dominant or crucial cause.

This does not, however, end the discussion as it is quite obvious that governments have played a central role in crises in modern times. It is probably more correct to talk of the ruling class, and the various governments, being central to the crisis. In this respect it is clear that the ruling class has deployed a particular strategy at this time, which has spectacularly failed – that of finance capital, which involved a particular politics and a particular relationship to the working class.

Logically, the difficulty in placing investment points to disproportionality as the technical issue, at the present time, within a context where the end of the Cold War removed the basic stability of the system. We cannot look at crises simply in terms of the innate contradictions of capitalism. We also have to understand the response of the bourgeoisie and of governments in order to understand the nature of this particular crisis.

In other words, we have a series of elements of the present crisis that also make up the form of extraction of the surplus product or surplus value. The form itself reflects the decline of capitalism as a system. There are two aspects to this decline; one is finance capital and the other is the direct intervention of the ruling class, as a class, whether through governments or through other means.

Regarding the latter: As the society approaches its supersession, forms of the future show themselves but in a highly distorted form – in this instance through conscious control of the capitalist economy. The “invading socialist society” noted by Friedrich Engels has been turned to the advantage of capital, so far as that is possible. Rudolf Hilferding (the early 20th century theorist of “finance capital”) was right to point to the way finance capital provides an

organizational form for the ruling class. It does not abolish competition, but the collective interest of the ruling class can express itself when it needs to, particularly when it is threatened.

During the Cold War, such expression showed itself through the actions of the United States as the dominant imperial power, which effectively coordinated the ruling class through a series of institutions. The end of the Cold War and the decline of the United States has created problems for the ruling class in this respect.

In regard to the first point, finance capital was effectively the strategy adopted from the late seventies onwards and it has now unravelled.

The problem, at the point of the crisis breaking out, was that capital is self-expanding value and an expression of labor time expended, but the huge agglomerations of capital that had built up could not be reinvested except as fictitious capital, in the form of various kinds of loans and their derivatives. Money cannot produce more money in itself, or produce value without the intervention of productive labor. Money, without going back to labor, cannot complete the circuit to produce more capital.

Concretely, the bourgeoisie was not able to invest because there were insufficient outlets in which to invest, so they poured money into finance capital itself – derivatives, stock exchange, real estate, commercial real estate. A vast asset inflation ensued.

The bourgeois economic argument is that the Chinese and other Asians acquired and expanded an external surplus corresponding to the U.S. deficit. Perversely the Chinese refused to spend their money on raising the standard of living of their own population. This argument is dubious – or more correctly, it is nonsense.

There was and still is a huge pile-up of money held in financial institutions by wealthy depositors – in 2007 it came to 18 trillion dollars, nine times the level of the Chinese external holdings. There was something like 110 trillion dollars held by financial institutions like pension funds, insurance companies, private equity

etc which had (and has) to be invested. The rate of industrial growth in the West is too low to absorb this money. The result has been a series of bubbles – first the East Asian bubble, then the implosion of Long Term Capital Management, followed by the dot.com bust.

The recent wars provided a brief relief for the system until it finally collapsed. Money has flowed to the third world, particularly to China, but it remains below its potential. Capital remains wary of investing money in countries over which it has limited control. The nations of Asia, Africa and Latin America are no longer colonies, and can and have nationalized property or (e.g. Argentina) refused to pay their debts.

The Situation Today

The situation has not basically changed. Hence money is flowing to the so-called emerging economies, where interest rates are relatively high, as in the case of South Africa, where interest rates are at 8%. In fact, corporations have done exceptionally well in the last year because they had a licence to dismiss workers and lower wages, so raising productivity and profits.

The recent additional expansion of the money supply in the United States – called “quantitative easing” or QE2 – is technically superfluous given the fact that companies have surplus funds. Obviously, the reason why the Federal Reserve Bank is issuing the money lies in the fact that they know that the corporations are not spending the money and hope that QE2 will provide an additional push to the money supply. However, unless somebody actually invests or spends the money productively it will not serve the necessary purpose.

Critics argue that the issuing of money will cause global inflation. Some, on the left as well as on the right, accept the argument. There is, however, no basis to it. The money flowing to the underdeveloped countries from the developed world goes very largely into portfolio investment or government bonds rather than into direct investment. Interest rates are high in those countries and we may expect

that the money will flow back as the interest rates are reduced. Otherwise it is going into speculative investment in commodities. In effect, there is a new bubble in the pricing of raw materials and food, which is certain to burst.

Why is there capital which is not capital – that is, why is the ruling class not investing? An editorial in the Financial Times put it like this: “At the same time, corporations are in fine fettle. They are flush with cash, having used the recession to stock up on cheap liquidity and rationalise their business models – by firing workers or improving their productivity: hence 18 months of growth and profits, but no new jobs.”

So why are they not using their money to increase their capital? The FT then says: “Business uncertainty feeds on itself: the more corporations postpone investments so that they can first see demand return, the longer they must wait for demand to materialise. In economics as elsewhere, the greatest thing to fear is fear itself.

“There are reasons to hope that US businesses may again be sniffing at risk.” [15]

So the problem, according to the Leader writers of the Financial Times, is that businessmen are afraid to risk their capital. The “uncertainty” is too great. Of course bourgeois economics absurdly argues that profits are the reward of risk. So the capitalist class, according to them, are afraid to risk their capital, even though that is the function of capital itself. In reality, capitalisms reduce their risk to the absolute minimum, rather than lose their capital or potential profit. So what are they afraid of?

The FT seems to imply that it is an issue of the moment and only this moment, but in fact it was this very issue which led to the downturn. Looked at superficially, of course, banks were doing their best to lend to all and sundry, which is not just risky but foolish. So the official story is that banks were greedy and not just greedy but stupidly greedy. They went for

high risks because the rewards were great.

Even a 10-year-old can see that this is nonsense. The banks did not invest in industry but in mortgages and derivatives – or in other words in loans and loan derivatives – and the economy had low levels of investment outside of finance. Once one removes finance from the statistics, the rate of growth is very low.

So why has the capitalist class in the West preferred only to invest in the unproductive sector and export its capital to the East? As mentioned above, Third World countries such as Brazil are suffering from a surfeit of Western capital going into portfolio investment in their countries. As a result they are taking steps to limit the inflow.

There are two points to note here. First, it is clear that there are huge sums of money which are looking for an outlet, as there were before the downturn; and secondly most, though not all, investors are not prepared to put their money into direct investment, into real production companies.

The huge pool of capital is looking for short term returns. The numbers went down during the downturn but they are moving up again. Obviously one way of spending money is to waste it, as in the recent construction of the most expensive apartment building in the world at 1 Hyde Square in London, where one apartment cost some \$200 million, or return to the building of yachts.

The Concept of Finance Capital

So what is going on in more theoretical terms? One way of looking at it is to talk of a capital strike, as some left-wing groups have done, but that implies it is a short term action, when it is a long term strategy. The concept of finance capital is crucial. It is abstract capital (not tied to any particular productive enterprise), which is necessarily short-termist, unproductive and predatory, [16] but has succeeded in shifting the terms of the class struggle towards the

capitalist class.

In Europe and the USA, the logic of a Keynesian or popular solution to the downturn would be towards both monetary expansion and the growth of nationalized industries. Yet private enterprise finds it difficult to go for large-scale investment over extended periods of time. Governed by finance capital, it is necessarily short-termist.

No legislation can alter the fact that the wealthy investors, holding the funds required, want immediate returns and are wary of taking on the risks involved in the research and development over long periods, without the government as partner. On the other hand, the dominant section of capital is afraid of allowing government to play an increased role in the economy and afraid of reflating the economy at a higher growth rate (i.e. “stimulus”).

The ideologists argue that growth and innovation comes from small and medium size companies, which have to be promoted over “planned” investment by the state. The argument has no merit, as truly independent SMEs are of little importance.

The automobile industry, aeroplane industry, military industry, pharmaceutical industries and chemical industries are typical in that they are dominated by large companies such as General Motors, Boeing, Pfizer and the like, which contract out a considerable proportion of the work. These smaller companies are effectively controlled by their purchasers in almost every respect.

Such window-dressing serves the purpose of covering up the real intentions behind the permanent austerity program. The meaning of the crisis is that the finance capital strategy itself has now imploded, and the capitalist class has no further strategy other than a return to classical capitalism, with mass unemployment and a minimal welfare state.

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<http://www.solidarity-us.org/curren...>

Baba Jan: The most wanted political activist in Gilgit Baltestan

28 August 2011, by **Farooq Tariq**

Baba Jan, a member of the federal committee Labour Party Pakistan and organiser of Progressive Youth Front Gilgit Baltestan is now the most wanted political activist of the region. The police is hunting for him everywhere, Yesterday on 25th August, the Hunza Police arrested 16 more political activists, however, Baba Jan escaped arrest once again. The total arrests made up to today for demonstrating against the killings have now reached 32. Among them, 10 are members of Labour Party Gilgit Baltestan.

We have decided that Baba Jan will not court arrest but will continue the movement against the killing of the two political activists by the local police when they protested for compensation of 25 families of Atta Abad lake effectees.

Today, on 26th August, the whole Hunza district is closed in protest. There is a shutter down strike by the traders of Hunza against the arrests, the traders are also very angry on the charges against the political activists who have held a peaceful demonstration. 16 FIR are registered against uncounted numbers of political activists, so police is arresting every one. However, Baba Jan is the main target. Several sections of anti terrorist charges are also included in these first information reports of police.

Ehsan Ali president Gilgit Baltestan High Court Bar Association and member federal committee LPP is preparing a write petition to challenge

the anti-terrorist charges included in police cases.

Baba Jan calling from an unknown place in Humza told me that there are road blocks every where and police is looking for me every where, he said that I have been told by the whole community not to court arrest because they are all false charges. He said that even under Musharaf, we were not treated like this, The government of PPP in Gilgit baltestan is very nervous of our growing popularity and now making all efforts to stop the growing radicalisation among the youth in the region.

Labour Party Pakistan is planning to organise protest demonstrations in several cities against the arrests and police raids and demand an immediate release of all those arrested and stop raiding activists homes day and night. LPP demand an end of police state in the region and demand for the acceptance of the demands of the people for better compensation. Karachi LPP and PYF have already protested against the arrest 1 year ago this week despite the bad situation in Karachi.

Baba Jan has become the folk hero of the region with his unending enthusiasm to build a movement for a right of self determination, for more democratic space and building of an alternative subjective factor. he is been protected by the community. thousands have taken part in today's action by closing their shops and businesses in support of the protesters.

Baba Jan while speaking to a mass meeting of Renala Khurd peasants organised by Anjuman Mozareen Punjab told that we need such a mass movement in our region as well. He extended full support to the struggling peasants for land rights. Now, within months, he along with his comrades and friends, has build a mass movement of resistance in the region not seen earlier.

Although, the local and national media is favouring the PPP government because of their material interest, this movement does not depend on the commercial media.

Please spread this message where ever it is possible

Farooq Tariq

spokesperson, Labour Party Pakistan

26 August 2011

Solidarity messages can be sent to:

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"The revolution has just begun"

27 August 2011, by **Gilbert Achcar**

Gilbert Achcar, professor at the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London, has no qualms calling the popular protests sweeping the Arab world a revolution. They are, in his view, part of a revolutionary process that is taking the region into uncharted territory. The forces active on the ground have changed, and, while the future is unpredictable, there is no going back to the previous situation.

Dima Charif: Different terms have been used to describe what the Arab world has witnessed since the beginning of the year: revolution, uprising, popular revolt, protests, etc. What do you think is the best description?

Gilbert Achcar: There has been much debate about what to call what has been happening, whether we're talking about the region as a whole or the countries which have seen successes, namely Tunisia and Egypt. In fact, even in those two countries, there are many who object to the use of the word 'revolution', as it gives the impression that the regime was overthrown in accordance with the people's wishes, when in reality it was not. Only its head and its most despotic and corrupt figures were removed. But the backbone of the regime survives. I think the best description of what is happening today is 'revolutionary process.' This term also explains what happened in Egypt and Tunisia. There were indeed revolutions there, with mass action achieving undeniable successes, even though they did not bring about overall regime change. They are important victories nevertheless, and the process is continuing in both countries. The Egyptians were right to name their revolution by the date it began, the 'Revolution of 25 January.' That was the date of a mass rally, nothing more, not a major achievement as such. But it was the starting date of a process that is still

continuing and whose fate is now being contested.

DC: Who is driving these revolutions in your opinion: the marginalized, the national bourgeoisie, the workers?

GA: The situation differs between countries. In Egypt, Tunisia, and elsewhere, there is a broad social front that is opposed to two key features: despotism and corruption. All are united against these two aspects. It is noteworthy that in countries where there is corruption but less despotism, the mass movements have not had the same momentum as when they have been united against both despotism and corruption, as in Egypt and Tunisia. This applies to Morocco, for example. There is no overwhelming sense of political oppression there, as the king instituted some democratic changes and eased some restrictions on freedoms, albeit to a limited extent. Right after the start of the protests he announced a number of reform measures. Thus the protests demanding political change and a constitutional monarchy lack the momentum of Egypt and Tunisia.

In Egypt, Tunisia, and elsewhere, there is a broad social front that is opposed to two key features: despotism and corruption. All are united against these two aspects. The masses suffering from social injustice and poverty took to the streets alongside wealthier social groups more concerned with ending despotism. These social groups are liberal in the political sense. They may favor social reform, and oppose neoliberal economic policies, but their members aspire above all to a degree of democracy and freedom that they believe to be appropriate for our time. They are advocates of modernity.

The bulk of the movement involves a very broad mass of the marginalized,

poor, and unemployed who resent the corruption and the social status quo and understand that there is a link between despotism and corruption. Included in this front are the left and the workers' movements. These were instrumental in Tunisia, as well as in Egypt where the mobilization of the workers' movements hastened the downfall of Mubarak.

Toppling Mubarak thus brought together a broad spectrum of forces, from far-left to far-right. But once he was ousted, a new alignment of political forces developed, with the Muslim Brothers (MB) and Salafist religious currents supporting the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), and differences emerging with the other forces - leftist and liberal - over the future shape of the state.

DC: What does the US want from the Arab revolutions? Is it behind the train, on board, or ahead?

GA: America certainly isn't ahead of the train. Washington and its ally the Zionist state were and continue to be extremely concerned about the changes in the Arab world. We know from the Israeli press that they are even concerned for the Syrian regime, because at least it provides a measure of stability. But the US wasn't entirely surprised by what happened. That was clear from the WikiLeaks cables. They know what is going on, especially regarding the corruption of the regimes. They know they are dealing with despotic regimes, but these are their clients. They have no illusions about such regimes lasting forever, and they know there's popular dissatisfaction.

Under George W. Bush, the US posed as champion of democratic change in the region because it needed to provide a pretext for occupying Iraq after the WMD lie was exposed. In 2005, its Arab allies came under heavy

pressure to come up with some cosmetic democratic reforms in order to enable the Bush administration to claim it was serious about the venture. Washington managed at the time to get its Saudi allies to hold municipal elections for the first time in 30 years – male-only elections and for only half of the seats. They pressed Mubarak to hold parliamentary elections with a modicum of credibility, and he obliged, letting the MB get 20% of the seats. He was thus sending back his usual message: if you want real elections, you will get Islamist groups who oppose your policies. This served to reinforce the line which had previously prevailed in Washington: that talk of democracy is a fine ideological weapon for the US and its allies to use, but not in the Middle East, where hostility towards the US is intense, not least due to its sponsorship of Israel.

Washington was dismayed by Mubarak's hereditary succession plans and his reversal of whatever limited democratization he had conceded, and it was certainly irritated by the fully rigged 2010 elections. This caused tension between Cairo and Washington, as the US realized that Mubarak had outlived his usefulness and that his continuation in power would jeopardize US interests. So once the protest movement began, and having taken in the lesson of Tunisia, Washington was not completely perplexed. It urged the army – the Egyptian player most organically connected to the US, as it subsidizes it – to remain above the fray. The US administration's statements hailing the peaceful nature of the protests were messages to the Egyptian army to avoid joining in the repression. Joining may have caused the army to split, making it less capable of managing the post-Mubarak period. Washington's much-repeated calls for an 'orderly transition' actually meant 'We favor a democratic transfer of power while our principal ally remains firmly in control.' This is the Turkish scenario of the 1980s: a peaceful transition under army supervision towards a civil state, in which the army retains its supervisory role, and can intervene should a threat arise to strategic interests.

America today is getting out of breath running behind the train, yet it is still attempting to get things under control. The clearest example is the intervention in Libya. There was a popular revolt there after the barrier of fear was broken in Tunisia and Egypt. But Libya is an oil state, and this is a serious matter for Western imperialism, i.e. the US and its allies. Hence the intervention aimed at bolstering the Western countries' image as partners in and supporters of change in the Arab world, while enabling them to hijack the insurgency and contain it. The West was relieved that the protesters in Tunisia and Egypt did not mobilize around slogans hostile to the US and Israel. This was read as a political indication, but it was a mistake. The reason such slogans weren't raised was not that they weren't shared by the overwhelming majority of protesters, but only that the priority at that point was to get rid of local despotism. People had also grown accustomed, over decades, to their regimes invoking the national cause in order to silence popular protest.

In Libya there is no institution like the Egyptian army that can be employed in a relatively peaceful transfer of power, hence the Western decision to intervene militarily. In its early weeks the Libyan revolt raised the slogan 'no to foreign intervention,' and even now after turning to external support they still reject intervention on the ground. But the Western powers do not want Gaddafi's regime to fall before knowing what will replace it. Everyone realizes that NATO's intervention is motivated mainly by oil. The Libyan rebels also know that. The West won't arm them, it limits their military action, and it dictates terms to them. But once the regime, or what remains of it, falls, the West will not be able to control the course of events without a presence on the ground. Unlike in Egypt and Tunisia, the regime's downfall in Libya will mean the disintegration of the existing state apparatus. The main difference between Tunisia and Egypt, on the one hand, and Libya and Syria on the other is that in the latter, the regimes have reorganized the armed forces so that their key components are linked organically to the ruling families. There can be no repeat of the

scenario of Tunisia or Egypt, where the establishment could survive without the family and disavow it. In Libya and Syria, the collapse of the regime would cause a massive institutional vacuum.

DC: Do you envisage an Islamist future for the region after the downfall of the regimes? Would the present Turkish model of government be suited to the Arab states?

GA: The recent Turkish experience is based on three components that are nowhere to be found in the Arab world: a secularist tradition represented by the army, a democratic (up to a point) constitution, and a party that split from a fundamentalist Islamic movement and underwent a profound transformation. Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP) is a conservative party that seeks to combine Islamic heritage with modernity. It is more akin to the Christian Democrat currents in Europe. So on what basis could we adopt a Turkish model? Take Egypt, for example. The army is not an institution that upholds secularism. The MB is a fundamentalist party in every sense, whose slogan is 'Islam is the Solution.' For a Turkish model to take shape, a modernizing Islamic party would be needed, not one that is just the political façade of the existing Brotherhood like the Freedom and Justice Party. It could be created by groups that are splitting off from the MB, especially among their younger members. As for the Egyptian army, it has since Sadat's days been inclined to use religion as an ideological ploy to cover its many failings. We may be actually closer to the Pakistani model – a military-fundamentalist alliance – than to the Turkish one.

There is no point speculating about where things will lead though, because the process is still in its early stages and it may take years of ups and downs before it settles. How and what kind of stability will be ultimately achieved depends on the shifting balance of forces. What is clear in Egypt's case is that the regime survives via the military establishment's continuing control of the reins of power, the maintenance of the economic and social order, and the

retention of the regime's personnel (other than a few figures who are being tried, representing the tip of the iceberg). Washington concluded that with democracy making inroads in the Arab world, and in the absence of US-friendly political forces enjoying public support, it would have to win over existing players. The most ideologically open to a partnership with the US is the MB. Qatar and Turkey are both engaged in mediation on this issue.

We are thus witnessing the beginnings of an alliance between Washington and the MB. The movement's statements have become more moderate vis-a-vis Washington and Israel than they used to be. The army and MB have been cooperating, with the latter providing assurances that it does not aspire to take power but only to participate in government. Thus a new page is being turned with Washington. We have also seen a clear shift in the official American line towards the MB. The cooperation in Egypt directly impacts the Palestinian reconciliation effort. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas could not have taken such a step as the reconciliation with Hamas in defiance of Washington. In the final analysis we must not forget that the MB cooperated closely with the US and its intelligence agencies in the 1950s and 60s.

For two decades after the 1948 Nakba, popular action was dominated by the Arab nationalist movement in its various guises. The 1967 defeat undermined the nationalist current, and the 1970s witnessed the rise of the radical left, which failed to secure a dominant position. The fundamentalist current was also on the rise during that transitional period, and Arab regimes used it to confront the left, often with the Saudi kingdom financing the Islamic movements. Then came the 1979 Iranian revolution which showed that the religious current could evolve in an anti-Western direction and therefore pose a threat to Western interests. This change set a political cycle in motion in the region. The US tried to draw a distinction between Sunni and Shia Islam, as evidenced in its continued collaboration with Sunni fundamentalism in Afghanistan.

However, after the invasion of Kuwait, the position adopted by several Sunni Islamic movements led to a breach between them and both the Saudi kingdom and the US. Yet the religious current has remained dominant for three decades, from the time of the Iranian revolution until today.

There were indications since 2009 that this phase is ending and a new one is beginning. In 2009, the Iranian model plunged into crisis faced with popular protests. Meanwhile, the rise of the class struggle and workers' movements in Egypt, in particular, and the sharpening of social conflicts in several countries such as Tunisia and Morocco signaled the things to come. The religious current stays aloof from this kind of struggle, which is at odds with its nature and program. These were important signs.

We are today entering a new political stage, but it is a transitional period in which the leadership of popular action is being contested by three forces. First there is the religious current, which has gained from recent events. But they are now reduced to being one force among others in the movement, after having been virtually the only opposition in previous times. The second force is a new kind of liberal current, composed of middle classes rather than capitalists, mostly professionals, students, unemployed graduates, and intellectuals, who are reformist in the social sense. These groups are not organized in a single party, but form a network which enjoys a certain degree of cohesion. The third force is the workers' movement and an array of allied leftist formations. The condition of the left varies from one country to another. It plays an important role in Tunisia, but less so in Egypt.

We are living through a revolutionary process and cannot prophesize its future. But while people have for years imagined that any shakeup in the region could only be brought about by religious groups, it is now clear that other forces are competing with them to lead popular action.

DC: Can Israel bear all these popular upheavals and revolutions?

GA: With the rise and radicalization of the nationalist current in the 1960s, the Saudi kingdom asked the Americans to evacuate their Dhahran airbase to fend off pressure from this current. The US found compensation for the exit of its troops from the Gulf in building a military alliance with Israel. The Zionist state's standing as a key ally of the US was bolstered after the victory it achieved in 1967, and the Iranian revolution further enhanced Israel's importance. This situation persisted until Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, which provided the US with a golden opportunity to stage a military comeback in the region. Israel's value accordingly declined.

At the time, Washington deemed it necessary to settle the Palestinian question, which was fuelling resentment against it. A period of unprecedented pressure and tension ensued between Washington and Tel Aviv in 1991. The Madrid conference was convened, and the Oslo accords were signed two years later. But their limitations quickly became apparent, and they were effectively terminated in 2000 with the second intifada.

The 9/11 attacks in 2001 restored the full importance of the Zionist ally to Washington. Afterwards, with US failure in Iraq, Israel was given free rein in the region. The revolutions we are facing are a source of anxiety for Israel, to be sure. But the Zionist state also sees them as strengthening its standing as a rock of stability from the perspective of US interests at a time when all Arab regimes are teetering.

DC: What kind of resolution could there realistically be to the crisis in Syria?

GA: Frankly, the prospect of a smooth transfer of power has receded with time due to the savagery of the repression there. This has created a great deal of hostility between a large section of the people and the regime. The involvement of the military establishment in the repression has meanwhile given its chiefs a strong interest in adhering to the regime: its downfall would mean them facing trial. I see no line of retreat for the regime. It has been escalating the repression, and this has polarized the

situation. We have seen that wherever initial demands for reform have been met with harsh repression, they have turned into demands for regime change. Where the regimes have acted more astutely, as in Morocco and Jordan, the demands have remained confined to reform. In Syria today, the least that the protest movement could accept would be the discard of the existing constitution and free elections. But I cannot see the Syrian regime agreeing to that. If Assad had

continued with the reforms that he began immediately after assuming office, he would have avoided the current situation. I see only two prospects for Syria: either bloody regime survival through more violence and repression or a civil war. The regime's collapse could come about as a result of the implosion of its armed agencies. If that were to happen, there would be a civil war.

The revolutionary process is continuing all over the region. Nobody

knows what the Arab world will look like in six months time. All options are open, and some of them are frightening indeed. But we've been through a very long night, and things are only beginning to change.

From *Al-Akhbar*, English Edition. Published Wednesday, August 24, 2011.

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Remembering Manning Marable

27 August 2011, by **Elizabeth Kai Hinton**

While working as the Managing Editor of *Souls* at a time when Malcolm was at the forefront of his mind, I still got to hear Professor Marable rap on Du Bois during nearly all of our conversations about the journal (whose title is even a riff on Du Bois's classic *The Souls of Black Folk*).

It didn't matter if we were deciding which font to use or which symposium to organize, Professor Marable always found a way to remind both of us that when he started *Souls* some 13 years ago, he very consciously modeled it after Du Bois's own *Phylon*.

Du Bois worked as the founding editor of *Phylon* at Fisk and Atlanta Universities during the Second World War. Like *Souls*, *Phylon* contained cutting-edge academic articles that offered critical interpretations of black American and Diasporic history, politics and culture, and showcased radical voices and methodologies.

Professor Marable always treated *Souls* as a living legacy of DuBoisian social and political theory, but as I wrestle with the void of him in my own life and work, and as I consider the implications of his scholarship now that he is no longer with us, increasingly I've come to think about Professor Marable as a living legacy of Du Bois himself.

In the spirit of Du Bois, Professor Marable continued to raise our collective historical consciousness in order to inspire political and social change. Both built institutions to sustain these sorts of critical interrogations, and to ensure that Black history would not be lost: Du Bois at the turn of the 19th century, holding a series of conferences in Atlanta that served as the foundation of black studies; Professor Marable at the turn of the 20th when he founded the Institute for Research in African-American Affairs at Columbia University.

They used the resources at their disposal shrewdly, and spoke to a range of audiences. While they helped build collective political movements — Du Bois of Pan-Africanism and Marable of the National Black Political Assembly — their enduring legacy in generating social change lies in the passionate and vast body of work they left for us to return to in their absence.

Groundbreaking books and essay collections aside, Du Bois's editorials in *The Crisis* and Professor Marable's "Along the Color Line" columns reached a general audience, providing historical context that allowed for a reinterpretation of current conditions in Du Bois's post-Reconstruction context of Jim Crow and Marable's

post-Civil Rights context of Color Blind Racism.

Both eventually turned to academic journals as progressive vehicles, recognizing the importance of research as a means to transcend structural inequality. In line with their larger dedications, by editing *Phylon* and *Souls* Du Bois and Professor Marable could highlight intellectuals and activists marginalized elsewhere for their commitments to radical and progressive social visions.

Even though Professor Marable only made the parallels with respect to *Souls*, I see how his accomplishments and encouragement offered us a living legacy of Du Bois. And now, to some degree, all of us here are a living legacy of Professor Marable's.

I am deeply honored to have worked with Professor Marable. I am thankful that he provided me with such strong model. I will miss him. And however we may define it for ourselves, it is up to us to carry Manning Marable's legacy forward.

The numerous works of the late Manning Marable are listed at <http://www.ranker.com/list/manning-marable-books-and-stories-and-written-works/reference>. We will present a review of his study of Malcolm X in a coming issue. We're pleased to

Call for a European Conference against Austerity, Cuts and Privatisation and in Defence of the Welfare State

26 August 2011

The peoples of Europe face a common enemy. The current debt problem is the latest stage of a long-running crisis of capitalism which is now impacting on virtually every aspect of our lives. But rather than dealing with the fundamental problems, governments, the European Commission and European Central Bank are trying to make the people pay - through public spending cuts, austerity measures, privatization and deregulation of the labour market. We stand for an alternative to the neo-liberal Europe and resistance to this destruction.

In each country in Europe, all the social gains of the post war period are now threatened. The unelected European Central Bank is providing loans to countries like Greece on condition of dramatic cuts in public services, wages and pensions which will lead to massive impoverishment.

2011 will be a vital year - we must work to ensure that this new movement grows in strength and begins to challenge the power of the financial markets. The situation is urgent. The economic crisis continues to deepen, threatening to plunge Europe into a depression.

In Britain we have established a Coalition of Resistance at a conference in November which drew together more than 1200 activists and trade union militants. We are committed to opposing all cuts and privatisation and defending the welfare state. We are encouraging all organisations to work together for a mass campaign of action in local communities and in support of industrial action by trade-unions.

This is already an international movement. But we need to learn from each others' experiences and work

towards a co-ordinated resistance across Europe and beyond.

We therefore call for a European Conference against Austerity, to take place in London provisionally on Saturday 1st October, with delegations and representatives from trade-unions, social movements and progressive organisations across Europe. We hope that this conference will be a step towards co-ordinating the resistance by agreeing to a European-wide day of action against Austerity, Cuts and Privatisation and in Defence of our Welfare State.

This call has been backed by a growing list of supporters across Europe: see <http://www.europeagainstausterity.org> / for that list, political pieces motivating the events, details of workshops and how to register for the conference.

We are against the Government's austerity budget: We must stop them, fight back now, they should pay their deficit!

26 August 2011, by Sinistra Critica (Critical Left)

Over the last two decades capitalism, thanks to government policies carried out by both the centre right and the

centre left - including Obama - has tried to save itself from its weak growth and profitability by

accumulating an avalanche of debts. In order to avoid the collapse of the system governments have taken over

the bulk of this debt by transferring it onto the public finances. Today the bill is being given to workers, young people, temporary workers, women and pensioners. It is significant that the bringing forward of the budget essentially involves changing the tax rates for the less well-off and 'reforming' the welfare system. This toughest budget yet now threatens to throw millions into poverty while at the same time not a euro will be taken from the pockets of the richest.

The majority of the population has to be a guarantor both for profit accumulated over many years and the profits to be made in the future.

The parliamentary opposition, in response to this decision 'ordered' by the ECB and its controllers, does not know what to say, it bleats incomprehensibly, oscillating between the sense of responsibility demanded by president Napolitano and the need to indicate differences that do not really exist. There is no alternative in parliament and therefore it is an illusion to expect anything positive to come out of it. The Italian parliament is de facto controlled by the central and private banks.

Worrying signs are also coming from the trade unions where the CGIL has managed to 'put itself into administration' under the Confindustria [main employers association] in the race to put on the

cloak of 'national responsibility'. [17] National responsibility in this case means accepting: balancing the budget to be written into the constitution; a reform of labour market agreements and laws; privatisation and liberalisation. The government has decided to go forward in this direction - among other things implementing the constitutionally consecrated balanced budget and thereby tying the fate of the country to the will of the 'markets', of big finance and the speculators. So how will now the CGIL be able to justify taking a position against it?

The situation is really serious but for reasons that are the opposite of those proclaimed on the TV and in the press. The brutality of the impending measures - 30 billion euro cuts in 2012 but around 100 billion to be made between now and 2014 - will mean poverty, unemployment and exploitation for millions of workers, young people and pensioners. A response is both necessary and very urgent.

If a class struggle and alternative left existed that was really independent of the Democratic Party's (PD) complicity with the system then it should meet and decide on a mobilisation required by the situation - including an effective general strike with real mass involvement.

Sinistra Critica is fully committed to building the 'We must stop them' initiative - the appeal that is supported by representatives from the trade unions, the CGIL, the rank and file unions, students, community activists, political militants and personalities. [18] It already has 1000 supporters. The appeal calls on activists to come to Rome on the first of October to build for a big national demonstration on the 15th October.

The central demands of the appeal are: 'don't pay their deficit', cut military spending, defend and win back the gains of the working class, look after publicly owned resources and extend democracy. If we really want to achieve healthy state finances we should get the money from where it has never been taken - from profits and rent with a comprehensive wealth and property tax on the open and secret riches that we know are there.

But we must start the mobilisation before then, at the end of August with mass meetings, smaller meetings, sit-ins, symbolic actions and anything else that manages to express a broad, people's opposition to the establishment's latest austerity measures. To this end we also invite everybody to come to the national seminar we are holding at Trevi (Foligno, Umbria) from the 15th to 18th September.

Police crackdown in Hunza Galgit Baltistan

25 August 2011, by **Nisar Shah**

On August 19 2011, Galgit Baltistan police, Ranger and Northern Squad jointly crackdown on the houses of different political activists and arrested 20 of them. The sixteen different FIR's registered under section 147,148,149,427,436,353,448 of PPC (Pakistan Penal Code) 17 Herba and section 6/7 of Anti Terrorism Act. The Police version is that on August 11, 2011 some nominated and unknown people

gathered on Karakorum High Way Ali Abad to Block the Road, when police try to disperse them they attacked on them and damaged public property.

All sections deal with riot, terrorist attacks, unlawful assembly, attack on government servant and damage government property. In practice these sections mostly used against the political activists. Labour Party Pakistan Federal Committee member Baba Jan is nominated as main

accused in FIR No 20/2011, Police raided his home many times but he is still underground. Labour Party Galgit Baltistan decided that Baba Jan will not surrender before the police in connection with these false FIR'S against him and many others activists.

Baba Jan is one of the most respected political activist of Gilgit Baltistan. He triggered the movement to save the people from the Atta Abad lake. He is head of Progressive Youth Front in the

region. Baba Jan just called me from unknown place, he rejected the police version about the crackdown, he said , real story is that on 11 August 2011, the effectives of Hunza Lake peacefully gathered on Karakorum High Way Ali Abad to present their demands before the Chief Minister of Gilgit Baltistan during his visit to the area. The 25 families of Hunza Lake effectives were demanding relief amount of Rs. 4 hundred thousand promised by the Government After the unnatural formation of Hunza Lake.

The Government is paying this amount in installment to the 457 affected families, 25 families out 457 totally were neglected and not paid even an emergency relief amount. Baba Jan said that protesters were totally peaceful and want to put their demands before the Chief Minister but

DSP (Deputy Superintendent of Police) Baber Khan ordered to fire bullet and tear gas on innocent peaceful peoples, due to the brutality of police six people severally injured and two father and son died, one on spot and other in hospital. He said after listening about the brutality of police common people came out from their houses and started protest for the registration of FIR against DSP Baber and other responsible police man. Baba Jan Said that on August 12, 2011 Speaker GB Assembly Wazeer Baig, Law Minister Wazeer Shakeel and another member assembly openly admitted the mistake of police with sorry they also showed the photo copy of FIR registered against DSP Baber and promised that he will be arrested. The GB Government used this tactic only for to cheat the people in-fact they

after three days they started crackdown against the political activist which is still continue.

Baba Jan member Federal Committee Labour Party Pakistan said that twenty people including Labour Party members Irfan Karim, Gulam Thair, Karim Baig, Tahir Jan, Nazim Khan and Sultan were arrested and remanded for fourteen days. Labour Party Pakistan strongly condemns the police brutality against the innocent protester and also demanding for early release of all detainees. We also are demanding to release the compensation amount to all Lake effectives.

Nisar Shah

General Secretary

Labour Party Pakistan

The One Billion Dollar Question: Who Are the Libyan Rebels?

25 August 2011, by **Gilbert Achcar**



AMY GOODMAN: [...] For more, we're going to go to London, where we're joined by Gilbert Achcar, a professor at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, author of a number of books, including *The Arabs and the Holocaust: The Arab-Israeli War of Narratives*. He published a long essay last week on NATO's role in Libya.

Welcome to Democracy Now!, Professor Achcar. Can you talk about what's happening in Libya today?

GILBERT ACHCAR: Hello, Amy. Good to talk to you.

Well, what is happening now in Libya is what you described. I would say I don't have more news than you do. But basically, the fight is going on until they can catch Gaddafi and

subdue the remaining cities which are pro-Gaddafi or dominated by pro-Gaddafi forces. And as far as we know from the news, they are in intensive negotiations with people in these cities to do it peacefully. And we just heard also this spokesperson speaking of the rebels taking control in Sirte. So this remains to be seen.

AMY GOODMAN: The piece you wrote is called "NATO's 'Conspiracy' Against the Libyan Revolution." Explain.

GILBERT ACHCAR: Well, "conspiracy," of course, is in quote marks, because I'm quoting in the article people who say that there is a conspiracy. But the key point is not a conspiracy. It's a very open scheme that has been developing there from the beginning, actually, of NATO's intervention. Ever since it appeared that it would be a longer perspective kind of intervention, schemes were

designed actually to keep the situation, the war, going on, in some sense, not to precipitate its conclusion, while trying to get to some kind of agreement between the regime of Gaddafi and the rebels. And this has been until the very last period.

A few weeks ago, the U.K.-led team of NATO, which designed a blueprint for Libya, was insisting on "you know, you have this kind of obsession about the Iraq example, where the Bush administration dismantled the Baathist state of Saddam Hussein when they invaded the country. And usually in Western sources, they attribute the disaster that the invasion of Iraq turned into to this initial act. And therefore, the very obsession of NATO has been to avoid the same kind of situation in Libya and have a deal between the barons of the regime of Gaddafi and the rebellion.

Until just a few days ago, the Financial

Times editorial, for instance, was saying the rebels should not attack Tripoli. And, of course, the pretext given for that was that a bloodbath would occur. Of course, this hasn't occurred, and fortunately. But this idea of not attacking Tripoli and trying to cut a deal with Tripoli has been all the time there. And the real stumbling block preventing this from happening has been the stubbornness of Gaddafi himself, because there was no way the rebels would accept a deal maintaining Gaddafi in any official position, and there was no way he would accept to step down.

AMY GOODMAN: Who are the rebels, Gilbert Achcar?

GILBERT ACHCAR: Who are the rebels? Well, this is actually the \$1 billion question, actually, because even in NATO circles, you find the same questions. The fact is, of course, we know about the Transitional National Council, and even that is a limited knowledge because not all the members of this council are known, and there will be new members announced in order to represent the remaining areas, including Tripoli. And here you find a mixture of, you know, liberals and former regime members and traditional people representing tribal or original components of the country.

What we can judge really is the program put forward by this council. In terms of a political program, what we have looks like a democratic blueprint for a democratic transition. They pledged to organize election, and actually two rounds of election: one for a constituent assembly, which would draft a constitution, and then a second round of election, based on the constitution, to elect a final government. And they pledged—and I'm really skeptical about it—but they pledged even that all the members of the existing National Council, the Traditional National Council, would not, I mean, enter in this electoral arena for the two rounds of election. Well, of course, this, again, remains to be seen.

At the level of the economic program that is represented in the existing cabinet of the council, you find people who actually were already playing the

same role under Gaddafi in supervising the neoliberal reforms in the country. So nothing much original, I think, to expect in that regard. I mean, this is not a socialist revolution. I don't think anyone has ever had any kind of illusion about that.

But this said, when we think of the rebels in terms of the fighting people, the fighting groups, when you think of the rebels in terms of the masses that have been—the insurgent masses that we have even seen in Tripoli on Sunday night coming out in huge numbers in what was formerly called the Green Square, which is the Martyrs' Square, well, then you find, I mean, a completely heterogeneous landscape, and I would say the overwhelming majority of these people are people with no previous political background, and including those holding weapons now, because you have—I mean, most of them—on the rebel side, most of the people holding weapons were civilians before that. They were not military. And most of these people, you know, after 42 years of dictatorship, without any real, genuine political life in the country, are very difficult to describe politically. We will have to wait and see what will come out, when you will have a real political struggle starting in the country, in the same way that we have—we are witnessing a political struggle going on in Egypt or Tunisia, the two countries where the dictators have been toppled until now.

AMY GOODMAN: How did NATO choose to work with this group of rebels rather than others?

GILBERT ACHCAR: Well, I mean, you don't—they didn't have—you don't have much choice. I mean, when the many countries in the world recognized the Transitional National Council, and you hear people saying, "Well, it's not elected," well, how could it be elected? It's an insurrectional situation, and you deal with what you have. They didn't claim to be the permanent rule of the country. They called themselves, from the start, interim or transitional. And they say that they will organize election and just leave the scene. And I just mentioned that they even say that all the members of their council would not even run in the two

next—the next two rounds of election. So, I mean, there's no alternative, I mean, to the Gaddafi rule for the time being in Libya but this council.

Now, what will happen politically will—remains to be seen. Again, it's like saying in Egypt, well, in Egypt Mubarak was toppled, but who took power? Who—I mean, the military. And actually, in that sense, what is happening now in Libya is a more radical transformation of the regime than what you had in Egypt, because in Egypt, basically, aside from the tip of the iceberg that was pushed aside, Mubarak and his cronies, basically the army is still in control, and it has been the backbone of the regime from the start, from the '50s, whereas now, in Libya, although you have former members of the regime in the rebellions, in the rebellion, the structures of the regime, starting with the army, of course, of Gaddafi, which was rather a group of private militias and Praetorian guards and also including mercenaries, this is crumbling, this is collapsing. And we have seen how it has collapsed in Tripoli, even though it is not completely finished yet.

AMY GOODMAN: Democracy Now! spoke to Phyllis Bennis yesterday, with the Institute for Policy Studies. She said control of oil in Libya by Western powers has been a crucial part of this conflict.

PHYLLIS BENNIS: It's not about access to the oil itself. That will be on a global market. It will be part of it. It's about control. It's about controlling the terms of those contracts. It's about controlling amounts that are being pumped at different times. It's about controlling prices. It's about controlling that crucial resource.

AMY GOODMAN: So we're talking about many different oil companies—the French company Total, the U.S. companies Marathon and Hess, ConocoPhillips. There are many oil companies. And interestingly, Libyan rebel government said to Reuters in an interview that they would honor all the oil contracts granted during the Gaddafi regime, including Chinese companies. Gilbert

Achcar, your response?

GILBERT ACHCAR: Well, it's absolutely obvious that oil is a key factor in NATO's intervention, and had Libya not been an oil country, they wouldn't have intervened. That's absolutely obvious. Now, the issue here is, as you just mentioned, it's not a matter of, you know, getting access to some territory which was beyond the Western access. Allâ€”basically all Western interests have been represented in Libya. All major Western oil companies have had contracts with the Libyan regime. And the government, the transitional government, Transitional National Council, is saying that they will honor these contracts with allâ€”all countries. Well, that basically means that the gains, at this level, cannot be huge. Of course, if there are new concessions or contracts, those who will be privileged in getting the deals are the countries which supported the rebellion from the start, as the council said.

But I think more important than that is the market to come, you know, because there has been a lot of destruction, and a lot of the infrastructure has to be rebuilt and all that. And of course, Western

companies, starting with the American, British and French companies, will be very much interested in getting to this market. So, of course, NATO has a major incentive, and it's a matter of interest, behind its intervention, and nothing else, basically.

But between this and believing that NATO is now in control of Libya, there is, you know, a very far cry, because how canâ€”I mean, even if you take countries like Iraq or Afghanistan with NATO troops on the ground, and massively in Iraq for a long while, they weren't even able to control the country. So how do you want NATO or the West to control Libya by remote control, without any troops on the ground? And that's why some people, like Richard Haass from Council on Foreign Relations, are now sayingâ€”you know, claimingâ€”asking Washington to send boots on the ground. But this is something that has been adamantly rejected by the rebellion from day one. They asked for air cover. They asked for air protection. But they were adamant from the start at rejecting any form of intervention of troops on the ground. And they are still very much on this position. They have even

made statements just recently that they would not allow NATO to establish any bases in their country. And we can see many signs, like, for instance, refusing toâ€”saying that they would not hand over Gaddafi or his sons to the International Criminal Court, but throughâ€”I mean, to have trials in Libya itself. So, this shows the limitation, whatever they claim in Washington or London or Paris, the limitation of their real leverage over the Libyan situation. They had a leverage as long asâ€”and they still have a more limited oneâ€”as long as Gaddafi's forces are there and as long as the war is going on. But as soon as this will vanish, then the leverage that they will have will be extremely diminished.

AMY GOODMAN: Gilbert Achcar, I want to thank you very much for being with us, professor at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, author of a number of books, and most recently, *The Arabs and the Holocaust: The Arab-Israeli War of Narratives*, published a long essay this past week on NATO's role in Libya.

From *Democracy Now*, August 24, 2011:

<http://www.democracynow.org/2011/8/...>

Sri Lanka: Country needs a pro-proletariat regime

25 August 2011, by **Vickramabahu Karunaratne**



It is not so much in urban areas though. Similarly the Tamils in Tamil home land voted against the killers of Tamil liberation struggle. However, this simple overall picture does not tell us the whole truth. In the north there was no option for the Tamil people; it was either the TNA or the killer regime.

People could not forget

It is a clear picture with a clear answer. But in the south the so-called patriotic victory did not bring any gains to the Sinhala masses. Not even to the village petty bourgeoisie. Of course, one could argue that the removal of violence in the south is a gain that the people could not forget.

But there was no threat of violence for Sinhala villages except in border areas. Fear of terrorist attacks was

confined to urban areas, particularly in the western province. Yet, it is in these areas that the government faced, relatively a strong opposition or sharp splits in its own ranks. Hence one cannot be satisfied by the "effect of the war" explanation, for the bad setback of the opposition in the south.

If the Tamil National Alliance, working in a very hostile surrounding under military rule, could defeat Mahinda, then why did the UNP fail to win a single council? This question has been

answered by opposition leaders referring to the oppressive atmosphere created by the government and to misuse of power. But that answer, I repeat, has been nullified by the victory of the TNA in the north.

There were enough problems faced by the Sinhala masses in the south, to make them forget about war heroes and vote against the government, if proper mobilization was done. But that did not happen. In urban areas there were workers agitations, and in the pension issue clash with security forces resulted in a death of a worker, while many were hospitalized.

Though JTUA was active and gave a leadership, there was no significant political intervention from the opposition. Efforts of Jayalath were not a substitute. The Government, of course kept on harping on a political conspiracy behind the workers action. But this election results confirmed that there was no such conspiracy and if there was one then it was from the side of the government. Also we see that the election result has exposed the crisis within the UNP.

Speaking on the conflict over leadership of the party, (UNP) Badulla District MP Harin Fernando firmly stated that "it is not a crisis". According to him what Karu has said was that if the party could agree and

give him the nod to go ahead as the leader, he would do that. That means, only if the party gives its blessings to him. Karu Jayasuriya has clearly mentioned that he wants Ranil Wickramasinghe also to be given the due respect, while Sajith Premadasa and new party members work together with others, as one. His main objective is to unite the party. Is this possible? Is it just a problem of a physically handicapped person?

A federal solution

Ranil may not be an orator and a charming stage actor. But he stood for a consistent policy. He wanted a federal solution for the national problem and by that means wanted to avoid a genocidal war. On the other hand he wanted a liberal capitalist economy with workers tied to collective agreements. He did not see the importance of food production and wanted to allocate the entire western province to industrial development. Obviously the left cannot agree to the latter part of his thinking; but could give critical support to the first part. On the other hand it is not a popular policy to go among the Sinhala petty bourgeoisie.

Naturally he failed in elections, and now he wants to push Mahinda towards a federal solution while strengthening democracy. If the UNP

rank and file or the young MPS do not want to follow these policies then either they can support Sinhala chauvinist pro-IMF policies of the Mahinda regime or try to convert the UNP to a social democratic party-radically reformist bourgeoisie party.

That is what Lakthilaka and others wanted; at least that is what I thought. But they have ganged up in the opposite direction. Karu is a gentleman no doubt. But he carried foreword the programme of the Sinhala chauvinists. He left the UNP to support the genocidal war against the Tamil people. Inside Mahinda's cabinet, he spent a humiliating period sans lustre and elegance. Then he crawled back to be the comrade at arms to Ranil. Now he wants to be the leader without policies, to unite every current within the party. Can one be sure?

I have no interest in the conservative party of the bourgeoisie, except in relation to the proletarian revolution. Hence I am not suggesting way out for the UNP. It is not my damn business. But I do believe that one Mahinda is more than enough for the country. We certainly do not need another of that kind, milder or not. What the country needs is a non chauvinist, anti IMF dictates, pro-oppressed, democratic leadership.

7 August

One year of the BP Blow out

25 August 2011, by Pauline M Alvar



We are far from healed: a report in April 2011, well over five years out, shows hospitalization rates for heart attacks still above pre-Katrina levels.

After years building social justice projects in New Orleans, the health care crisis I witnessed moved me to reexamine my priorities. I enrolled in

general science classes at the local community college, the first step in the long path to becoming a health care provider.

When the eyes of the world turned again to the Gulf of Mexico last spring, I was in my first semester of Physician Assistant school in Mobile, Alabama. PA school is like a med-school boot camp "we soldier through seven semesters with very few breaks" and I was still adjusting to long days

in the cadaver lab. But with oil spewing in the Gulf just miles south, I couldn't keep my head in the books. I anticipated massive psychological fallout in communities still recovering from the hurricane, and I feared the uncertain health impacts from the spewing oil and, perhaps worse, the dispersants.

Cleanup workers entering the Gulf without a shred of protective gear bore too close a resemblance to post-

Katrina recovery workers, and for that matter, 9/11 first responders and cleanup workers at "The Pile." Would these oil spill workers meet the same fate, lauded as heroes in the moment and disregarded as disposable when their health issues mounted?

In the fall of 2010, between cramming for tests, I started researching health impacts from BP's disaster. I also sought out providers caring for coastal residents and workers. I believed, naively, that a cadre of doctors in Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana would step forward to connect the dots in the constellation of symptoms surfacing on the coast, and I envisioned sneaking away to volunteer with this outreach.

There seemed to be no organized effort. This was not exactly a surprise "I had lived through post-Katrina New Orleans" but I had not fully understood the sway the oil industry holds over healthcare delivery in the region.

Through my research, I stumbled on a group called Sciencecorps. They'd put out an excellent report outlining health issues connected to exposure to the array of chemicals now swamping the Gulf. This report was sound science, and was exactly what federal government agencies such as the EPA and OSHA should have been distributing to protect the public, especially those to whom the chemicals were most dangerous "pregnant women, children, and those already living with chronic illnesses.

Despite my wariness of outsiders (especially "smart" Northerners who claim to have the answers for us backward folk down here in the South) I contacted the Boston-based nonprofit, hoping they could lead me to Gulf Coast healthcare providers I was somehow missing.

I had a lengthy conversation with Sciencecorps toxicologist Kathy Burns about her efforts, including her collaboration with nationally renowned Occupational & Environmental Medicine doctor Michael Harbut. They had also hit a brick wall with the Gulf Coast medical community. They found most doctors unwilling to provide information to the

public about the very serious health effects the spill could have.

Though Gulf Coast providers would treat patients' symptoms, they were unwilling to draw any connection between the symptoms and the cause. In this atmosphere of evasion, one doctor from coastal Alabama actually sought Sciencecorps out. "My patients are getting really sick," he said, and he felt sure it was linked to the oil and dispersants.

This doctor was eager to work with Sciencecorps but after a few weeks suddenly withdrew, saying he couldn't be involved in the project. No more explanation was forthcoming, and thus no firm conclusions can be drawn as to why he quit.

Dr. Burns did share with me the chilling cautionary tale of Dr. Victor Alexander, a New Orleans Occupational Medicine specialist who spoke out against big oil. He was arrested in the late 1980s "many say framed" for bank robbery, a story I would hear again and again (for a more complete story, see www.ragingpelican.com).

Multiple Manifestations of Illness
Exposure to oil and dispersants does not constitute a contagion with one clear treatment. Individual cases will differ; variables such as amount and composition of exposure or a person's pre-exposure state of health play heavily into the specific manifestations of illness. Any body system can be impacted, and pre-existing cardiovascular, liver, kidney, neurological or respiratory disease will likely be exacerbated.

As Sciencecorps points out in information designed for providers, the approach to treating these oil- and dispersant-exposed individuals is to treat their signs and symptoms. Thus, it is possible to treat patients sickened by the oil disaster without needing to link their sickness to the oil disaster.

Sciencecorps recommends general practitioners and others use an approach developed by Occupational Medicine doctors. In addition to a careful patient history and physical exam, Sciencecorps encourages a very detailed exposure history. They

suggest a battery of blood tests and organ function tests directed at the patient's symptom.

In the end, the clinical presentation and lab results will point to the patient's treatment plan. Even without connecting illness to exposure history, a provider can treat the patient. This has been true in many acute cases of cleanup workers.

A friend of mine, an ER nurse, works at one of the closest hospitals to the Louisiana coast, just across the Mississippi from New Orleans in Gretna, LA. She saw a number of respiratory cases she suspected were connected to the spill, often with the patients coming straight from the water. Their acute symptoms were treated and they were discharged back into the night, to shoulder the burdens of any chronic illness alone.

In February 2011, clinical training duties sent me to the oil-devastated coastal fishing village of Bayou La Batre, AL. The patients I saw there had the usual array of illnesses seen in primary care; no one specifically complained of oil-related symptoms. I asked one of the providers about what she had seen post-disaster. She said, "Oh, we refer all of that to the health department." But from what I had read, the health department was not treating them either.

Disasters of this scale have impacts going far beyond direct exposure. One patient came in with fasting blood sugar at nearly triple acceptable levels. In addition, her blood pressure had spiked despite taking her blood pressure medication. She was the wife of a now-unemployed fisherman, and since BP had ceased hiring locals to lay boom, there was no money coming into her household. With no health insurance and three kids to feed, she had at first divided in halves and then simply run out of her diabetes medication.

It is impossible to quantify the ways the people of the coast are suffering. Not just the oil and dispersants, but the destruction of a way of life and livelihood are killing the people of the Gulf Coast. Like that patient in Bayou la Batre, we often suffer as individuals in isolation the crimes that capitalism

inflicts en masse.

As I write this, the Gulf Coast is observing the one-year anniversary of the disaster. This is our chance to tell the country that we are still suffering. Health issues are a bullet point in the obligatory national media coverage, which vacillates between crisis ("People say they are still struggling to recover their health, mental health, and livelihoods") and optimism ("Hey, it wasn't as bad as we thought. Let me take a bite of this shrimp po-boy.")

What's notable is the absence of doctors' voices. The media quotes individuals, not groups like the Louisiana Environmental Action Network (LEAN), the Louisiana Bucket Brigade, and Guardians of the Gulf, all of whom are working to organize the thousands of people who are sick along the coast. Unless they are placed in context, individuals' stories of persistent neurological, respiratory, and gastrointestinal issues, while important to hear, only reinforce that these are "individual" problems.

Where's the Urgency?

There are signs of hope. Recently Dr. Michael Robichaux, an Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) specialist and former Louisiana state senator in Raceland, LA, connected with LEAN to share information about his patients. He is willing to treat people impacted by oil and dispersants; he does not hesitate to connect their symptoms to the spill, and he is speaking out on their behalf (to see the compelling testimony of Dr. Robichaux and his patients visit <http://www.leanweb.org>).

People are traveling hundreds of miles to see Dr. Robichaux; why should this all fall to one private doctor? Why isn't the \$20 billion BP fund, far from tapped out, being used to address coastal residents' health? Why can't the federal government and state governments coordinate this care? What about the state health departments? Why aren't state governments advocating for their citizens?

For the anniversary, Mississippi's Attorney General organized town hall meetings along the coast and was surprised that people wanted to talk health issues more than the frustrating BP claims process. His surprise encapsulates the government response in impacted Gulf states: "We'll have to look into that." His ignorance is outrageous. Where's the urgency? Do states have no duty to protect their citizens?

The federal government certainly did not protect us from this atrocity, and in fact has made itself complicit throughout. We see this in the behavior of the Coast Guard, in the cozy relationship between the regulators and the regulated (remember the Minerals Management Service cocaine parties?), in the slow reaction to the spill, in the unwillingness to enforce regulation, and in the National Institute of Environmental Health Services' belated, cutesily-named "GuLF" study of cleanup workers.

By waiting six months to start the data

collection, NIEHS ensured that the results would be flawed, as the study's designers have already admitted. The study was designed to be defective. Of the tens of millions of dollars being spent on the study, not one single cent will go to actual health care treatment. NIEHS' years of periodic phone surveys will alleviate no suffering; they will only provide bullshit data, "inconclusive" results BP can then cite to exonerate itself.

Deepwater Horizon joins a shamefully long history of the oil industry and corporate interests putting their profits above our lives and health, and doing so with the government's blessing. For too long in South Louisiana and the Gulf Coast, we have been limited to treating the symptoms of this dynamic. It's time we traced these symptoms back to their source.

Just as it's possible to go on addressing piecemeal the problems caused by a drug addiction without ever engaging the addiction itself, we enable the petrochemical industry's ongoing abuse of the Gulf Coast when we limit ourselves to quietly, dutifully attempting to clean up after them.

Their pipelines eat into our wetlands; their toxins eat into our organs. They are the cancer in Cancer Alley, and until they are excised, no healing will be possible. A world that prioritizes human health above profit is the only cure, and only through collective struggle can we create this world.

July/August 2011, ATC 153

<http://www.solidarity-us.org/curren...>

Learn from Japan- say no to nuclear power in South Africa

24 August 2011, by **AIDC**

The South African government should therefore abandon nuclear power. There is no compelling justification to subject the country to the risks made

so agonizingly clear in Japan. In addition, the time has come for starting the decommissioning of the 27 year old Koeberg nuclear power

plant. This French power plant was built under apartheid, it is clearly at the end of its life span and it is the only nuclear power station on the

entire African continent.

The earthquake in Japan has of course triggered yet more debate over the world future of nuclear power. Tens of thousands of people took to the streets of Stuttgart, Germany, last weekend to protest against plans to extend the life of 17 German nuclear plants for an average 12 extra years. There are clear indications that the rest of the world community objects to the continuation of nuclear power generation in their countries.

Opposition is also strong in South Africa. In the last Department of Energy /Nersa Public Hearings on Integrated Resource Plan (IRP2010) the largest forum of civil society in South Africa ? the broad South African Energy Caucus ? vehemently opposed the inclusion of nuclear in the IRP2. Sadly, during the public hearings senior government officials categorically committed South Africa to nuclear power. In the Engineering

News 21 May 2010 DoE's Director General, Nelisiwe Magubane, is quoted as saying: "The nuclear industry is one of the most exciting fields and much needed industry expansion is necessary in the country. However, the importance of industry involvement in expanding South Africa's nuclear programme cannot be overemphasised, since it is industry that will be called upon to develop and deliver in the near future".

This government's stubborn commitment to the inclusion of nuclear power in our electricity mix is alarming.

AIDC's concern is further exacerbated by the recent visit of the President of South Africa, Mr Jacob Zuma to France. Some of agreements signed included the New Partnership Framework Document for 2011 to 2013. France derives over 75% of its electricity from nuclear energy. Reactors and fuel products and

services are major French export products

South Africa is, however, not in the world to be a dumping ground for a technology that others are about to abandon. South Africa has already wasted over R10 billion on the pebble bed reactor. Secure Renewable Energy is not only a formidable alternative to nuclear power, it is the only alternative. That an unpredictable natural disaster in Japan is being made even worse by a man-made nuclear disaster makes this blatantly clear.

The COP 17 meeting in Durban on climate change in December will be the next chance for world leaders to undo their mistakes by agreeing on safe and sustainable options.

[<http://www.aidc.org.za/>]

1 June 2011

Famine: Less land, more hunger

23 August 2011, by Esther Vivas

Africa is a ravaged land. Its natural resources have been plundered from its communities over centuries of domination and colonization. Although it is not only the plundering of gold, oil, coltan, rubber, diamonds and so on, but also, water, land, seeds that provide food to its inhabitants. If 80% of the population in the Horn of Africa, as indicated by the FAO, depends on agriculture as their main source of food and income, what they do when there is no land to cultivate?

In recent years, the growing wave of privatization of land in Africa (purchase by food multinationals, foreign governments or investment funds) has made its precarious agricultural and food system even more vulnerable. With peasants and farmers expelled from their lands, where can they grow food to eat? Many countries, as a result, have seen their already limited capacity for self-

provision drastically reduced, after decades of trade liberalization policies which have reduced their productive capacity.

The food and financial crisis that erupted in 2008 gave rise, as has been well documented by the international organization GRAIN, to a new cycle of appropriation of land on a global scale. Governments of countries dependent on food imports, in order to ensure the production of food for their people beyond their borders, and agro-industry and investors, eager for new and profitable investment, have subsequently been acquiring fertile lands in the South. A dynamic that threatens peasant agriculture and food security in these countries.

It is estimated that since 2008, they have acquired in this way around 56 million hectares of land on a global scale, according to data from the

World Bank, the major part of this, more than 30 million hectares, in Africa, where land is cheap and communal ownership makes it more vulnerable. Other sources, such as the Global Land Project, speak of from 51 to 63 million hectares in Africa, an area similar in size to France. This covers leases, concessions or purchases of land. The forms of transaction can be multiple and often opaque, a dynamic that some authors have described as a "new colonialism" or "agricultural colonialism", through an indirect recolonization of African resources.

The World Bank has been one of the main proponents in developing, together with other international institutions such as the FAO, UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the International Fund for Agricultural development (IFAD), what have come

to be known as the “Principles for Responsible Agricultural Investment”, which legitimize the appropriation of land by foreign investors. Through the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the institution affiliated with the World Bank dealing with the private sector, programmes have been promoted to eliminate administrative barriers, change laws and tax systems in the countries of the South and encourage investment.

Ethiopia, one of the countries affected by the current famine, has offered three million hectares of arable land to foreign investors in India, China, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, among others. Business could not be better: 2,500 km² of virgin productive land at 700 Euros per month, with a contract for fifty years. This is, for example, the agreement reached between the Ethiopian government and the Indian

company Karuturi Global, one of the 25 largest global agribusiness which uses these lands for the cultivation of oil palm, rice, sugar cane, corn and cotton for export. The consequences: thousands of peasants and indigenous people expelled from their lands, precisely those who suffer most from hunger and lack of food, as well as vast tracts of forests cut down and burned.

Other African countries such as Mozambique, Ghana, Sudan, Mali, Tanzania, and Kenya have leased out millions of hectares of their territory. In Tanzania, the government of Saudi Arabia has acquired 500,000 hectares of land to produce rice and wheat for export. In Congo, 48 per cent of agricultural land is in the hands of foreign investors. In Mozambique, more than ten million areas of land

have been leased.

The academic conference “Global Land Grabbing”, which took place in Britain in April 2011, noted the negative impact of these acquisitions. Over 100 documented case studies show how these investments had no positive impact on local communities, on the contrary generating displacement and increased poverty.

For years, the international movement VÃa Campesina has denounced the dramatic impact of this massive wave of land grabbing on the peoples of the populations of the countries of the South. If we want to put an end to hunger in the world it is essential to ensure universal access to land, as well as water and seeds, and prohibit speculation and business deals concerning that which feeds us and provides us with food.

The whys of hunger

23 August 2011, by **Esther Vivas**

The famine in the Horn of Africa is not new. Somalia has been experiencing a situation of food insecurity for 20 years. And, periodically, the media moves us from our comfortable sofas and reminds us of the dramatic impact of world hunger. In 1984, nearly one million people died in Ethiopia; in 1992, 300,000 Somalis died of hunger; in 2005, almost five million people were on the brink of death in Malawi, just to name a few examples.

Hunger is not inevitable, nor is it inevitable that it affects certain countries.

The causes of hunger are political. Who controls the natural resources (land, water, seeds) that enable the production of food? Who benefits from agricultural and food policies? Today, food has become a commodity and its main function, to feed people has started to take second place.

One can point to the drought, with consequent loss of crops and livestock as a major trigger of famine in the

Horn of Africa, but how is it that countries like the U.S. and Australia, which periodically suffered severe droughts, are not suffering from extreme hunger? Obviously, the weather can exacerbate food problems, but not enough to explain the causes of hunger. In regard to food production, control of natural resources is key to understanding why and for whom things are produced.

In many countries of the Horn of Africa, access to land is a scarce commodity. The purchase of large amounts of fertile land by foreign investors (agro-industry, governments, hedge funds...) has led to the expulsion of thousands of peasants from their lands, decreasing the ability of these countries to feed themselves. Thus, while the World Food Programme tries to feed millions of refugees in Sudan it is a paradox that foreign governments (Kuwait, UAE, Korea...) are buying land to produce and export food for their own

populations.

We should also remember that Somalia, despite recurrent drought, was a self-sufficient in food production until the late seventies. Its food sovereignty was undermined in later decades. Since the eighties, the policies imposed by the IMF and World Bank, so that the country will pay its debt to the Paris Club, have forced the implementation of a set of structural adjustment measures. With regard to agriculture, this implied a policy of trade liberalization and opening up of markets, allowing the massive influx of subsidised products like rice and wheat from North American and European multinational agribusinesses, who began to sell their products below their cost price “creating unfair competition for local producers. Periodic devaluations of the Somali currency also generated rising input prices and encouraging the production of monoculture for export, steadily forcing peasants to

abandon the land. There are similar tales not only in Africa, but also in Latin America and Asia.

The rising price of staple cereals is one of the elements identified as a trigger for famine in the Horn of Africa. In Somalia, the price of corn and red sorghum increased by 106% and 180% respectively in just one year. In Ethiopia, the cost of wheat rose by 85% over the previous year. In Kenya, maize reached a value 55% higher than 2010. These increases have made these basic staples inaccessible. But what are the reasons for the escalation of prices? Several signs point to financial speculation over food commodities as a major cause.

The price of food is determined by the stock exchanges, the most important of which, worldwide, is Chicago, while in Europe the food is sold in the futures exchanges in London, Paris, Amsterdam and Frankfurt.

But today, most of the purchase and sale of these goods does not correspond to actual trade flows. In

the words of Mike Masters, head of hedge funds at Masters Capital Management, 75% of financial investment in the agricultural sector is speculative. We buy and sell commodities in order to speculate with them and make profit which is eventually reflected in higher prices for the consumer. The same banks, hedge funds, insurance companies, which caused the subprime mortgage crisis, are those who speculate with food today, taking advantage of a deep global market which is deregulated and highly profitable.

The global food crisis, and famine in the Horn of Africa in particular, are the result of food globalization in the service of private interests. The chain of production, distribution and consumption of food is in the hands of a few multinationals who put their individual interests before collective needs and over recent decades have eroded, with the support of international financial institutions, the ability the countries of the Global South to determine their agricultural and food policies.

Returning to the beginning, why is

there hunger in a world of abundance? Food production has tripled since the sixties, while the global population has only doubled since then. We are facing not a problem of food production, but above all a problem of access to food. The UN reporter for the right to food, Olivier de Schutter, told El Pais: "Hunger is a political problem. It is a matter of social justice and redistribution policies."

If we want to end hunger in the world it is urgent to implement different policies for food and for agriculture which put at their centre the need of people, those who work the land and the ecosystem. This is to achieve what the international movement Via Campesina calls "food sovereignty" and regain the ability to decide what we eat. Borrowing one of the most popular slogans of the Movement 15-M, what is necessary is a "real democracy, and" in agriculture and nutrition.

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info: <http://esthervivas.wordpress...>

Correct the homophobes

23 August 2011, by Phumi Mtetwa

The timing of this judgement is particularly significant given that four known cases of hate crimes and 'corrective rape' against lesbians were widely reported within the last month. Twenty-year old Nokuthula Radebe's body was discovered in an abandoned building with her pants off in Everest Thokoza, Ekurhuleni; there was the rape and brutal murder of 24-year-old Noxolo Magwaza from KwaThema, Gauteng, and the rape and murder of Ngobile Khumalo from KwaMashu in KZN, and a 13-year-old girl from Atteridgeville, west of Pretoria, who is open about her sexual orientation, was sexually violated in what seems to be an act of 'corrective rape'. This follows at

least 30 known cases across the country since 2000, of which a dozen young lesbians and gay men have lost their lives.

These cases, of course, may be only the tip of the iceberg. How many LGBTI persons, we wonder, have actually been raped and murdered? The nature of the crime unreported and many too intimidated and shamed even to go to the police?

A hate crime is defined as violence motivated by a feeling or display of animosity on the basis of the victim's race, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, mental and physical disabilities, or other similar forms of discrimination. Hate crimes

against LGBTI people are neither new nor uniquely South African. There have been reports for decades, from Brazil to India, from the US to Europe, and in Uganda, just as recently as January this year, of violence motivated by homophobia. Homophobia, which is the hatred of homosexuals, can range from Qwelane's anti-rights rhetoric to murderous violence, but in all instances it has severe consequences.

The term 'corrective rape' is now commonly used to describe the rape of a woman who is not heterosexual, purportedly to 'correct' her sexual orientation. This might mean, in homophobic parlance, the assertion that this woman 'doesn't know what

a penis is like' and would, after the experience, be convinced to no longer be a lesbian. In reality, of course, the 'corrective' component of 'corrective rape' speaks to a simple, brutal, and horrifying form of punishment. It is unacceptable, to these perpetrators, for a woman to be anything other than heterosexual, and her 'error' is then disciplined, not simply through rape, but through additional forms of torturous violence.

In a country like South Africa, however, violence in general is so high and violence against women, particularly rape, even more so. The use of the term 'corrective rape' separates out these crimes from a crisis of violence more generally. How can we address the ways in which homosexuals are targeted without ignoring the context of such violence?

Many activists have objected to the term 'corrective rape'. They argue that rape is rape and, in many ways, all rape is corrective. Women's bodies are not always respected as their own, and sexual violence against women 'corrects' women who think they have a right to say no. This is a problem for all women, and it is also the precise reason why lesbians are so frequently targeted. Ngobile Khumalo, for instance, was brutally attacked by an ex-boyfriend, who raped, killed and buried her secretly in KwaMashu. Sentenced in May 2011 to 15 years of prison, he said he did it because she was dating women and rejecting him.

South African society, like so many others, prescribes how a woman should or should not behave, making

women's bodies the property of patriarchal society. Whether in sexual practice or in childbearing, women's bodies are understood to belong, not only to particular men - husbands, fathers, boyfriends - but also to a larger social order which is enforced, frequently, by both men and women. Lesbians, by directing their romantic and sexual interests towards other women, violate many men's and women's ideas of how a woman should behave and how society should be ordered. When women, frequently but not exclusively lesbian, compound this violation by challenging how women are expected to dress, walk, and speak, they are met with hostility, hatred, and, all too often, rape.

Post-apartheid South Africa and the 1996 Constitution afforded formal equality to many marginalised groups, like LGBTIs. This enabled many to come out as LGBTI South Africans and still feel like citizens. The rights of the Constitution, however, do not translate to equality in everyday life. From religious fundamentalists to so-called traditional leaders, a range of groups in South African society have been vocal in their opposition towards non-heterosexual persons. Qwelane's article, thus, is the manifestation of a larger push to eliminate the rights of LGBTI South Africans - and, perhaps, in the end, their existence.

In our society, with its deep social crisis, individual sentiments often find extremely violent expression. Thus, the struggle against homophobic violence operates at the intersection of multiple concerns. Violence against women and children; violence against LGBTIs; the socioeconomic conditions;

the safety of our townships and urban areas; a general climate of hate speech against LGBTI persons; the role of the police and the judiciary. Homophobia, thus, is not the problem of homosexuals but the problem of society. Yet the struggle against it has frequently been a lonely one. This is why we welcome the recent voices of trade unions like SADTU, NUMSA, SAMWU, amongst other formations, which have spoken out against these recent attacks.

The Department of Justice and Constitutional Development has recently announced the formation of a task team with civil society, an initiative which must be welcomed. The government as a whole, however, has not shown the political will to stop homophobic violence. The Department of International Relations and Cooperation spokesperson, for instance, claimed that John Qwelane's conviction in the Equality Court was simply a 'personal matter'.

Statements like these hollow out the progressive positions enshrined in our Constitution and legislation. The result is that rights become nominal and issues like homophobia are seen as a problem for lesbians and gays and not a collective problem.

This is a fight that must become imbued by the slogan 'an injury to one is an injury to all'.

Phumi Mtetwa is the former Director of the Lesbian and Gay Equality Project.

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Dropping the last mask of democracy

22 August 2011, by **Omar Barghouti**

Much controversy has arisen since the Israeli parliament passed legislation that would effectively criminalise support for any boycott against Israel or its institutions, under threat of

heavy penalties and worse, without the need to prove "guilt". Dozens of Israeli civil society organisations and leading legal scholars, including many opposing the boycott, have resolutely

opposed this exceptionally authoritarian law on diverse grounds, ranging from the most principled to the downright pragmatic.

Palestinian perspective

Missing in most of the debate is the Palestinian perspective, which is undoubtedly most relevant given that this law was entirely motivated by the spectacular growth in recent years of the global boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel, which was launched in 2005 and is led by the largest coalition of Palestinian civil society parties, unions, and NGOs: the Boycott National Committee (BNC).

While expressing alarm at this latest repressive attempt by Israel to crush Palestinian peaceful resistance and support for it among conscientious Israelis, a BNC statement conveyed confidence that this law will bolster the spread of BDS even faster among liberal communities the world over. Hind Awwad, coordinator with the BNC, reacted: "This new legislation, which violates international law, is testament to the success of the rapidly growing global BDS movement and a realisation within political elites inside Israel that the state is becoming a world pariah in the way that South Africa once was."

Eilat Maoz, coordinator of the Coalition of Women for Peace, a leading Israeli feminist alliance that endorses BDS, was quoted in Maariv (Hebrew) saying: "An illegitimate government passes an illegitimate law to protect an illegitimate occupation, while complaining about delegitimisation. We will continue boycotting, protesting, demonstrating and resisting the occupation - and we call on everyone else to do so."

The Palestinian BDS leadership stood by its Israeli partners saying: "We stand in solidarity with all principled Israeli citizens and organisations who are the primary target of this law, and who may be fined and even imprisoned for exercising their fundamental right to speak out and act non-violently in order to bring their state into compliance with international law."

International condemnation

Amnesty International condemned the new Israeli bill, saying it "will have a chilling effect on freedom of expression". Members of the European Parliament raised similar concerns,

while the EU itself, typically submissive to Israeli-US interests, expressed alarm at the law's implications on basic rights. Even a New York Times editorial slammed it as undemocratic. All this will further aggravate Israel's already low standing in international public opinion.

It is as if Israel has pushed the Fast-Forward button in the process of digging the grave for its own occupation and apartheid policies.

By passing this exceptionally draconian law that blatantly stifles free speech, Israel seems ready to sacrifice one of its very last masks of "democracy" for the sake of crushing, with an iron fist, the BDS movement. This provides further, irrefutable evidence of the level of panic in the Israeli establishment of the dramatic expansion of the movement with its simple yet compelling slogan, Freedom, Justice, Equality. It also proves, once again, the futility of all the other unsavoury weapons in Israel's massive arsenal of intimidation, smears, threats and bullying in combating BDS, which, as a non-violent, morally consistent movement, has dragged Israel into a "battlefield" where even its daunting nuclear weapons are deemed ineffective.

Israeli justification

The Israeli establishment's attempt to justify its repressive new law under the rubric of countering a movement bent on "delegitimising" it and calling into question its very existence has failed to convince any significant portion of world public opinion. Most observers cannot but ask, why wasn't the anti-apartheid boycott in South Africa considered a threat to the existence of the state? Also, did ending segregation in the southern states of the US delegitimise whites or end their existence? In fact, the only things that justice and equality delegitimise are injustice and inequality.

Similarly, BDS aims to "delegitimise" Israel's occupation and colonial policies and structures. And it seems many in international civil society are gradually moving in the direction of

supporting the movement and bringing closer Israel's South Africa moment.

As to those who may say that this law will corrupt Israel's democracy, one can only wonder whether a state that has dozens of laws discriminating against its "non-Jewish" citizens solely based on their religious/ethnic identity can be called a democracy. Can a state involved in occupation, forced displacement, siege and denial of basic rights of refugees be regarded as a democracy? The prominent Israeli historian, Ilan Pappé, calls Israel a "herrenvolk democracy", one only for the masters.

Finally, Israel's claim that BDS is somehow against Jews is best refuted by Avraham Burg, former chairman of the Jewish Agency and for many years speaker of the Israeli Knesset, where the latest legislation only underlines the pivotal role it has consistently played in maintaining Israeli colonial oppression.

Burg says:

"Israel sweeps all the criticism against it, both justified and unjustified, under the same anti-Semitic rug. It is actually we who are repeatedly mixing up proper criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism. The reason is to avoid at any price having to confront the situation and make tough existential decisions: the occupation, the injustices, the discrimination, the persecution of the non-Jewish minority in our midst. ... There is no other country in the Western world from which the international community has been willing to put up with acts of state violence for five decades, other than Israel. ... And there is no other colonialist left in the world, other than 'the only democracy in the Middle East.' The world is still putting up with all this, but not for much longer - it will soon be over."

If Palestinian activists learned anything from the South African struggle it is that the darkest moment is that that precedes dawn. In an ironic way, this new Israeli law may be a harbinger for that darkest moment, with no masks or pretence, and then we see the light of freedom and justice.

"What has happened since 15 M has favoured the politicization of society and the opening of new spaces for self-organization and participation".

22 August 2011, by **Josep María Antentas**

Starting from the demonstrations of 15M [May 15], do you think that there may be a change in the concept of representative democracy as we know it today?

15 M challenged the current political model. Although vaguely, and not without contradictions and limits, the movement criticizes the professionalization of politics, reduced to simple electoral marketing between similar political options subordinated to economic powers, and the loss of control over political representatives. The movement expresses a firm will to regain control of public affairs, over the decision-making process, and of creating democratic spaces of popular participation, such as neighbourhood assemblies, for example. There exists within it, in any case, different appreciations and views on alternative models of democracy, and what relationship should be maintained with party politics. There will be no substantial changes, however, in the current model of democracy if there is not a sufficient social mobilization to impose them.

Starting from these mass social demonstrations, is society heading to a new political moment?

The movement born on 15 M marks a turning point in the social history of the Spanish state. Demonstrations over these two months have been genuine founding struggles that have brought the birth of a new stage. The phase dominated by fear and resignation has ended. In the

management of the crisis the ruling classes have finally come up against the eruption of the masses, and in particularly daring, combative and striking forms. They will from now on have to deal with an unanticipated and annoying interlocutor. What has happened since 15 M has led to the politicization of society, the opening of new spaces for self-organization and participation, and has been a reaction against apathy and depoliticization.

What would a change in politics and democracy consist of today?

Current politics and democracy have become politics at the service of a privileged minority, under the domination of the financial elite, carried out by a professionalized caste, and with close ties to the business world. Any significant change involves breaking with neoliberalism and the subordination of politics to business interests and promoting the possibility of individuals controlling their own lives and their own destiny, by encouraging popular self-organisation and involvement in collective affairs. It is necessary to advance another logic based on the defence of the common good, solidarity and equality rather than the dominant logic based on privatization, competition and selfishness.

What is the impact of the global financial crisis in European society?

The crisis has deepened the social effects of the neo-liberal policies that

we have suffered for decades. It increases the polarization of wealth, the deterioration of the labour market and rising unemployment. With the excuse of the crisis and the deficit a genuine "social European war" has begun that seeks to destroy the social regulations that still exist in Europe and restore the mechanisms of class domination.

The submission shown by the political parties to the financial world has been more evident than ever, increasing disaffection with regard to institutional politics and scepticism toward political representatives, whose discredit is growing. The crisis has shown in crude form the ideological fallacies of neo-liberalism and has exposed the true nature of the system, whose alibi has vanished. I think that people have the feeling of living in a democracy kidnapped by financial power, markets, the rating agencies...

Is it possible to take a balance sheet of the consequences of the neoliberal system in Europe during the last decade?

Neoliberalism has caused an increase in social inequalities, the polarization of wealth, the casualization of the labour market, the erosion of labour rights and the mechanisms of social protection, environmental depredation, and the privatization of public space. It has also meant the generalization of an individualist and consumerist culture and the spread of the values of competitiveness,

competition and selfishness, and has contributed to social fragmentation, breaking class solidarities, and the privatization of the social life of people.

Some sociologists say that Europe has rediscovered its poor. When was the social welfare state damaged? What is the current status of social welfare in Europe?

The situation is very different depending on each country, since the models or welfare state regimes have been different in Mediterranean Europe, the Anglo-Saxon countries, central Europe or Scandinavia and, of course, Eastern Europe. But the general trend of recent decades has been the erosion of social gains and regulations.

The European ruling classes consider that the social rights existing in the old continent are an obstacle to the international competitiveness of European enterprises in their fight to avoid losing positions in the global economy. So dismantling as much as possible of the so-called "European social model" has been their strategic objective for decades, and this has intensified now even more.

What can you expect of the European left parties?

Social democracy is fully integrated in the logic of the current system, does not have an agenda of its own solution to the crisis different from that of the right and is limited to managing the interests of financial power. Nothing can be expected of it. To its left, the European Greens have for a long time experienced a rapid process of integration into the institutions becoming part of many governments with social democracy, and applying a green cosmetic to social liberal policies. In many countries they have grown electorally from the votes of those disillusioned with social democracy, seeking to vote for something a little better and fresher, but they do not have any alternative project. At the same time, most Communist parties or coalitions dominated by them (with the exception of Portugal and Greece, where there are Communist parties of the Stalinist type) have tended to

move towards the right, institutionalizing their political practice and always governing at the side of social democracy and subordinating themselves to it. In some places they have grown electorally at the expense of social democracy, but lack strong links with the social movements and activist generations. There are in some countries relevant anti-capitalist alternatives, like the Bloco in Portugal or NPA in France, which are attempts to articulate new anti-capitalist projects geared to struggle, although they also experiencing difficulties, and in several European countries the anti-capitalist left, without being relevant in electoral terms, has a significant role in social struggles. The fundamental challenge remains building a political alternative which involves a project of rupture, oriented to the struggles and with a non-institutional conception of politics, and acquires social influence in a fragmented and increasingly destructured society.

How have politicians and financial institutions reacted in relation to the 15 M demonstrations?

First they reacted with disbelief and with the hope that the movement was something temporary. When that proved untrue reactions were divided between apparent hostility, including attempts to criminalize it, and demagogic expressions of false sympathy. The movement raises a number of changes that question at the root current economic policy and the logic of professional politics. Despite the fact that some of the demands of the movement can be met and that some moderate sectors within it could be co-opted or instrumentalized, the political class and financial power find it is very difficult to deactivate a movement like this and they cannot absorb its demands without touching the hard core of their current policies.

What has been the impact of the movement in politics and in the Spanish economy? Has 15 M already achieved any concrete action?

The movement broke out in an unexpected and abrupt way in the

political and social life of the Spanish state. After two and a half years where the resistance to the crisis had been limited (but real) the outbreak of 15 M completely changed the political, social and cultural landscape of the country. Challenging the current economic model, policy courses and the political regime born from post-Francoist Spain. It has emerged as a new social and political actor whose existence is extremely annoying for the political powers and all those that have the monopoly of public life and decision-making, who are now sharply addressed by a movement they did not expect and whose vitality has puzzled them.

The biggest victory of the movement is that it has allowed many people to regain confidence in collective action, in the collective capacity to change things. It has been demonstrated that "Yes, we can", that is possible to overcome after many years of setbacks and defeats. From 15 M to date several victories have been achieved that have generated a feeling of strength and optimism: first, the challenge to the Central Electoral Board and its prohibition of the camp and occupations of the squares on the eve of the elections of March 22; second, the victory over the attempted eviction at Plaza Catalunya on March 27 by the police; third, the victory against the attempt at media criminalization of the movement after the day of blockade of the Catalan Parliament on July 20, during the Catalan Government's budget debate.

Some concrete, although very defensive victories have also been won. In many districts of cities throughout the Spanish state social mobilization has managed to block evictions of families who could not afford to pay for their homes. In Catalonia, where the Catalan Government has announced big cuts in health care, ambulance occupations have succeeded in some cases in avoiding closures and cuts to emergency and other services. Also in many cities during these two months the implementation of repressive "civility orders" (governing the use of public space) has been de facto impeded, but if the movement falters their implementation will be ruthless.

However, it is necessary to recognize that the movement still has not obtained enough strength to reverse the general sense of anti-social policies underway or the big neo-liberal reforms, or the adoption of the social cuts in the case of Catalonia.

What are the social and political effects of the movement of 15 M in Europe?

The start of the movement in the Spanish state generated many examples of solidarity and sympathy. Under the impetus of students coming from the Spanish state in many European countries there were camps and symbolic occupations of squares in solidarity with the movement of 15 M, and attempts to start a similar movement. In Greece, the European country with the most explosive social

situation since the outbreak of the crisis, the popular movement added the "occupation of square + camp" method to their protests, turning the Syntagma square in Athens into the centre of the social mobilization against the new adjustment plans. The emergence of 15 M in the Spanish State, the protests in Greece, are symptoms of a new trend across the European Union which is starting a cycle of mobilisations against the effects of the crisis. The Arab revolt and the protests in the South of Europe have placed the Mediterranean at the epicentre of this new wave of struggles.

What are your expectations about 15 M, two months after the emergence of the movement?

We are at the beginning of a new wave of struggles, of which 15 M and the

square occupations have been the first shock. The emergence of district assemblies is the strongest organizational achievement movement and its dynamic for now is positive. The latest demonstrations, like the march in Madrid on July 23 and 24, the demonstration against the budget of the Catalan Government in Barcelona on July 20 and, above all, countless demonstrations in small towns against health cuts and evictions, show the vitality of the movement. In September and October there will be new struggles and the day of demonstrations on October 15 seems strong. One of the challenges and unresolved matters is penetrating workplaces, bringing the indignation to the enterprises and shaking up the trade union scene, questioning the conciliatory policies of the majority unions.

Anti-capitalism and environmentalism as a political alternative

20 August 2011, by Esther Vivas

Indeed, we cannot analyse the global ecological crisis separately from the crisis in which we are immersed or the critique of the economic model that has led us into it. It is also necessary to reject outright the logic of profit maximization of the capitalist system and the productivist orientation which takes no account of the limits of planet Earth.

The reality is that we are witnessing a crisis of civilization that has multiple dimensions: a crisis of ecology, food, care, finance, and as José Saramago says, ethics and morality.

A crisis which puts on the agenda the inability of the capitalist system to meet the basic needs of the majority of the population and threatens the very survival of humanity.

Therefore, we are not in a passing crisis. The crisis is going to last. And

there is no light at the end of the tunnel. Or worse yet, as argued by the philosopher Slavoj Žižek, the light at the end of the tunnel has proved to be that of a train approaching us at full speed.

This is demonstrated by the rescue plans which have been applied to Greece, Portugal and Ireland, the adjustment measures of the Zapatero government and the cuts announced in many other countries of the European Union. We have a true "social war in Europe". An offensive that seeks to end the few social rights that still exist in the continent, which companies consider a burden to their competitiveness in the global economy.

The crisis shows the urgent need to change the world from below. And this is the starting point for me to confront the ecological crisis, and do so from a

radical anti-capitalist and environmental perspective.

Given the state of the planet, what seems strange to me is not being anti-capitalist, but not being so. It is they who defend this model, a capitalist system generating poverty, inequality and war, who should justify themselves. Thus anti-capitalism emerges as a double imperative: moral and strategic.

In fact, the failure of past climate summits in Copenhagen (December 2009) and Cancun (December 2010) illustrates the inability of capitalism to solve and respond to a crisis it has itself created. Both meetings proved to be an abject failure and a missed opportunity where not even the hollow rhetoric and the pomp of the heads of state could hide the lack of real measures approved.

The agreement at Cancun showed that we are dealing with a dead end. Its aim, as noted by Daniel Tanuro, was to give the impression there was a pilot in the plane. But, in reality, there is no pilot. Or rather, the only pilot there is the automatic one. And that is capital's race without limits to maximise profits. It places short-sighted interests and electoral tactics above the long term needs of people and nature.

In fact, the Copenhagen and Cancun meetings made it clear that there is no political will to respond to the climate and ecological crisis we face. A real solution would require profound social and economic transformations. And we have seen, clearly, there is no will to carry them out.

False solutions to climate change arise, technological responses, within the framework of green capitalism, as if technology could save us from the impasse to which the capitalist system has brought us. A good example is the attempt in recent years by the pro-nuclear lobby to present nuclear energy as an alternative to the oil crisis. An "operation" that has come crashing down to earth with the accident at Fukushima, in Japan, which shows how nuclear energy, in the words of Michael Löwy, brings disaster like a storm cloud.

In fact, the central cause of the climate crisis is denied: the logic of this usurper system, of growth without limits, which is capitalism and which has led us to an unprecedented global crisis.

Paradigm shift

In this way, the crisis poses the need for a radical paradigm shift and this paradigm shift has to take place from an anti-capitalist perspective. But what do we mean by anti-capitalism?

Anti-capitalism is a term that has been imposed for a horizon of breaking with the existing order of things. The negative nature of the concept has often been critically noted, but this is only a half-truth as anti-capitalism, as is understood by good part of those of us who are in this camp, flows directly in the formulation of alternative

proposals to the dominant policies that aim towards another model of society.

Proposals such as demanding that the banking system is at the service of the people and that it should not be at the service of a few to do business. The nationalization of the banks is necessary. Demanding, likewise, universal access to housing and the creation of a public housing stock. How can it be understood today that there are people without houses and homes without people? In the Spanish state, there were 250,000 evictions in 2010 and three million empty apartments.

Anti-capitalism begins with the rejection of the existing in order to defend another logic opposed to that of capital and domination. The limits of the term are, to some extent, the limits of the current phase, still that of resistance and (re) construction, marked by the difficulty of expressing a positive strategic perspective and the horizon of an alternative society.

Indeed, the grand narratives designating models of society, like socialism or communism, have an equivocal meaning today due to the failure of the 20th century emancipatory projects. Founding experience are needed which can impose new concepts or recover the old ones to designate an alternative project of society.

And for us anti-capitalism and ecology are two struggles that must be closely linked. Any prospect of breaking with the current economic model that does not take into account, as a central element, the ecological crisis is totally doomed to failure. At the same time, any environmentalist perspective without a clearly anti-capitalist orientation, of rupture with this system, is totally disoriented, stays on the surface of the problem and could end up being an instrument at the service of green capitalism and marketing policies. It is necessary to stand apart from institutionalized environmentalism and place the environmental battle within a logic of change of system. We do not want to put a green veneer on the current model, we want to change it.

Curbing climate change and tackling the global ecological crisis involves modifying from the roots the model of production, distribution and consumption, and not simple measures or cosmetic tinkering. Solutions to the ecological crisis will affect the foundations of the capitalist system. By affecting the "hard disk" of this model.

Global capitalism is based on privatization and the massive commodification of the common property of humankind and nature and is incompatible with the preservation of the balance of the ecosystem. There are many examples that show how capitalist logic is responsible for the ecological crisis and how a serious environmentalist policy must deal with the private interests of large companies.

The global food system

A highly visible case is, for example, how the global food system functions. The model of production, distribution and consumption is in the hands of a handful of multinationals that control the agri-food chain, from producer to final consumer, and determine what, how, where from and what price is paid to the producer for what we eat. A monopoly based on the market in seeds, where currently some ten companies globally control 70% of marketing, via food processing, through to distribution in the supermarkets. And these companies put their own interests above our food needs and respect for the environment.

In fact, the agricultural and food chain has been extending increasingly causing a loss of autonomy of the peasantry with regard to the same and a total ignorance of the consumer as to what we buy. We do not know what we eat, where it comes from or how it was produced. And it is clear that if our food is dependent on companies like Cargill, Monsanto, Dupont, Nestle, Danone, Kraft, Carrefour, Mercadona our food safety is not guaranteed.

The impact of neoliberal policies in

agriculture and food over the past decades has led us to a deeply unfair agro-food model, depredatory and generating hunger. According to data from the FAO, today, one in every six people in the world suffers from hunger, while food production has not stopped increasing since the mid-1960s, multiplying threefold, while the world's population, since then, has only doubled. Therefore, the food is there, but we are faced with a problem of access. If you cannot pay the price set (every day getting higher as a result of financial speculation on food commodities, among others) or do not have access to the means of production (land, water, seeds and so on that have been privatized), you do not eat.

What elements characterise this agricultural and food system? It is a model heavily dependent on oil, with intensive production and the use of large machines that need fossil fuel; with the use of chemical inputs (pesticides, insecticides and so on) prepared with oil; and food which travels thousands of miles before reaching our plates when it could be developed at local level.

We have a model which generates climate change. According to the organisation GRAIN, more than 55% of greenhouse gases are caused by this agro-industrial system, with a production model that deforests and kills off virgin woods and forests, which wears out soils, with food that travels long distances, with consequent conservation in large refrigerators and transport over long distances.

It is a model that involves the loss of agro-diversity. The FAO indicates that in the past hundred years 75 per cent of agricultural and livestock varieties have disappeared. The food known by our grandfathers and grandmothers, and even fathers and mothers, has very little to do with what we eat. In recent decades, there has been a growing homogeneity with regard to food consumption, with the loss of not only agro-diversity but also of cultural knowledge.

In addition, industrial agriculture dispenses with the peasantry and the farmer's knowledge. Currently, in the

Spanish state only 5% of the active population is rural and agricultural income is only 55% of overall income. If they disappear, in whose hands is our food?

An ecological and social transformation

Before the impasse to which the current model of civilization has led, we sense more than ever the relevance of the lucid metaphor of Walter Benjamin who argued that humankind was heading like a runaway train towards the precipice and the role of those who strive to change the world is to pull the emergency brakes as the train approaches the cliff.

Faced with the global ecological crisis, which is intertwined with the economic and social crisis, there are two conflicting logics which are in contradiction. On the one hand, short-term profit and permanent electoral tactical manoeuvring, characteristic of capital and managerial politics, embodied by the majority of the world's governments. And, on the other, the long term logic of the defence of humanity, life and balance with nature, represented by the movement for climate justice. They represent two alternative destinations. For us, the choice is clear.

What does it mean to defend a perspective of social and ecological transformation of society and the economy? And what does it imply? On the one hand, retraining for workers from the environmentally unsustainable production sectors (arms industry, cars, and construction), maintaining employment rights and creating new jobs in economically sustainable sectors such as renewable energy and agro-ecology.

It means a massive reduction in working hours, working fewer hours while maintaining wages, creating new jobs and promoting a more balanced sharing of domestic work and care between men and women.

It means banning layoffs at companies

that are making a profit. It is scandalous that as Telefónica announced record profits of more than ten billion Euros in 2010 it also announced its intention of laying off 20% of its workforce in the state.

It involves a redistribution of wealth and income. Who has most should pay most. And combating tax fraud. Today it is estimated that in the Spanish state tax fraud amounts to 100 billion Euros per year, double the tax cuts that Zapatero wants to make with the austerity plan of 2010-2013. Instead of freezing pensions, cutting public sector wages, privatizing public services and so on, other tax policies could be followed.

Alternatives calling into question capitalist property relations. Defending the nationalization of the financial system and other key sectors such as energy. Banking should be a public service, aimed at meeting social needs.

It is necessary to reduce over-production and the consumption of material goods, especially in rich countries. If everyone consumes as we do here, we would need several planet Earths. It is necessary, therefore, to rethink our model of consumption and reduce unfair, redundant, unnecessary, anti-ecological and excessive consumption.

In fact, the logic of the capitalist system needs this compulsive consumption, selling goods that are produced on a large scale. On the one hand, it promotes a series of artificial needs. We believe that we need more to live better and be happier: the latest mobile telephone, a change of clothes each season.

And on the other hand, production is based on the mechanism of planned obsolescence: products are made to ensure that they have a short life and will deteriorate quickly so that new ones have to be bought: mobile phones stop working after three years, printers are programmed so that they will stop working. Cosima Dannoritzer's documentary "The Light Bulb Conspiracy" explains it perfectly.

Thinking about an anti-capitalist and anti-productivist strategy to transform

society is important so as to incorporate the contributions of the indigenous movements such as the concept of “good living”, which raise other relations between humanity and nature in harmony with the Pachamama, “mother earth”. Demands that were raised strongly in the Assembly of Social Movements of the World Social Forum in Belen (Brazil) in January 2009 and in the People’s Summit on Climate Change and Rights of Mother Earth in Cochabamba (Bolivia) in April 2010.

This is not, however, to fall into romanticism or idealizations of the indigenous movement, but to integrate their contributions and understand their proposals, seeking a critical dialogue between indigenous movement, environmentalism and socialist thought.

Be angry and organize

The starting point for confronting the social and ecological crisis is social resistance, organization and mobilization, because changes do not occur spontaneously from above but are the result of pressure and the fight in the street. It is necessary, therefore, to build another correlation of forces between capital and labour.

And the inability to force significant changes in the dominant policies is mainly explained by the weakness of the social response to the crisis. Because if there is a climate that anti-capitalists and environmentalists need to change it is precisely the social climate. In the social field, we definitely need some global warming.

Ultimately, what is at stake is a conservative solution to the crisis or a left, anti-capitalist, environmentalist, feminist and solidarity-based outcome. The reactions of workers in scenarios such as this may be dominated by fear and selfishness or by solidarity and anger against injustice. They can move towards progressive options or turn to reactionary alternatives. There is no automatic relation between distress and social mobilization, and even less, between mobilization and mobilization in the sense of solidarity.

We live in a paradoxical moment where the cumulative malaise is very broad, but at the same time there is a great resignation and discouragement. The difficulty is not convincing many people that the current model does not work, but rather convincing those who already share this diagnosis that is possible to change things. Many people are defeated before they start to fight. And this is the great victory of the capitalist system: making us believe that “there is no alternative”. The conquest of our collective imagination.

The challenge ahead is transforming the social unrest into mobilization and collective action, and reconstructing a culture of mobilisation, solidarity and participation in collective affairs, in the workplace, in neighbourhoods, in study centres. And it is necessary to obtain concrete victories, to show the usefulness of mobilization, to build up forces and prepare new victories.

For a long time people have only experienced, in general, defeats and setbacks, and we need counter-examples to show that it is possible to change things. I believe that, precisely, the most important consequence of the revolutions in the Arab world, for the alternative movements in Europe, is that they demonstrate that mobilizing, fighting, organizing, taking to the streets, work, that the foundations of the current system are not so strong as they seem or as want us to believe and that when unrest turns into anger and anger into popular mobilization, the power of those at the bottom becomes unstoppable.

Environmentalism has traditionally also placed much emphasis on going beyond mobilization, promoting a change in values, transforming lives and daily habits and building alternative practices aimed, here and now, at “another world”.

From this point of view, individual action is important because it provides consistency regarding what we stand for, is demonstrative and puts the possibility of other daily practices on the agenda. Those who want to change the world should try to find a possible coherence between what we do and what we say. Although on the

basis that absolute consistency in the capitalist system in which we live is impossible.

But we must also bear in mind that individual action is not sufficient, not enough. Sometimes you can believe that by changing our daily habits, one by one, we will change our society, and this is not the case. Individual action does not generate structural change. These will only be possible through collective action. It is necessary to break the myth that our individual actions, by themselves, can generate structural changes.

On the other hand, the alternative social movements place much emphasis on building alternative non-capitalist islets to transform society in an anti-capitalist logic, by way of liberated spaces. A good example of these practices, among others, is the movement of agro-ecological consumer cooperatives and groups.

Their growth in the Spanish state this past decade has been very significant and there have been thousands of experiences throughout the country, with local consumer groups, who establish a direct relationship with a producer and/or local farmer and develop another model of production, distribution and consumption based on trust, proximity, peasant-based and ecological production.

In fact, Andalusia has been a pioneer with these experiences. We are talking about initiatives based on the demand for food sovereignty, regaining control over agricultural and food policies, the ability for us to decide what we eat rather than a few multinationals that control the food chain and put their own interests above collective needs.

Sometimes there may be a certain idealization of these experiences and the potentialities of these spaces and projects and it may seem that reinforcing these initiatives and enlarging them is enough to change the world. But this is not the case.

For agro-ecological consumer cooperatives and groups, if I want to consume organic products it is necessary that GMOs are banned because coexistence between the latter and conventional and organic

agriculture is impossible. We need, therefore political changes which can only be obtained with the mobilization of the masses

Although it is clear that the construction of local alternatives, in everyday life, consumption, alternative media, and so on, is something fundamental. And any social mobilization of the masses will have feet of clay if it is not supported by a dense network of associations and conferences, together with a powerful labour and neighbourhood movement.

But such local and daily alternatives cannot be to the detriment of the search for the mobilization and organization of the bulk of the workers and popular sectors. Apart from active minorities, social change will come from the collective action of the majority of the population. Changing the world is not the task of a few but is the business of many.

On the other hand, another urgent task is to promote the coordination of struggles, creating spaces of articulation and ensuring that they are not isolated. It must be borne in mind that neoliberal capitalism bases its strength in the fragmentation and dispersion of the whole of the oppressed and exploited. "Divide and rule" has been the great success of neoliberalism.

We live in an increasingly fragmented society: between natives and immigrants, unemployed people and workers with jobs, between precarious and stable employees. But where the system places walls, we must promote convergence between mobilizations and social struggles.

Another left from below

Although social resistance is the starting point to change things, by itself it is not enough. We need to articulate an alternative broad anti-capitalist policy linked to struggles and movements, because we do not want to resign ourselves to be a pressure group on those who rule.

With the current system, it is

necessary to note the absolute inability and lack of political will on the hegemonic left to change society and combat the social and ecological crisis. The European social democratic parties have adapted, for some time, to the interests of big capital and have woven ties with private sectors. Political and corporate collusion and revolving doors are the order of the day. The number of ex-politicians occupying positions on the boards of directors of the main Spanish companies continues to increase.

Social democracy does not have its own agenda for a way out of the crisis, beyond the management of the interests of capital. And the bulk of the formations located to its left, as is the case with many Communist Parties or Green Parties, have become forces disconnected from struggles, led by "families", absolutely institutionalised and subordinated to social democracy. This does not mean they do not contain valuable people with another vision, but they are without the ability to make an impact. In fact, both the Communists and the Greens have become essentially electoral, institutional and media apparatuses, with a hollow social base and have abandoned a perspective of mobilization and social struggle.

The majority left, unfortunately, has lost any ambition to transform society from below and to the left. The conventional left-wing parties may have electoral credibility, receiving support as a lesser evil, but do not have political credibility as useful tools to change this world. The case of the European Greens is an example of this evolution. They have grown electorally with the support of the middle classes tired of social democracy, but they are little more than an electoral umbrella.

In the German case, the Greens, from their emergence at the beginning of the 1980s, went, in a very short time, from embodying an anti-systemic and radical alternative to being a force in the management of government and correction of the system, from having a pacifist and anti-militarist perspective to defending the bombing of Kosovo in 1999.

One of the best examples of

institutionalization and abandonment of a real prospect of transformation by European Greens is now in Iceland, where, on April 9th and for the second time, the citizens rejected in a referendum the agreement that the Icelandic government, formed by the Social Democrats and the Greens, had signed with European financiers. The proposal was to pay \$5,200 million to British and Dutch banking insurers. The Icelandic people said "no". Because this is not the way to combat the ecological and social crisis that we face.

Against this "left" we must build another credible left as a useful tool to combat neo-liberalism and the transformation of society. A left that is based on a strategic perspective of a break with the logic of capital, commitment to the social struggles and a politics not conceived as a profession. Politics cannot be the monopoly of a caste of professional politicians that make it a *modus vivendi*.

This other left cannot have its centre of gravity as working in the institutions; its axis has to be on the street, in mobilization and in the production of oppositional social and cultural proposals. Here is where the left must have its line of action. Because you cannot fight neoliberalism and capitalism and at the same time manage their policies.

This does not mean that it is not necessary to work in institutions or be present in electoral contests. We must participate in them to challenge the monopoly of political representation of the parties which have it. And having people within institutions (in municipalities, in Parliament and so on) is useful as a loudspeaker for struggles, ideas and alternative proposals, as a sounding board. It is to use public office in the service of mobilization.

We need a left independent from the logic of the institutions, that does not have financial or ideological ties. The major political and trade union organizations are now linked to institutions and banks. And often they depend materially on these to survive.

The left that we need must maintain

its independence with respect to the social liberal governments. Governmental collaboration with social democracy does not lead to progress in the construction of another left, but quite the contrary, it leads to retreat. We have many examples that demonstrate the failure of the governments of the plural left. In France, for example, with the Jospin government formed by the Socialist Party, the Communist Party and the Greens, in 1997, which was one of the governments that privatized most in the country's recent history. Or in Italy, the government of Romano Prodi and Rifondazione Communist which, after a few years of existence, disillusioned its social base so much that Berlusconi came back to power.

In Catalonia, the passage of Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds (ICV) to the government of the Generalitat, with the PSC and ERC, is the best example of how the left to be built cannot be placed in a subordinate logic to social democracy. The overall balance of management, beyond some concrete measures, has nothing to do with the transformation of society but just the opposite. The justification of environmentalism that ICV made in order to govern with the PSC was a discourse influenced by the left, but the reality is different: far from dragging the Socialist Party to the left, the ICV has been dragged to the right and the practice of policies contrary to its program.

In the case of the ICV, this has become very visible at a triple level. At the social and economic level, looking the other way in relation to business relocation and privatizing, for example, parks and gardens in Barcelona. In the environmental field,

giving in to the construction of large-scale infrastructure like the Very High Tension electricity link, the Quart Cinturo, and others. And in the field of democratic rights, with the lamentable assumption of the Ministry of Interior and head of the Mossos de Esquadra [the Catalan police force] responsible for serious episodes of repression in the last term of government.

It is necessary, therefore, to construct an alternative that breaks the monopoly of political representation held by the traditional parties. There are no shortcuts to build this other left, which will necessarily be the fruit of the confluence between various people and organizations and the result of the participation of many activists in unorganized social movements who are fighting on various fronts.

But there is still a great mistrust and scepticism towards political activity by the majority of left-wing activists, as a result of the balance sheet of the failed experiences of the twentieth century. Although in the specific political context, the crisis, the difficulties of social resistance will gradually raise the need to build a political alternative not limited to social activity.

The need to build an alternative is the debate that we have to place in the political, social and cultural life of the left in the Spanish state. And the alternative that we have to build is an alternative of a sharp break, of struggle, not a political project that is intended to manage what exists.

Often, for various left currents, it has been about trying to reconcile institutional logic and the logic of

transformation: defending the idea of "party of struggle and party of government", but practical experience has shown that this is completely contradictory and ends up as a left take on institutional drift and management.

Today left-wing policies mean facing the logic of capital, a logic that does not allow even minor reforms. It means working to open a breach in the political system, building up the forces and generating the conditions to achieve a social majority in favour of a change of model.

The objective of the left must be taking power "without being taken by power", without being trapped by the latter, as Olivier Bensancenot has put it. Working to organize resistance, mobilize society, advance anti-capitalist ideas and build an alternative project that someday could be hegemonic and carry out a politics of real transformation.

In conclusion. The crisis of modern civilization puts us before great challenges. We must recognize that we have no magic recipes or miracle potions to change the system, as the French philosopher Daniel Bensaïd put it, "Let us not deceive ourselves, nobody knows how to change the world". But we have some clues on how to do it and some working hypotheses: beginning with indignation, then rebellion and collective action.

And in this uncertain journey of changing the world, the works of people such as José Saramago, are, without doubt, a good reference to guide us and ensure we do not get lost along the way.

Nuke the Nukes

17 August 2011, by **Rehana Dada**

Whoever made that comment was courageous. I can quite picture the room rapidly transforming itself into

the sort of stony silence that polite people adopt when presented with nonsense; although there could have

just as easily been soft applause from the sort who promote megaliths as cutting-edge technology. I suppose it

depends on where this comment was made and what the average age was in the room.

Nuclear was quite sexy in the sixties and seventies, and that's about when the bulk of the world's nuclear specialists had hit adulthood. This isn't a frivolous point. The world is rather short on nuclear specialists, experienced or not, especially the sort that might be entrusted with the management of a power station. Of those still functional, very few are African.

Even South Africa's Koeberg nuclear power station still requires foreign expertise after three decades of being in operation. There aren't many universities on the continent that can churn out nucleomanics, so if South Africa went nuclear we'd have to be searching elsewhere for the necessary high-skilled crew. Even then, we might have to make use of a combination of geriatrics (poetic licence) and college kids.

The world did eventually get sensible about nuclear energy, possibly after that little warning from the Ukraine in 1986. From the 1990s onwards there wasn't much effort made to produce that particular skills set; it was considered too expensive and too unsafe. Essentially, South Africa does not have the technology and skills base to roll out nuclear in its own territory, let alone across Africa.

Should we even bother mentioning safety concerns when talking about nuclear? It might be good to mention that minor trouble that happened in one of the world's most conscientious and prosperous nations 25 years ago. The land around that European incident is still uninhabitable. But apparently, all we need to prevent nuclear disaster is regulation and efficiency, right?

Well, we know that Africa has excellent regulatory systems, plus good operating records and absolutely no interest whatsoever in nuclear

weapons. Let's be real - nuclear is entirely harmless as long as nobody leaves a nut in the wrong place, falls into the waste pit or has an argument with their neighbouring dictator.

Or as long as the planet stops shrugging her shoulders in that irritatingly irrational way. Not that earthquakes are much of an issue in Africa, mind you. Firstly, most of the continent is quite stable geologically, and secondly, there's not that much to damage, given the vast expanses that are sadly (or not) free of high-rise buildings and roads and such measures of progress and wellbeing - also mostly free of electricity grids, it might be worth pointing out.

Even if some impressionable LDC (least developed country) were to have its ego twisted into buying one of these big toys, and even if it instilled good governance and management practices, it would still have to give up its economic sovereignty and any opportunity for good development for having committed its income for generations to pay off the loans.

Nuclear comes in large boxes that are better suited to large-scale grids and high technical skills levels, most of which will need to be imported, even in some areas of construction. It is very complex equipment that takes a long time to build and requires a lot of money upfront. Once you've committed to it, you don't have room to adjust if your electricity demands change, which makes it a very risky and very expensive option.

Nuclear power stations do provide a steady base load supply if they are run optimally, which makes them attractive to large industries - except that every 18 months or so they need to be shut down entirely for at least a month for refuelling. If this is your country's main or only power station, I suppose it provides a good chunk of time to go holidaying.

And for any who'd dare invoke the climate change argument at this point,

I'd have to ask if they'd noticed the wind or that big ball of energy that appears in the sky most mornings. Renewables, such as biogas digesters and wind farms have short lead times, which means that if demand changes over a short to medium term, capital expenditure can be adjusted fairly easily.

They can be built in a range of sites across the continent and thus bypass the need for a massive and inefficient grid. The biggest plus is that more jobs are provided per unit of output from renewables than any other electricity generation option, and the skills set required for most aspects of renewables construction and maintenance is quite accessible. In passing, they're also a lot cheaper than nuclear.

Yes, Africa needs electricity. Yes, access to energy will enhance the lives of millions, reduce the burden on women, facilitate the instalment of plasma TVs and a deep freeze in every homestead, and so on, but you have to ask some questions about the timing. If electricity provision is such an urgent need, why would you want to spend over a decade building a single central power station when you could install a series of wind, solar and small hydro options throughout your country that could come online within a few years?

Nuclear is a mismatch for what Africa requires. As South Africans, do we want to be building a string of these things across an impoverished continent?

PS: Just to be absolutely clear: "No nukes" does not equal coal.

Rehana Dada is a South African science and environmental journalist. She has produced numerous television documentaries on a wide range of environmental, science and conservation topics.

From Amandla
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Jaitapur: a new nuclear folly

16 August 2011, by **Danielle Sabai**

This disaster, of a magnitude unequalled since Chernobyl and the extent of whose consequences is still not known, has reopened in India the debate on the safety of civil nuclear power and the Indian government's policy of nuclear expansion.

In 2010, the share of nuclear power only represented 4,780 megawatts or 4.2% of the country's energy consumption. The Indian government plans to multiply this capacity fivefold over the next 10 years. The constructions underway should only add 3,900 MW, but the objective fixed is to build new reactors which would cumulate in a power of 63,000 MW by 2032. That would represent 100 billion Euros of potential investment and 25% of the country's energy.

Indeed, the revelations on the negligence in the area of safety by industrialists in the name of the race for profits illustrate the impossibility of ensuring satisfactory safety levels for nuclear installations. India does not possess an independent safety authority. The atomic energy regulation commission, which is responsible for this question, shares its personnel with and provides funds to the organisations it is supposed to control.

And yet seven power stations are being built and at least 36 new ones

are being designed or planned. The government has signed an agreement with the French company AREVA to build 6 reactors of the EPR type of a total power of 3,600 megawatts in Jaitapur, a coastal town in the state of Maharashtra. Ultimately, Jaitapur will host the biggest nuclear complex in the world!

The region of Jaitapur is well known for its great biodiversity. It shelters thousands of animal and plant species of which some are threatened with extinction. The construction of the nuclear power station is a threat to this entire ecosystem. The inhabitants of the region, some of whom have been expropriated, have reacted strongly against this nuclear power station project which threatens their way of life and the environment.

The Indian government has responded to the opposition with the greatest scorn. Demonstrations have been harshly repressed and a demonstrator killed. Jaitapur illustrates the blindness of the nucleocrats. To this day, no EPR reactor has yet been tested. Outside of the prototype of Flamanville, one is being built in Finland, two at a more initial stage in China. The Finnish project is now two years late. It should cost 3 billion Euros but its cost has now reached 5 to 7 billion, a financial abyss paid for by the French taxpayer.

If we refer to the Fukushima disaster, the choice of Jaitapur is an aberration. Located on the coast, the site is not sheltered from sea water infiltration or a tsunami and Jaitapur has already been hit by an earthquake. Also, India is not Japan. No evacuation plan exists in case of accident in a power station. What would happen if a nuclear disaster affected the country?

The Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace (CDNP), involving 200 Indian associations, calls for a moratorium on Indian civil nuclear activities and an audit on the installations in service. Greenpeace India has launched an online petition seeking to gather 100,000 signatures against the construction of the six reactors at Jaitapur.

With the Fukushima disaster, the opposition has deepened. It is important to support the mobilisations against the dizzying nuclear expansion envisaged by the Indian government. There is a risk of seeing a new disaster, which we can imagine will be still more destructive and costly in human life, and quite simply unbearable. Everything must be done to stop this new nuclear folly.

Petition against the construction of the nuclear power station at Jaitapur: <http://www.greenpeace.org/india/en/...>

Protest in the face of Syria's tanks

15 August 2011, by **Eric Ruder**

The ferocity of the latest assault shocked Arab public opinion and was rebuked around the world. The offensive began July 31 and took 75

lives in the town of Hama, the same city where Assad's father ordered a mass slaughter nearly three decades ago.

In all, more than 150 people were killed by security forces throughout Syria on the eve of Ramadan, making it the bloodiest day yet in the

government crackdown on dissent that has claimed more than 1,600 civilian lives so far and wounded many thousands more, according to pro-democracy and human rights organizations.

Since June, Syrian security forces had largely retreated from Hama, a city of 700,000 about halfway between Damascus and Aleppo, allowing residents to enjoy some degree of autonomy. In early July, some 250,000 of the city's residents took to the streets to demand the ouster of the Assad regime.

About a month ago, government forces surrounded Hama and began preparing for the assault. In anticipation of the confrontation, city residents erected barricades made from cement blocks, sandbags and other miscellaneous materials.

But on July 31, those barricades quickly succumbed to the treads of tanks and armored personnel carriers as they bore down on the town from every direction before dawn. The assault then paused and resumed the following day. Mortar fire pummeled residential areas, and soldiers fired on unarmed protesters in the streets. Horrifying footage of the assault appeared on YouTube and elsewhere on the web [<http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/07/31/syria-hama-barricades-fall>], even as troops continued their massacre of unarmed protesters and plunged the city into smoke-filled chaos.

"The assault on Hama is an indication of loss of control," said Bassma Kodmani, head of the Paris-based Arab Reform Initiative. "They crossed the threshold. They want to show that they can raise the level of repression to the whole country."

"What has been clear is that the government is prepared to use force without limit," Middle East commentator Rami Khouri said. "But this is not solving the problem. Instead, it is making the rebellion more robust."

Hama was the site of a far greater massacre 29 years ago—systematic killings ordered by Hafez al-Assad, the father of the current president who essentially passed political power to

his son when he died in 2000.

In 1982, Syrian security forces were carrying out an offensive against the armed wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, and Hama was turned into a warning to any other city, town or political current that might consider defying the regime. Survivors of the massacre still live with terrifying memories of those days, in which up to 30,000 Syrians were killed.

A Reuters report from a month ago recounts some of their stories [19]:

"Hama's community of survivors in Lebanon, Jordan and the Gulf say they cannot forget the blood-spilled streets, the unattended corpses, the raped women, nor the death squads who dragged youths to execution grounds nearly 30 years ago." "Twenty-four young men were sprayed with bullets in front of my own eyes including a child who was 12 years old. And in five minutes they had picked up the bodies and (only) the shoes and hats were left. The ground was a pool of blood. The women came out, and one was screaming 'This is my husband' and the other shouting 'This is my son,'" said Umm Omar, 53, as she sobbed.

Abu Rahman al-Asfar, from the Baroodiah neighborhood of Hama, recounted how his neighbors tried to breastfeed a baby for up to nine days after its mother died, as there was no food available."

This history of resistance lives on in Hama, and it explains why the government is desperate to unleash its superior military force before the start of Ramadan.

Since the beginning of the Arab Spring earlier this year, protests have often emerged from the gatherings for Friday prayers, as youth leave the mosques and take to the streets. In fact, since government security forces regularly crack down at the first sign of political dissent, Friday prayers have often provided the only opportunity to bring masses of people together.

For this reason, rulers throughout the Middle East have looked with dread on the approach of Ramadan this year. According to an Agence France Presse report [20]:

"Arab governments are bracing for increased tensions during the Muslim

holy fasting month of Ramadan, which this year comes amid a wave of unprecedented uprisings sweeping the region."

"Throughout history, Ramadan has been the month of revolutions and victory," said Abdullah al-Amadi, director of the Qatar-based Islamic website IslamOnline. "I think it will inspire the youths of the Arab Spring to complete their struggles against injustice and tyranny," he said.

In Syria, tens or even hundreds of thousands of people have taken to the streets after Friday prayers in recent weeks. Now, during Ramadan, when observant Muslims fast during the day and then gather nightly for prayer and to break their fast, pro-democracy forces in Syria are planning to transform every night into a Friday prayer-protest night in order to ratchet up pressure on the government and the military, which is already showing signs of strain.

According to experts on Syrian military affairs, the Syrian military is held together by a fiercely loyal officer corps, drawn from the minority Alawite sect that forms the backbone of Assad's ruling Baath Party. However, the rank-and-file troops are primarily made up of Sunni Muslims, who make up the majority of Syria's population.

So far, the military has been able to send its most loyal units to crack down on one hotbed of resistance, and then redeploy to the next center of rebellion. But if the military faces an ongoing mobilization in several larger cities and towns simultaneously, it could be stretched to the breaking point.

According to analyst Firas Abi Ali [21]: "If they don't have enough loyal units to take Hama, they don't have enough loyal units to take on much bigger cities like Homs, Aleppo or Damascus...I don't think they have enough of these units to crack down in a major way on multiple cities at the same time, at least not without seeing defections and without risking expanding the scope of the protests."

In fact, the repression has already served to reinforce the resolve of the resistance and provoked outpourings of solidarity with the besieged people

of Hama. And the regime's use of naked force to ensure discipline within the ranks of the military [22] is an indicator of how the regime's control is balanced on a knife's edge:

"Syrian exiles, citing accounts from relatives, say that in cases where Sunni troops are deployed on the frontline, they are coerced into firing on demonstrators because security agents positioned to their rear will shoot them if they disobey orders."

"If you don't kill, you will be killed," said Ahmed Hussein, originally from the eastern city of Deir al-Zor, demonstrating against Assad outside the Syrian embassy in London.

"Anyone who is Sunni and has a capacity to do anything is carefully watched," said [Andrew] Terrill, [a professor at the U.S. Army War College]. "You would not want to defect if you were afraid you did not have much of a chance."

U.S. and European heads of state—as well as the government of Israel—were initially restrained in their criticism of Assad. They preferred his continued rule to the possibility of another revolution in the Middle East.

But the scale and savagery of the regime's crackdown have compelled them to issue stern warnings to Assad to stop the butchery. But even if some in Washington might wish for military strikes against the regime [23], the reality of U.S. deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan and NATO's ongoing assault on Libya mean such talk is pure bluster.

According to the Christian Science Monitor:

"William Hague, the British foreign minister, also said that military action was not even a remote

possibility. "Instead, he said that the European Union would issue a second round of sanctions against Syria in the coming week." "...It is a very frustrating situation—the levers that we have in this situation are relatively limited, but we should be frank in admitting that and working with the ones that we have," Hague said."

The protests in Syria are driven by the same forces at work throughout the region—high levels of unemployment, the rigidity and authoritarianism of the regime, a surge of youth into political activity and the inspiration of victories in Tunisia and Egypt.

President Assad accuses the protesters of acting on behalf of foreign governments and seeking to cripple Syria's leadership in the Arab world by sowing chaos throughout the country. Assad is clearly hoping to discredit the resistance by appealing to Syria's reputation as a thorn in the side of U.S. and Israel and their aims in the region.

But Syria's support of resistance forces in Lebanon and Palestine shouldn't give it a free pass to crush the legitimate aspirations of its own population, according to Middle East commentator Ramzy Baroud [24].

"Although the official Syrian narrative claims that [U.S. and Israeli targeting of Syria] alone should justify the army's harsh crackdown on pro-democracy protests, the rationale is challenged by a history of regime hypocrisy, doublespeak, brutality and real, albeit understated willingness to accommodate Western pressures and diktats...

It seemed that Syria wanted to be involved in the region only so much as

to remain a visible player, but not to the extent of having to face violent repercussions. It was an act of political mastery, one that Hafez crafted in the course of three decades and which Bashar cleverly applied for nearly 11 years. In essence, however, Syria remained hostage to familial considerations, one-party rule and the sectarian classifications initiated by colonial France in 1922.

True, Syria was and will remain a target for Western pressures. But what needs to be realized is that these pressures are motivated by specific policies concerning Israel, and not with regards to a family-centered dictatorship that openly murders innocent civilians in cold blood."

In fact, the Syrian opposition insists that the uprising in Syria is not only in solidarity with the broader revolt in the Middle East, but that victory in Syria will help the Arab cause more generally, including the Palestinian cause specifically.

According to Burhan Ghalyoun, professor and Syrian opposition figure in exile [25]:

Syrians will determine the fate of Syria...The Syrian people are closest to the Palestinian people, and they are more protective of the Palestinian cause, the Golan Heights and Arab solidarity than the current regime whose leaders have made the country feudal and do not care for anything except for protecting their own interests and existence."

As the regime continues its crackdown, it will be important to seek out opportunities to demonstrate solidarity with the just ambitions of the Syrian revolt.

From Socialist Worker USA
<http://socialistworker.org/>

The Arab revolutions in perspective

13 August 2011, by **Gilbert Achcar**, **Yvan Lemaître**

Yvan Lemaître: The smothering of all political life by the Arab dictatorships may have obscured

the politicisation through anti-imperialist struggles of intellectual circles, of the workers'

movement and of the populations overall in the aftermath of World War II. Isn't this political base re-

emerging today in the revolutions underway?

Gilbert Achcar: What is happening today should be placed indeed in the context of the long modern history of the Arab states. Without going back too far in time, we can situate the current revolutionary wave in the evolution that took place since the previous regional wave of upheaval, following the Nakba, the Arab defeat in Palestine in 1948. The rise of the nationalist movement in the 1950s and 1960s managed then to capture and stem the popular protest, but also accompany it in its socio-economic and political radicalisation. The new Arab defeat of June 1967 at the hands of Israel signalled the beginning of the decline of Arab nationalism. The 1970s were years of transition during which three currents battled for hegemony: declining nationalism, a new radical left partly originating in nationalism, and Islamic fundamentalism fuelled by Saudi petrodollars and favoured by the existing regimes as an antidote to the left.

After the Iranian revolution of 1979, a new historic phase began, three decades during which regional popular protest was dominated by religious currents, with the decline and marginalisation of the left. In recent years, however, the socio-economic consequences of neoliberal globalisation have led to a new rise in social protest, class struggle, propelled by the effects of the crisis and the deterioration of living conditions. In Egypt, the years 2006-2009 saw a wave of workers' struggles that went beyond anything the country and the region had seen before.

This revival of class struggle — an area in which the religious currents which advocate social conciliation are virtually absent — indicated that we were entering a new political phase, a new phase of transition. With the current revolutionary wave, we see a strengthening of the mobilisation and role of the working class in Tunisia and Egypt, the two leading countries so far. We see also, more modestly, a new rise of the radical left. We also see the powerful emergence of a new liberalism in the American sense of

the word, a political liberalism, rather progressive on the social plane, whose best known representative is the April 6 youth movement in Egypt.

While it is much exaggerated to speak of a "Facebook revolution," it is quite true that a generation exists that got politicised within the limits of this new liberalism, a generation that found in this technology its means of organisation. From Morocco to Syria, we have seen a prominent role played in the organisation of mobilisations by electronic communication networks, whose adherents in their great majority are young people inspired by liberal, democratic and secular aspirations, combined with social reformism. There is here a significant potential for radicalisation that the left, if it knows how to deal with it, could influence.

We have entered a new period of transition, with a reshuffle of the cards creating a strong competition between, on the one hand, the new rising forces — the workers' movement, the left and the liberal youth — and on the other, the Islamic movements.

YL: You talk of revolutions as if there is a single process. What is the role of pan-Arabism in the consciousness of participants and in the actual developments?

GA: We should use the term "Arab" in quotation marks. We could characterise this region as Arab in the geopolitical sense of the Arab League of States, in the sense also that Arabic is the official language there, though not always exclusively. Morocco and Algeria, in particular, are Arab-Amazigh countries.

Pan-Arabism, or in other words Arab nationalism, was the dominant ideology in the mass movement at the regional scale during the 1950s and 1960s. At the same time, this nationalism represented an aspiration to a unity in the manner of the great European bourgeois unifications, from above, mainly crystallised around the person of Egypt's President Nasser. The defeat of the Arab nationalist movement was accompanied by an ebb of the "nationalitarian" ideology. Today, the fact that the protest

movement has spread like wildfire in the Arabic speaking area bordered by the Sahara, Iran and Turkey, can only be explained by the links created by this cultural, linguistic and historic community. The satellite chain Al-Jazeera strongly contributed to that, as, of course, did electronic communications.

A new regional consciousness is in the process of emerging, which is no longer the aspiration to a unity from above, through dictatorship, but a much more democratic aspiration to unity from below. Rather than the European models of past centuries, it is the confederal and democratic model of the current European Union (putting aside its social content, of course) which best matches what the youth of today may wish for.

The actual attempts at unification which occurred until now in the Arab world have taken the form one might expect for unions between dictatorial regimes. They were either bound to break up, through the failure of one country's grip over another like in the 1958 Syrian- Egyptian union, or lacking in consistency like the 1989 Arab Maghreb Union. Today, there is the consciousness that before arriving at unification, deep democratic changes are needed in the countries concerned.

YL: What stage are the Arab revolutions at now and what are their perspectives?

GA: The point on which a broad consensus exists is that things are only just beginning. Even in the two countries where victories have been won, Tunisia and Egypt, there are as many if not more elements of continuity with the old regime as of discontinuity. What has been overthrown is the tip of the iceberg; all the rest is still there, i.e. the bulk of the dominant class and the power apparatuses. That is indeed why the fight continues, as in Egypt with the mobilisation against the military council that has assumed power since the departure of Mubarak.

The most appropriate phrase to describe what has happened in the region is "revolutionary process," rather than "revolution" in the sense

of a finished process. Unleashed by the events of December 2010 in Tunisia and continued in Egypt, the revolutionary process is underway on a regional scale; it is only at its beginning. It has not yet won initial victory in Bahrain, Yemen, Libya and Syria — not to mention the other countries where demonstrations have not yet reached a massive scale — and it remains largely unfinished in Tunisia and Egypt. The Egyptians were quite right in calling their revolution by the date of its beginning: the "revolution of January 25."

They are still far from reaching the end. The latter is difficult to predict, because as in any period of revolutionary upheaval marked by the irruption of the masses onto the political scene, history accelerates to a dizzying degree.

That said, any return to the status quo ante is excluded. You can't turn the wheel of history backwards. The Arab world entered in 2011 into a period of transition which opens several possibilities like any revolutionary process.

The most desirable perspective from my point of view is the deepening and consolidation of the democratic conquests in such a way as to allow the construction of a social and political workers' movement capable of starting a new phase of radicalisation of the process, on a class basis. The main alternative perspective today is the limitation of the democratic transformation in favour of the continuity of the regimes, by co-opting the fundamentalist movements. This is what the US calls "orderly transition,"

which is why they have now established official relations with the Muslim Brotherhood. There also remains, of course, the perspective of a phase of prolonged instability with social and economic consequences that could ultimately lead to an authoritarian power confiscating the revolution and its gains — like the aftermath of the revolution of 1848 in France, which led to the "18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" [the title of Karl Marx's book on the 1851 coup of Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte]. Such a development cannot be ruled out.

That is why it is fundamental that the left know how to fight for political democracy, with the alliances that this fight requires, while considering it essential to construct an independent workers' movement on both the trade union and political fronts.

Sacrificing the earth on the altar of politics

11 August 2011, by **Chris Williams**

"It may seem impossible to imagine that a technologically advanced society could choose, in essence, to destroy itself, but that is what we are now in the process of doing."

— Elizabeth Kolbert, *Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature and Climate Change*, 2006

Marooned from the mainland United States, in June, the nuclear power plant at Fort Calhoun, Nebraska, became a small island. Sandbags were hurriedly deployed to prevent inundation from floodwaters as the Missouri river burst its banks, a consequence of the greatest flood in U.S. history.

Another nuclear facility, this time at Los Alamos in New Mexico, birthplace of atomic weapons, was threatened by an altogether different force of nature. Los Alamos was forced to evacuate <http://livewire.koat.com/Event/Live...> as flames overran fire defenses and firefighters struggled to contain the largest wildfire in New Mexico history.

As the Las Conchas wildfire blazed out of control at the end of June, it consumed over 130,000 acres of forest. Large areas of land at Los Alamos are contaminated with radioactive waste from decades of nuclear research and testing. Scorched land increases water run-off and the danger from flash flooding. Thus, a further alarming side effect of the wildfire and Los Alamos's legacy of radioactive contamination is the likelihood that radioisotopes will spread, as happened when wildfires threatened the Hanford nuclear weapons plant in Washington state. Extended drought and persistent wildfires saw the U.S. Department of Agriculture declare the entire state of Texas as a natural disaster area <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/art...>, as more than 30 percent of crops have been lost due to severe water shortages. This follows a spring where the majority of counties in Texas were on fire <http://www.rollingstone.com/politic...> as Texas experienced its eighth year

out of the last twelve for "exceptional" drought.

Globally, 2010 saw massive and unprecedented flooding in Pakistan that displaced 20 million people. Worsening air quality caused by wildfires in Russia killed 56,000 people and floodwaters in Australia covered an area larger than France and Germany combined; along with commodity speculation, these events contributed to record increases in grain prices, driving many millions more into extreme poverty and starvation. Nineteen countries around the world set new temperature records in 2010.

Outside of the statistics, a despairing op ed in the *New York Times* <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/28/o...> by Midwestern farmer Jack Hedin, a man who can trace his family's farming history back to before the Great Depression, commented on the desperate nature of his future, as well

as identifying an aspect of the cause:

Climate change, I believe, may eventually pose an existential threat to my way of life. A family farm like ours may simply not be able to adjust quickly enough to such unendingly volatile weather. We can't charge enough for our crops in good years to cover losses in the ever-more-frequent bad ones. We can't continue to move to better, drier ground. No new field drainage scheme will help us as atmospheric carbon concentrations edge up to 400 parts per million; hardware and technology alone can't solve problems of this magnitude.

To make things worse, I see fewer acres in our area now planted with erosion-preventing techniques, like perennial contour strips, than there were a decade ago. I believe that federal agriculture policy is largely responsible, because it rewards the quantity of acres planted rather than the quality of practices employed.

Another grim U.S. record was set in April as over 600 tornados swept across the country leaving a trail of devastation and death; Joplin, Missouri, saw 138 people lose their lives to one monster tornado alone. At the memorial service, President Obama echoed his comments of almost exactly a year ago at the time of the gargantuan BP oil spill. At that time, he invoked "the invisible hand" of God to help guide the country out of the crisis.

At the remembrance service in Joplin, President Obama rhetorically answered his own question of why this disaster had happened at this time to these people in the town of Joplin, and stated that it was a question that couldn't be answered <http://m.whitehouse.gov/the-press-o...>

On one level, he is of course correct. It is not possible to ascribe any individual weather event or local weather-related tragedy to global warming and one does not want to coldly remember those who lost their lives in the violence of a mile-wide tornado with reference to statistics on climate change.

However, on another level, the trend of odd and extreme weather

patterns—what has been dubbed "global wierding" <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011..> —is hard to ignore and looks set to continue as once-in-a-lifetime extreme weather events become the "new normal." And there is something that connects the spill in the Gulf to the litany of extreme weather events around the globe: the corporate hunt for fossil fuels and their subsequent combustion that earns the corporations so much money at our and the planet's expense.

Observing the circus shenanigans of our elected representatives over the past few weeks, they seem to have found science, rationality and the extreme weather events of the outside world all too easy to ignore.

While the planet-gone-wild weather perturbations of the last year devastated the lives and livelihoods of countless millions of people, Congress spent its time this summer debating the repeal of a bill that promoted energy efficient light bulbs. As if that wasn't outlandish enough, the drive by the government to ban the more wasteful incandescent bulbs—bulbs which waste 90 percent of their energy as heat—was cast as an attack on "personal freedom" <http://www.guardian.co.uk/enviromne..> by Texas Republican Senator "Smokey" Joe Barton.

In a sign of how disconnected Congress is from reality, the vote to repeal the bill—which was in fact signed into law in 2007 under that renowned environmentalist George W. Bush—received over 200 votes in the House of Representatives; though it failed to garner a sufficient majority to win enactment. Undaunted, House Republicans brought to a voice vote another measure cast as a defense of personal liberty that would remove all federal funding for energy efficiency measures.

In support of the bill, Texas Republican Michael Burgess <http://www.guardian.co.uk/enviromne..> claimed that "the federal government has no right to tell me or any other citizen what type of lightbulb to use at home. It is our right to choose."

So, not being able to use ragingly inefficient lightbulbs that cost people more money in their electricity bills—bulbs that, farcically, as of last year are no longer manufactured—is an affront to personal liberty and yet another example of government overreach.

However, in the topsy-turvy, Orwellian world inhabited by members of Congress, President Obama's failure to close Guantánamo, the continuation of unlimited detention without trial, the use of extra-judicial assassination squads, the continuation of warrantless wiretaps, his administration's refusal to disavow the use of torture or investigate those in the Bush administration who championed its use, or a host of other incursions and curtailments of civil liberties, are not in any way examples of government overreach worthy of congressional discussion.

As if the lightbulb debate wasn't a ludicrous enough example of just how detached Congress is from the concerns of the people they are supposed to represent or the planet that they presume to live on, another bill, passed by 239 votes to 184 with the help of 16 Democrats, sought to bar the Environmental Protection Agency overruling states' decisions <http://www.hpj.com/archives/2011/au..> on water quality. If the bill became law, it would hamstring the federal government's ability to protect rivers, lakes and coastal waters from pollution and move the country decades backwards to a time prior to the Clean Water Act.

Meanwhile, in a little noted aspect of the energetic competition over which party can claim to be cutting the most from social programs to funnel additional cash to corporations and banks, *Energy and Environment Daily* reported that in both Republican and Democrat bills, following on from large cuts to the EPA from the budget showdown in April, billions more dollars are being lopped off the budgets of the EPA, the Department of Energy (DOE) and the Department of the Interior for programs that deal with energy conservation and promotion of alternative energy

systems:

Those long-term cuts refer to the panoply of domestic agency spending, from EPA air-pollution monitoring to DOE efficiency grants to many other non-energy or environmental programs. But on a more granular level, the 16 percent slice taken from EPA's budget in the April shutdown deal [brokered by Democrats] could well be the shape of things to come for most non-defense federal programs, unless the final debt pact takes a turn toward the left.

Furthermore, because it was a Democratic proposal in the Senate that stipulated no new revenue in any deal on raising the debt ceiling, thereby removing from debate the question of ending tax breaks for the oil industry—an extremely popular measure with the general public—liberal lawmakers and their environmental backers cannot publicly criticize the deal that hands yet another major victory to the oil industry.

All of this is of course a far cry from what we were told to expect from a President Obama when he gave his victory speech
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kbbI...> in St. Paul, Minnesota after winning the Democratic primary in 2008. There he promised a new time; a time where policies would no longer be beholden to past political limitations and ugly compromises:

[It is] our time to turn the page on the policies of the past. Our time to bring new energy and new ideas to the challenges we face...I am absolutely certain that generations from now, we will be able to look back and tell our children that this was the moment when we began to provide care for the sick and good jobs to the jobless; this was the moment when the rise of the oceans began to slow and our planet began to heal; this was the moment when we ended a war and secured our nation and restored our image as the last, best hope on Earth.

Given the realities of the last two and a half years, especially the period prior to last November's "shellacking" when the Democrats held a large amount of political capital with majorities in both Houses, and

reflecting on the actual environmental, economic, health and war policies enacted by Barack Obama's administration, his speech comes from an alternate universe; one where the Democrats aren't in thrall to the corporate interests who fund them and the practical reality of running an imperial empire based on ruthless economic competition, inter-imperial conflict and military might.

If republicans have run out of policy ideas and moved to the insane end of the legislative spectrum, there's a simple reason: Barack Obama stole all their original policies and then enacted them into law.

Even with a set of lunatics more or less running the congressional asylum, the yawning gulf between rhetoric and reality that defines the Obama White House, alongside the visibly decaying nature of our world, is causing some previously unquestioning liberal beneficiaries of the two party system and stalwart backers of Obama to become more forthright in their criticism.

Former Vice President and presidential candidate Al Gore, in a long article for *Rolling Stone* <http://www.rollingstone.com/politic...> decried the entire U.S. two-party political system as fundamentally corrupt, "Politicians have been racing to the bottom for some time, and are presently tunnelling to new depths...Largely as a result, the concerns of the wealthiest individuals and corporations routinely trump the concerns of average Americans and small businesses."

But Gore went further and assaulted Obama himself in strong (if ultimately equivocal) terms:

President Obama has thus far failed to use the bully pulpit to make the case for bold action on climate change. After successfully passing his green stimulus package, he did nothing to defend it when Congress decimated its funding. After the House passed cap and trade, he did little to make passage in the Senate a priority. Senate advocates—including one Republican—felt abandoned when the

president made concessions to oil and coal companies without asking for anything in return. He has also called for a massive expansion of oil drilling in the United States...He has simply not made the case for action. He has not defended the science against the ongoing, withering and dishonest attacks. Nor has he provided a presidential venue for the scientific community—including our own National Academy—to bring the reality of the science before the public.

In a recent forum at Yale's Environment 360 site assessing Obama's overall record on energy and the environment
http://e360.yale.edu/feature/forum_..., climate blogger and former Acting Assistant Secretary of Energy Joseph Romm gave Obama an "F" on energy and climate issues: "Obama deserves an 'F.' Fundamentally he let die our best chance to preserve a livable climate and restore U.S. leadership in clean energy—without a serious fight."

Elizabeth Kolbert, the author quoted at the beginning of this piece, recently had this to say:
<http://www.newyorker.com/talk/comm e...>

When Obama took office, he appointed some of the country's most knowledgeable climate scientists to his administration, and it seemed for a time as if he might take his responsibility to lead on this issue seriously. That hope has faded. The president sat on the sidelines in 2009 and 2010 while congressional leaders tried to put together majorities in favor of climate legislation. Since the midterm elections, Obama has barely mentioned climate change, and just about every decision that his administration has made on energy and the environment has been wrong.

The *Los Angeles Times* <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/ma...> joined in with a cutting editorial entitled "In the 2012 campaign, environmentalists don't matter: That's the message President Obama is sending as the administration caters to smokestack and other industries." In other words, compromise with the Democrats leaves people genuinely concerned with creating real change

sidelined and taken for granted as the Democrats pander not to their voting base but to the corporate trough that sustains them.

As Obama now runs the imperial empire, Democratic denigration of their own liberal base of supporters is no longer something that has to be quietly voiced behind closed doors. As Obama lurched even further to the right in the impasse over the budget ceiling, Democratic pollster Mark Mellman, felt emboldened to publicly disparage any concerns left-leaning Democrats may have to *The New York Times*

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/31/u..> as their concerns really don't matter: "Whatever qualms or questions they may have about this policy or that policy, at the end of the day the one thing they're absolutely certain of—they're going to hate these Republican candidates...So I'm not honestly all that worried about a solid or enthusiastic base."

In a further cynical example of how the administration operates, even as President Obama is saying that his administration has yet to decide on the proposed Keystone XL tar sands pipeline from Canada to Texas and government environmental studies are ongoing, documents indicate <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/ju...> that his administration is in fact gearing up to support it, even before those studies are complete.

Given all of this, anyone who wants to see the reigning in of corporate power in the interests of ordinary people and environmental sanity cannot campaign or vote for Barack Obama again.

There is no time to fall once more into the trap of lesser-evilism. It's not a question of worrying about whether the Republicans will win in 2012; their policies already have.

Whoever does win in 2012—and, judging by recent campaign contributions, the corporations and ruling class are backing an Obama second term—people and the planet will lose. The only way to bring real change, the only hope for environmental and social activists in the United States, is to work completely outside the Democratic Party and within the new social movements against nuclear power, against hydrofracking for natural gas and against mountain top removal for coal, to name only a few.

The challenge of our age is to build links between the movements, with the rank and file of the labor unions and internationally with other groups to create a mass movement in the United States that campaigns for a redirection of government funds toward renewable-energy jobs, energy conservation, public transportation and the new infrastructure that is so obviously and desperately needed. We must reject the false "choice" that we are presented with by both mainstream parties: Do you want us to cut flesh from your arm or your leg?

The money for such social and ecological projects cannot once again be sought from the mass of the people, but must come from the coffers of the corporations and the fabulously wealthy by raising their taxes and pulling out of the wars. Most U.S. corporations pay no income tax <http://www.reuters.com/article/2008...>, neither do a large percentage of foreign companies doing business in

the U.S.

If politicians were really serious about closing the budget gap it could very easily be done just by closing those tax loopholes, let alone by raising their taxes back to historical levels. In itself, this would raise trillions of dollars.

The fact that the richest 400 people in the United States have more wealth <http://www.politifact.com/wisconsin...> than 50 percent of U.S. households—150 million Americans—is truly obscene.

Likewise, that the money spent by the U.S. military just on air-conditioning in Iraq and Afghanistan was \$20.2 billion

<http://www.npr.org/2011/06/25/13741..> in 2010 is a monument to the insanity of capitalist priorities in a world that is crying out for food, clothing, shelter and environmental redress.

The only way we are going to achieve real ecological and social progress in the U.S. is to cut all ties to the Democrats and fashion our own independent movement that is organized, autonomous and out on the streets, not lobbying in the corridors of power.

The evidence is so compelling, and the time for action so short, that all equivocation must end, all ties to the Democrats must be severed, and a new, stronger, more effective movement will rise from the ashes of Obama's false promises, one that can truly combat the inequities of the world and forge policies that will begin to heal the planet.

This really is the last, best hope for the Earth.

Why we need a living wage campaign

10 August 2011, by **Amandla!**

The ideologues of business have started a systematic and sustained campaign against the wages and the

laws that protect workers. The job crisis is central to their campaign and deregulation is their leading mantra.

Opinion pieces, columnists and letters in the business press appear as voices of the same choir conducted by a

singlemindedness to attack the alleged rigidities of the labour market and other regulations that undermine so-called economic freedom. So sustained seems this attack that Business Day of 13 June has Michael Bagraim of the Cape Chamber of Industries writing an op-ed piece, ‘Why Vavi’s socialist jobs ideas are bound to fail’, on one page and a letter on the opposite page titled ‘Unions creating fear’.

The background for this is the debate concerning the direction of economic policy. Recently government published the Industrial Policy Action Plan, The New Growth Path Document and now Trevor Manuel’s National Planning Commission has published its Diagnostic Overview. A common thread running through these texts is SA’s unemployment crisis and strategies for creating jobs. This seems to be the opening for the corporate ideologues to unashamedly promote a set of failed policies, namely deregulation and liberalisation. The very set of policies that are widely understood to be the cause of the Great Recession and the long crisis gripping the global economy.

Years of economic deregulation, liberalisation, privatisation, lower taxes and profits at the expense of wages – policies which we know collectively as neoliberalism – resulted in a massive redistribution of wealth from the poor to the rich. The concentration of wealth and the global rise of inequality put an end to the post-Second World War dynamic of economic growth driven by the expansion of consumption of millions of workers based on expanding wage employment.

Neoliberalism has not only led to wider levels of inequality but to an almost constant situation of

overproduction and stagnant markets. In an attempt to overcome this crisis, the ruling class elite made things even worse through switching from production to financial speculation. A new phase of financial turmoil in the global economy resulted as speculative bubbles ballooned and then went bust. And Greece is just the latest example of this.

In this period of economic crisis the powerful elites seek to pass the costs of the crisis on to working and poor people. Hence, the unemployment crisis is not seen as a result of wave after wave of corporate restructuring where millions of workers were expelled from the workplace as businesses tried to maximise profits in a situation of declining demand and intensified competition. Rather, supposedly high wages and remaining regulations that protect workers are opportunistically trundled out by the captains of industry as the cause of unemployment.

As shown by official GDP statistics, ever since the end of apartheid, profit share of national income has increased over the wage share.



Yet the ideological onslaught continues unabated. Mike Schussler of economists.co.za attacks the demand of public sector workers for a wage increase of 9%, claiming that public sector workers earn the equivalent of their Swedish and French counterparts. Yet, as the diagnostic overview report of the NPC states, a third of all employed people earn less than R1 000 and half of all employed people earn less than R2 500.

The same NPC report points out that many working families in SA experience grave poverty because of

the high number of dependents that share in the wage of the ‘lucky’ few that have employment.

Cosatu has consistently pointed out that the wage of a single worker supports as many as ten dependents without income: ‘because many low-wage earners have to support so many people, many working households live near or below the poverty line’ (NPC, Diagnostic Report, p. 11).

The same ideologues who attack wages as the cause of high unemployment have nothing to say about the high profits and income of the very wealthy.

According to Statistics South Africa the richest 10% of households have more than 56% of the total income from salaries and wages. Each of the top 20 paid directors in JSE-listed companies earned 1 728 times the average income of a South African worker in 2008. The CEO of Edgars is reported to earn R755 million.

This is the equivalent of 25 000 workers earning R2 500 per month.

Take into account the steady decline in wage share of national income down from 56% in 1996 to less than 47%, and the reason for a combined struggle of the labour and social movements for decent work and a living wage becomes obvious. Last year, Cosatu general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi promised ‘the mother of all living wage campaigns’. To counter the offensive from big business, now and in the future, such a campaign should be rolled out as soon as possible.

Since unemployment and job losses are such deep crises in our society, the labour movement would do well to build a common struggle with key social movements in fighting not just for a living wage but decent work for all.

Neo-liberalism in Britain reaps what it sows

10 August 2011, by **Billy Curtis, Terry Conway**

The immediate cause were two actions by the police. The first of these was the killing by armed police officers of Mark Duggan on Thursday August 5 and the subsequent treatment of his family - including their failure to even visit them to inform them of Mark's death.

A justifiably angry demonstration gathered outside the local police station on Saturday August 7. The police refused to even come out and make a statement. It was the police behaviour then that detonated the riot, a fact that has been omitted from virtually all the subsequent reporting.

As this eyewitness account makes plain the police attacked a 16-year-old girl with batons. This video clip <http://youtube.com/watch?v=RjT68msx...> captures something of the violence of the police behaviour. It was virtually inevitable that aggression of that sort would provoke a paroxysm of rage among the local community.

Reports from other parts of the country tell similar stories, each with their own twist but with the common theme - in the East London borough of Hackney and in Birmingham in the West Midlands for example.

There are reports of increased harassment of young people just for being on the streets at any time of day, including the extensive use of the notorious stop and search powers which are deeply hated by the black community, especially young black men against whom they are generally targeted. Black people are 26 times more likely to be stopped and searched than white people.

Unusually the Independent Police Complaints Commission has moved quite quickly in the case of Mark Duggan, reporting on August 9 that its initial ballistics report showed that he had not fired at police officers, giving the lie to rumours that had been spread in the media that the police were acting in self-defence. However no one has any confidence that justice will be done in this case - there is a long history of deaths at the hands of the police but not one single officer has ever been prosecuted.

And while lack of trust in the police is

particularly strong - for good material reasons, in the black community, events over the last few years have increased broader disquiet. The death of newspaper seller Ian Tomlinson at the hands of police during the G20 protests in London on April 1 2009 and then the brutal batoning of disabled student activist Jody McIntyre during last year's student demonstrations flashed images of police violence into many homes that had not noticed the tactics being tested out on the black community for many years.

Neo-liberalism's chickens are coming home to roost. In Haringey, the area where Mark Duggan lived, the local government's £41 million (US\$ 67 million) cuts have devastated the borough's youth provision. This is a pattern common to most inner city areas - youth provision has been one of first areas hit by Cameron's austerity strategy. At the same time, the government scrapping of the Educational Maintenance Allowance, which gave 630,000 young people the economic possibility of continuing in secondary or further education beyond the age of 16, as well as the tripling of tuition fees for university students has increased frustration, anger and a sense that no one cares what happens to this generation of young people. These are just some of the factors that have created the pressure cooker that has exploded over recent days.

Last month the local Tottenham MP David Lammy demanded government action to deal with a 10% rise in unemployment in his constituency that now has 10,514 people seeking work. Local residents have been saying in interviews that thousands of people in their late 20's have never been able to find a job. It's no surprise then that the shops selling designer sportswear, mobile phones and state of the art TVs and MP3 players are being looted by people who know that they'll never earn enough to buy these things.

The capitalists can't have it both ways. On one hand they say you need these things for status and to feel fulfilled and on the other most of the jobs on offer pay poverty wages on short-term contracts where they exist at all.

By contrast the very rich have never

had it so good in living memory. The High Pay Commission reported on August 8 that executives in FTSE 100 companies received average annual pensions worth around £175,000 (US\$ 285,000). The average British pension is a paltry £5,860 (US\$ 9,550) and this government want to make working people poorer still. At the same time they are hell bent on transferring vast sums of money to the 300,000 people who pay the top rate of 50% tax on earnings over £150,000 (US\$ 245,000) per year. London Mayor Boris Johnson has called for it to be scrapped and his millionaire chum George Osborne, Chancellor of the Exchequer has said he wants to get rid of it.

No wonder that many have made the point that these are the real looters, the real criminals. One letter in yesterday's Guardian newspaper put it thus: "The rioters are only doing to the high street what the bankers did to the country. Unlike the bankers, the rioters will no doubt be held to account." Leftwing Labour MP John McDonnell wrote in the same paper: "We are reaping what has been sown over the last three decades of creating a grotesquely unequal society with an ethos of grab as much as you can by any means. A society of looters created with MPs and their expenses, bankers and their bonuses, tax-evading corporations, hacking journalists, bribe-taking police officers, and now a group of alienated kids are seizing their chance..."

These things may not have been on the minds of the teenagers who were grabbing £100 trainers from JD Sports. What they did know was that there are people out there who have wealth and privilege and are using their power to keep millions of people poor. A riot is a spasm of destructive anger and inarticulate protest but it is one of the ways the voiceless make themselves heard.

We have to resist attempts to use what has happened on the streets since Mark Duggan's death to further crack down on civil liberties and attack the right to protest. Rubber bullets have been issued more widely to police on the streets of mainland Britain than ever before - we know how lethal they can be from their use in the North of

Ireland. Water cannon have never been used here, but will now be available to the police at 24-hours notice, while bringing in the army is still being debated.

It is very positive that anti-cuts

organisations such as the Coalition of Resistance and most particularly Black Activists Rising Against The Cuts (BARAC) have made their voices heard, talking about the real causes of this unrest, and the policies that need to be implemented to give poor

communities a future and give young people new hope. In the coming months the unions and the radical left have to make their voices heard and start rolling back the Conservative-Liberal Democrat government's offensive.

Stand against fascism and imperialism, stand with the revolutionary Arab masses

9 August 2011, by Bassem Chit

At 8.15, the pro-Assad supporters launched an attack at the activists standing in support of the Syrian revolution, with knives, metal rods, and leather belts, which resulted in the injury of five people, two of them having severe injuries.

The police present at the scene retreated and did not even call for any backup but let the protestors get severely beaten up, as a result none of the attackers were arrested, and when some of the activist tried to report the attack at the local police station the reply came: "we do not have the jurisdiction to file this incident" while another policeman said that: "the counter attack is covered by the SSNP, and reporting it will lead us to loose our jobs".

Both of these political parties are solid supporters of the Assad regime in Syria, and after the outbreak of the Syrian revolt, they have been spreading security checkpoints all over Hamra (one of the busiest streets in beirut, and the street where the Syrian embassy is based). Attacks have been widespread against many pro-Syrian revolution activist throughout the past few months.

The threat of these groups trespasses the incident that occurred on August 2nd, but warns of the development of a extremely violent political wing that threatens the state of liberties in Lebanon, especially that the direct allies of the syrian regime are now in government in Lebanon.

Moreover, the opposition currently composed of Pro-Hariri political groups, who since 2005 have been the classical enemies of the Syrian regime are attempting to ride the wave of protests to benefit their positions within the Lebanese political scene and to win leverage over the loyalist forces currently in government.

The hypocrisy of both the loyalist camp and the opposition camp in lebanon when dealing with the Arab uprisings has been widely exposed, as their support is limited to the extent of their regional allies, while the loyalists support the uprising in Bahrain, while supporting the regime in Syria, the opposition supports the uprising in Syria, and opposes the uprising in Bahrain.

The reasons behind these double standards are due to the sectarian affiliations both camps are strongly engaged in, on the one hand Hizbullah supports the uprising in Bahrain, due to the fact to its oppressed Shia population, and Hariri supports the uprising in Syria due to its oppressed Sunni population, while ignoring calls from the masses of both countries to reject sectarianism.

The revolutionary left, along with some independent activists (excluding the Communist Party) have been pushing since the outbreak of the Tunisian revolution to create a political space that gather popular support to the Arab revolutions as a whole, and pushing to look at this

revolutionary wave as a process, that engages the whole of arab masses, while acting against sectarian politics that are being injected by the ruling dictatorships and western imperialism as well as the dominant regressive political forces in the region.

This last incident in Beirut, triggered a widened support for the Syrian uprising, but it is still not enough, and a new correlation now exists between supporting the syrian uprising and defending the freedoms of expression in Lebanon that are being threatened by a burgeoning fascist political forces such as the SSNP, which is a copy-cat organization of Nazi Party in germany, and whose main ideology call for the purification of Natural Syria from "alien elements", while the Syrian Baath Party which is the ruling party in Syria is trying to extend its oppression into Lebanon and threatening the lives of both syrian and lebanese activists who dare support the syrian people in their fight against the regime.

Due to this situation, we call on all progressive and revolutionary currents to heighten the level of support to the Arab masses in their struggle for freedom and especially in Syria, as it is one of the hardest knots in this revolutionary wave, and to stand united against the interference of western powers in these revolutions and to show that the only real ally for these uprisings and revolutions are the world masses and not western ruling classes.

The only guarantee for the success of the Arab uprisings are the heightening of the struggle against the ruling

classes, heightened solidarity with the Syrian and the Arab people as a whole

in its fight against oppression, dictatorship, impoverishment and for freedom and social justice.

A crisis without end

8 August 2011, by **Michel Husson**

And meanwhile, the rate of profit...

Everything however seems to be going better, if we take profit as the barometer of capitalism. The marginal rate, in other words the share of profits in valued added, is recovering. In the United States, where it had plunged soonest [26], it has now nearly recovered to its pre-crisis level. In the Euro zone, the fall came later, and the catch up has been less rapid: the marginal rate has returned to its level of ten years ago, and the increase over the last decade has thus been lost, at least for now (see chart 1). But profits are headed upwards.

It is moreover one of the most striking traits of the conjuncture : while austerity is unleashed, unemployment remains high and wages are being frozen or indeed lowered, the first concern of the big groups and banks has been to start distributing dividends and bonuses again.

However this growth delivers fairly different indications. The growth of GDP is also a useful indicator when it comes to assessing the good health of capitalism (well being is entirely another thing). Even if at the end of the account, it is the rate of profit which is the true criterion, its reestablishment after the crisis cannot durably persist if the market outlets are not there. From this viewpoint, the big question is whether the dip of the recession will be overcome. One can a priori imagine three scenarios: a return to the pre-crisis trend, a durable loss or even a growing loss.

Chart 1
Profits in Europe and in the USA



In % of added value - Source: Eurostat, Bureau of Economic Analysis. NB. The levels are not comparable because of the differences of definition and field.

The latest data available show that many countries are in a situation of the scenario of durable loss [For more details, see: "Pertes de Pib et facture de crise", note hussonet number 35, July 2011, <http://hussonet.free.fr/pertepib.pdf>]. In the first quarter of 2011, some had not yet recovered the level of GDP reached before the crisis: this is the case with Japan, the United Kingdom, Spain and Italy. The USA, Germany and Sweden have just done so, and France is not far from it. But recovering the pre-crisis level of GDP does not mean the loss will be erased. This reading of the conjuncture allows us to bring out its broad trends.

A broken up Europe. If France, Sweden and Germany have come out of the dip, this is not the case with numerous other countries: Spain, Greece, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Portugal, United Kingdom, which have suffered a durable loss in activity or are with difficulty regaining momentum.

The old capitalist countries are behind. The USA has for the moment recovered its pre-crisis rhythm of growth. The European Union, taken as a whole, succeeds with greater difficulty and has not filled the hole. Finally, Japan is far from doing so, and its GDP is headed downwards again since the nuclear disaster. On the other hand, the growth of the two big

emergent countries (China and India) continues, and the crisis has practically not affected them. Others (Brazil, South Korea, Russia) have suffered a more severe fall in activity.

Unemployment becomes embedded. The USA and Europe present the same profile. Growth recommences, but the unemployment rate is not falling from the upward boost that the crisis gave it (chart 2).

Graphic 2
Growth and unemployment in Europe and in the USA



Source: OECD

The bill has yet to be paid. The loss of economic growth seems then irremediable. That means that, even if the US and European economies regain their previous standard rhythm, the "loss of income" would not be recovered. We can evaluate the amount of it, as the gap between the GDP observed and that which can be obtained by projecting the pre-crisis tendency. The gap thus measured emerges at 8% for the Euro zone, and 6% for the USA. The US GDP is around 15,000 billion dollars and that of the Euro zone around 9,400 billion euros (or around 12,000 billion dollars). In short, in the two cases, the loss of income is around 900 billion dollars (750 billion euros).

This loss of GDP is reflected in the form of growth of the public debt. In the Euro zone, the latter has increased by 980 billion Euros between 2008 and 2010. Over the same period, it has also increased more strongly in the USA, by 3,200 billion dollars.

This “loss of GDP” risks bringing about the collapse of the debt mountain. To limit the damage, the states have taken responsibility for this lost income. Their problem is now to manage this debt, by seeking obviously to pass on the bill to the immense majority of their citizens. But this project comes up against obstacles of every kind, and this uncertain situation will render still more improbable a return to the growth of yesteryear. If nothing is done to renounce the debts, their drift could take as much time to absorb as it has to constitute. And growth will be held back, in the same proportion that it was artificially boosted before the crisis. But there are more fundamental reasons to bet on the hypothesis of durably reduced growth in the two big poles of the capitalist economy: the US model can no longer function as before, and the Euro zone has plunged into a lasting structural crisis.

The limits of the US model

The entire logic of the US model is summarised in chart 3 below, which shows how this model comes up against its limits. This chart compares two curves. The first is the rate of household savings (in percentage of available income): it has fallen tendentially since the early 1980s, until the outbreak of the crisis. That means that throughout this period (a quarter of a century), households (on average) have consumed a growing part of their income.

Chart 3
Rate of savings and trade deficit 1970-2010



Bold line shows trade balance as % of GDP (scale on right). Faint line shows household saving rate (scale on left).
Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis

This very marked development has no real equivalent other than in the USA. It involves two mechanisms that the different social categories use in different proportions. The first is the wealth effect: when my financial or

property assets take on value, I have less need to save, and I can then consume a greater proportion of my income. The second is over indebtedness: my income stagnates, but I go further into debt so as to continue to consume. And some rich households can moreover go into debt to play the stock market! This phenomenon has contributed significantly to the growth of GDP, drawn by this overgrowth of consumption [27]

However, this model leads to a degradation of the trade balance, which is the second curve. Pushed by household consumption, internal demand tends to increase more quickly than national production, and the difference is covered by excess imports which increases the trade deficit. It is only to the extent that the financing of this deficit can be imposed on the rest of the world that this model can function. That is why the two curves of the chart above (savings rate and trade balance) are in step over the whole period from 1980-2006.

This correlation is not by chance, but results from an essential accounting equality, that could be called the “rule of equilibrium of balances” [28] and which is summed up thus: private savings + budget balance = trade balance.

Private savings represent the cumulated savings of enterprises and households. The first are in general negative (companies go into debt) and the second positive (globally households save more than they indebt themselves) but the sum of the two can be positive or negative. As to the budget balance, it is generally in deficit. The equation expresses the fact that the trade balance is equal to the sum of private saving and the budget balance. If it is negative, that means that inflows entries of capital ensure the equilibrium of the balance of payments. In other words, the savings of the rest of the world cover the savings needs of the country considered. In case of a trade surplus, it is the contrary: the country (state + households + enterprises) disposes of surplus savings which it can then export in the form of outflows of capital, the counterpart of its trade

surplus.

The fall of the household savings rate in the USA is then naturally accompanied by an increase in the trade balance. The other elements to take into consideration (indebtedness of companies and trade deficit) play a relatively secondary role. But we can also find a trace of them on chart 3. During the 1990s, we see that the household savings rate continues its fall, but that the trade deficit tends to stabilise. The reason for this is simple: in the course of this period, the budget balance considerably improved. It went from a deficit of -5% of GDP in 1992 to a surplus of 2.6% in 2000, before plunging again with the breakup of the Internet bubble, Bush’s tax cuts and military expenditure. With the crisis and the plans for reflation it got stuck in the abyss, to the extent that the budget deficit is now around 10% of GDP.

The accounting relationship used is still verified, but that says nothing about the terms of its realisation. There is no factor to which the others will adjust: each relates back to the others. But the most important is that the adjustment is not compatible with any old growth rate. In the case of the USA, the realisation of this equilibrium can only take place with a growth rate lower than its pre-crisis level.

However we can (still on chart 3) locate the opening of a virtuous circle over the recent period. After the entry into crisis, the household savings rate ceased to fall; it even increased by 4% of GDP. The effect on the trade balance was immediate and practically of the same order. This is at first sight a good thing, since it implies less recourse to foreign capital for the US economy. But the contradiction is then the following: since the fall in the savings rate has been one of the motors of US growth, the fact that it has increased means that it is no longer possible to count on this boost.

It is then necessary to take into account the growth of the budget deficit. Its size (around 10% of the GDP) is without equivalent in the past half century, and it is not then astonishing that the budget deficit is today the main point of political

dispute between Democrats and Republicans. Here we find a new contradiction: the savings rate, whether it emanates from the private sector of the public deficit, will be covered by capital inflows with increasing difficulty.

Here again the point of equilibrium is found at a level of reduced growth, with its batch of political and social problems linked notably to the embedding of an unemployment rate also at a historic high level, and which is only coming down slowly. It has even begun to increase, going from 8.8% in March to 9.2% in June. If we include job seekers who have effectively given up and part time employees looking for full time work, unemployment now affects one worker in six.

There are only two paths which would allow release from this system of constraints. The first would involve favouring the growth of US exports, allowing increased growth without increasing the trade deficit. This objective could be attained by an effort of investment and innovation but, in the current conjuncture, investment is not very dynamic and the transnational firms privilege investment abroad. Only the continuous downward rate of the dollar renders US products more competitive. But this tendency could reach its limit, raising doubts about the exchange rate of the dollar and leading to a drying up of the external financing necessary to cover the deficits. This path is then associated with fundamental uncertainties.

The other solution could involve a substantial change in the division of incomes. Since the early 1980s the extra income procured by growth has in effect been cornered by a very narrow fraction of the population. Thus, between 1982 and 2007, the average income increased by 18,900 dollars. But the richest 10% took 81% of this additional income! [29] A lower growth could then be admissible if it was better divided, so that wages evolved like the productivity of labour. In the immediate, a radical tax reform would allow deficit reduction by making the beneficiaries of this quarter of a century of inequality contribute more. Manifestly, the social

relationship of forces is not sufficient to impose such a solution. In these conditions, it is probable that the US will seek to make the rest of the world responsible for the continuation of their prosperity. But this again is an impossible task, because it can only come up against the slowing up of capital disposed to finance the US trade deficit. China and many of the emergent countries will moreover see their surpluses reduced to the extent that their economies will recentre on their internal market and exchanges between them will intensify.

The crisis of bourgeois governance in Europe

Logic would have meant that the crisis would politically benefit the critics of capitalism. Reality has unhappily been very different: the radical left has not really progressed, social democracy and the right alternate to the rhythm of elections, while the nationalist right gains ground almost everywhere. It is necessary to understand the roots of this situation lying in the systemic nature of the crisis, which combines in Europe with the specific contradictions of a truncated construction.

We can speak here of a boomerang effect of the neoliberal mode of construction of Europe and the choice of the single currency. The latter was mainly conceived in terms of disciplining wages: in the absence of the possibility of manipulating exchange rates, wages became the only variable of adjustment allowing several national economies to cohabit in the same monetary zone. But this system was not coherent and includes two leakage variables. A single currency means nominal convergence of interest rates, in the event downwards. The perverse effect was then the following: a country which controls its prices poorly benefits from a still lower real interest rate, and this favours the development of a growth based on indebtedness. Also, the single currency by definition leads to the disappearance of the feedback

effect of a trade deficit on the currency of a country. Spain benefited from these two effects and experienced strong growth, which led to a spectacular fall in unemployment. But this growth was based on an uncontrolled property boom and a huge trade deficit.

All this could function for good as much as evil, but the crisis has sharply revealed the incoherency of the European neoliberal model. Beyond the day to day patching up, Europe is at a crossroads: either a step forward towards a federalism allowing immediate mutualisation of debts, or the breakup of the Euro zone. As the European bourgeoisies are not disposed to accept one or the other of these outcomes, the result is a very profound crisis, all the more so inasmuch as one cannot really speak of a united European bourgeoisie, because neither European capital nor a European state exists.

It is necessary to distinguish, to simplify things, four "actors": the big transnational groups, the banks, finance, and the governmental representatives of the dominant classes. On a whole series of questions, there obviously exists a deep agreement where the interests of the class essentials are concerned: in the current conjuncture, the common perspective is to resolve the situation by profiting from the crisis to apply shock therapy. The crisis is the opportunity to go still further in social regression: cuts in public spending, wage freezes, counter-reforms of pensions and so on.

But this community of interest does not prevent internal contradictions, which the crisis sharpens. They can be analysed according to two axes opposing, on the one hand, the states and capital and on the other, finance and other fractions of capitalism. The current situation is marked, from the viewpoint of the dominant classes, by a growing inability to manage these contradictions.

The sovereign debt crisis is revelatory of the first contradiction. Capital in general is no longer concerned with the conjuncture in this or that country, because its dominant preoccupation is profitability and its market shares.

Indeed, neither outlets nor production lines link the transnational groups to a specific territory, even if, in case of difficulties, they fall back on their state of reference. In globalised capitalism, the role of the state has been to increasingly shrink to ensure the general conditions of profitability. Thus, Carlos Ghosn, the Renault CEO, can state in the *Financial Times* (June 2, 2010) that “Renault is no longer a French manufacturer”, but he immediately nuances the words by stating that “Renault is French, Renault has its base in France” (*Europe 1*, June 13, 2010) [30]. And indeed the French state has advanced the necessary funds to its car builders when they were in difficulties. We are no longer in situation of the world capitalism described nearly a century ago by Bukharin [31], when it was possible to overlap states and capital.

The big novelty is that the horizon of the transnational groups is global and not limited to the national, or even European, space. Bukharin spoke in his time of “higher protectionism” which was for him “the state formula of the economic policy of the cartels”. Things have changed and we cannot fault him for not having anticipated the transformations of capitalism. This is not obvious to the advocates of “de-globalisation” who propose trade protectionism, as if productive globalisation did not exist. This new situation creates a profound asymmetry: the states are in the service of “their” capital, but the latter is freed from the necessity of a dynamic internal market. During this time, the states despite all continue to manage class relations inside each country. It is notably these states who are now responsible for ensuring the crisis is paid for by their citizens.

The second contradiction opposes finance, the banks and the states. It expresses itself with an especial force today when finance speculates against sovereign debts and risks, by ricochet, making the banks fail, since the latter hold a great part of these debts. The contours between these three actors (banks, finance, states) are obviously fluid and above all of great opacity. But it is very much these conflicts of interest which are at the source of an extremely unstable situation. The debates taking place inside the

European bourgeoisies illustrate this profound crisis of bourgeois “governance”, which stem from the fear, indeed panic, of the possible repercussions of a Greek debt default. The governments wing it between two objectives: making their peoples pay the bill for the crisis, but also avoiding the failure of their banks.

The risk incurred is dual. The inevitable default on the Greek debt threatens the banks with losses which are difficult to evaluate. Today, many bank economists are working internally on stress tests which are more realistic than the official simulations which are only there to play to the gallery. The results have been disquieting enough for a certain number of banks to choose to anticipate the shock by accepting a controlled restructuring of the Greek debt until the next due date. But another viewpoint, defended by the European Central Bank, absolutely rejects this perspective. Its fear is the extension to other endangered countries, for amounts much higher than the Greek debt. The dogmatic position is above all intended to play for time, so as to “reassure the financial markets”, in the hope that the situation in the countries in difficulty could improve.

One thing is for sure: nobody could believe for a moment in the possibility that Greece could pay its debt. That is stressed by the editorialist at Bloomberg [32]: “Even if Greece gets its bailout and its economy rebounds, the government would have to run a budget surplus, excluding debt-service costs, of 5 percent of GDP for about three decades to bring down debt to the 60 percent maximum allowed by euro-area rules. Achieving such a fiscal feat for even five years is extremely rare for any government, let alone Greece’s” [33]. The latest rescue plan only marginally modifies this situation.

The social democratic impasse

Initially at least, the crisis gave a new youth to social democratic themes:

Keynesianism, regulation of finance, banks and capitalism in general, return of state intervention, role of the social state in the absorption of the recession, appeal to a greater justice in income distribution and taxes, and so on. The crisis seemed to open up a pathway for social democracy, and it important to consider why its political space has not enlarged, when it has not shrunk.

European social democracy has also been subjected to stress tests and it has not passed them. The prototype is Papandreou, the Greek Socialist prime minister, who has faced the crisis in an absolutely lamentable manner. He could have started an arm wrestling match by saying: “Greece cannot pay, so we have to talk”. That is what Argentina did by suspending its debt in 2001 and winning its renegotiation. But Papandreou folded and accepted without discussion all the demands of the “troika” (ECB, IMF, and European Union).

Papandreou is not an isolated case. There is also Zapatero, there are also, for example, the European MEPs who have just approved, with the Greens and liberals, a report from the French Socialist deputy Pervenche Berès [34]. Among its recommendations we find the report requests calls “for measures to overcome the current lack of competitiveness through appropriate structural reforms” (...) “welcomes the principle of the European Semester of economic policy coordination” (...) and in the French version, requests the dismantling of trade barriers and the necessity of the opening of public contracts on a transparent and reciprocal basis. Meanwhile “tax competition is acceptable only as long as it does not jeopardise the capacity of Member States to collect the revenue they may fairly expect” and the report “supports the Commission in its efforts to tackle harmful tax competition”. This new concept of harmful tax competition will undoubtedly become significant.

The risk of poverty which particularly affects women is certainly referred to; but curiously the conclusion is an appeal to the existing nongovernmental organisations. Faced with cuts in social budgets, the report restricts itself to writing that it “could

"also be desirable to safeguard public sector services and existing levels of social protection even if it is necessary to consolidate the public finances. The use of the conditional speaks volumes. There are some interesting trails here, but they are advanced with a touching timidity; thus the report exerts a terrible pressure on the Commission in asking that it reflect on "the issuance of Euro-bonds".

In France, the two main presidential candidates for the Socialist Party agree on austerity. François Hollande puts it very clearly: "our public accounts must be rebalanced from 2013 (...) I do not say this to cede to I don't know what pressure from the markets or rating agencies but because it is the condition for our country to rediscover confidence in itself". Martine Aubry also has got in line and committed herself to "3% in 2013, since that is the rule now" [35]. This terrible formula says a lot and provides the key to the impasse social democracy is in. It can be summed up thus - any authentically social democratic programme would imply a high degree of confrontation with the bourgeoisie, which social democracy is not ready to take on.

Faced with this crisis, a so called post-Keynesian [36] school has argued that a distribution of income which was more favourable to wage earners, associated with less shareholder power, would have positive effects on growth and jobs. If these contributions are very useful in correctly indicating the causes of the current crisis, they underestimate its systemic nature. In particular, they skirt the issue of the

growing gap between social needs and the criteria of capitalism, even without finance.

The current reality is that any progressive outcome to the crisis would suppose a direct confrontation with the logic of Capital, thus a higher level of conflict. The examples we have just touched on show that essentially beyond a minimum threshold of radicalism that they refuse to exceed, the social democrats only distinguish themselves very marginally from neoliberal logic.

A blocked horizon

Any recession creates tensions and contradictions which emerge in the steering of economic policy seeking to renew growth. This is particularly true in the case of the recent "great recession", but the latter is also the symptom of a systemic crisis: capitalism can no longer function as before. A return to "business as usual" or the regulated capitalism of the post war era is impossible. The period opened by the crisis is then characterised by profound uncertainties. In its project for emerging from this, capitalism faces the following obstacles, referred to as "dilemmas" in a previous article [37]:

1. **dilemma of distribution:** the re-establishment of profit is opposed to the recovery of growth and tends to be linked to an inegalitarian distribution of wealth which is however one of the profound causes of the crisis.

2. **budgetary dilemma:** the clearance of the public deficits implies a reduction of public expenditure which,

without speaking of its social effects, can only aggravate recessionary tendencies. "Budgetary austerity could further slow recovery", notes a recent UN report [38].

3. **European dilemma:** the triple rejection - of a mutualisation of public debts, a real contribution from the banks and a disciplining of finance - means the breakup of the Euro zone, following a sequence of defaults, cannot be ruled out.

4. **dilemma of globalisation:** the clearance of imbalances can only be done at the price of a slowing of world growth. The UN report already cited notes that "the world recovery has been held back by the developed economies" and stresses the risk of an "uncoordinated rebalancing of the world economy".

These four dilemmas are closely intertwined. They indicate a "chaotic regulation" of capitalism, lastingly incapable of finding a trajectory of exit from crisis compatible with profoundly contradictory interests. Only social mobilisation can prevent capitalism seeking to exit from this impasse by further deepening social regression and pushing to the extreme the tensions between countries. But that also supposes that these mobilisations rest on alternative perspectives. As the latter imply a higher degree of confrontation, the historic task is today to realise the unity of the forces of the radical left around a programme throwing a bridge between resistance to austerity and the objectives of a break with the logic of a system which is adrift.

Defeat to the corrupt, oppressive battalions of Mahinda

6 August 2011, by **Vickramabahu Karunarathne**

He thought it was gruesome having to commit these terrorist acts, but in his head these were necessary. Like

Hitler, this guy too believes in a Caucasian dream of supremacy and cultural purification. He wanted a

change in society and, from his perspective, he needed to force through a revolution for that purpose.

He wished to attack the structure of society. It is very popular among the European right-wing extremists to condemn multiculturalism and in particular to condemn Muslim immigration.

Breivik, wearing a wetsuit and carrying an automatic weapon, has appeared in a 12-minute anti-Muslim video called Knights Templar 2083.

These ‘Christian’ fundamentalists consider Muslim religion as a cause for backwardness and poverty. However the truth is that poverty and backwardness is a result of global capitalism; and the so called cultured elites are dependent on plunder and exploitation irrespective of religious beliefs.

It is natural for the Sinhala chauvinists to be happy, to hear the attack of Norwegian neo-fascists. The Norwegian Labour Party is social reformist and not communist. But for Breivik even social reformists fall into the category of "cultural Marxists/multiculturalist traitors"!

In the meantime Tamils in the north used the given grossly distorted election at the end of July to kick out Mahinda from the north. Latter used military power, administrative power, thuggery, impersonation and bribes to kill the fire of the oppressed. He expected Tamils to submit and crawl.

However courageous, resilient Tamils braved the onslaught and gave a

resounding defeat to the corrupt, oppressive battalions of Mahinda. In the south he could dominate mainly because of the weak opposition.

However the election results glaringly show that the country is divided.

While Mahinda rule the south, the north is dominated by the Tamil National Alliance (TNA). That is the glaring truth that the government wanted to conceal, but miserably failed. Has the government got a solution to this national division in the country? This will be the prime question discussed in Lanka in the coming period.

The statement of the leader of the TNA stated;

“the verdict of the people conveys beyond doubt, a definite message which the people have conveyed from the Parliamentary elections in 1956, and at all elections thereafter. The message is that the Tamil people have an inalienable right to live as equal citizens in security with their dignity restored within an undivided united Sri Lanka and with access to governance to be able to fulfill their legitimate political, economic, social and cultural aspirations.

The people have also voted for expeditious resettlement and rehabilitation of all the internally displaced persons in the North and East on their lands with proper housing, livelihood opportunities and other basic necessities and for the suspension and reversal of all actions

of the Government or its agents in the North and East pertaining to land, religious places, cultural places and other areas of concern to the Tamil people which will have long term evil consequences on the Tamil people. We earnestly urge the Government to recognize and respect the clear verdict that has been delivered by the Tamil people, without any delay.”

The TNA leader Sampanthan as usual is very mild and compromising. Clearly he is in favour of what the late LTTE leader referred to as internal self determination. Actually it is not self determination that they are demanding but autonomy in a united country. As I believe, self determination is the right to decide the destiny of a nation including separation.

Even autonomy is rejected by the Mahinda regime in the past. I do not believe that Mahinda is going to change his mind looking at the election results. Here is a leader who achieved his aim by resorting to mass action. He marched, demonstrated, agitated until he arrived at the door step of power. Of course he has forgotten all that including the oppressed masses that rallied around to march with him. But we must not forget the lesson he left behind.

Let us combine the demands of the Tamil nationality with those of workers, fishers and the other oppressed to demand democracy and freedom

Debt Ceiling Doomsday?

5 August 2011, by Against the Current

Legislation to raise the U.S. debt ceiling is usually a routine procedure whose necessity is well understood. The Republicans’ position is to hold this measure hostage to the right wing’s savage budget-cutting agenda. Take a blowtorch right now to Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and every other social program – and don’t

touch the rich –” the Republican leadership demands. Is this a bargaining posture, or are the Republican leaders paying more attention to the Tea Party than to the real needs of capital?

Is the U.S. debt problem like that of Greece? No – Greece is effectively

insolvent because it is trapped in the European currency zone, because of enormous structural corruption, and because international banks have imposed austerity measures that are pushing its economy down so it’s even less able to pay its debts. The U.S. dollar in contrast is the world’s reserve currency, and will remain so

for the foreseeable future (replaced by the euro?? - forget it).

Our problem, in the first instance, is the trillion-dollar permanent war budget, made worse by George W. Bush's habit of starting wars and pretending that they didn't have to be paid for. The theory that cutting taxes for the rich would grow the economy didn't help either. In any case, the bills do come due.

Without trying to get technical, the August 2 date is when the U.S. debt is projected to hit the \$14.3 trillion ceiling and the government can no longer borrow to cover its expenditures - and since over 40 cents of every dollar Uncle Sam spends has to be borrowed, a lot would go unpaid. But what, and how much, and with what consequences?

Learned opinions vary. According to Richard Wolf in USA Today [1]:

"To hear Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner tell it, interest rates would spike, stock and home values would sink, savings and investment would dry up, jobs would disappear, businesses would fail, and everything from tax refunds to troops' salaries would go unpaid. Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke says it would lead to 'severe disruptions' in financial markets, lower credit ratings and damage to the dollar and Treasury securities....

"Others say the doomsday scenarios are hogwash. Sen. Pat Toomey, R-Pa., says it would take a simple law laying out who gets paid first when the government no longer can borrow 41 cents of each dollar it spends. As long as bond holders collect interest on time, he says, there would be no default - just 'sudden, drastic spending cuts' such as furloughing federal workers or delaying welfare payments."

Got it so far? Financial Armageddon, warn Geithner and Bernanke. No sweat, says the Republican Senator, just pay the bondholders and let the

people starve.

Leftwing economist Dean Baker offers a different perspective [See below]:

"While the country will still be left standing after a debt default, there is one important sector that will not be standing: Wall Street. A debt default would almost certainly make all the major banks insolvent as they would have to mark down the value of U.S. government debt, which had been held as a completely safe asset. The loss of value would also apply to all the assets backed by the government, such as the mortgage backed securities issued by Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.

"Even when the economy revived, the U.S. financial sector would never hold the same place in the world as it does today... This fact is essential in understanding the endgame on the debt ceiling. Suppose that we get to the dates in August when the Treasury has reached the limit of its ability to shuffle accounts and literally can no longer pay its bills. Secretary Geithner will at that point make an announcement that in three days there is an X billion payment on Treasury bonds coming due. He will say that the government does not have the money in the bank and will therefore have to miss this payment.

"The markets will then go into turmoil. We will see the same sort of plunge in the stock market that we saw when the House voted down the TARP the first time back in September of 2008. At that point, the Wall Street boys will be screaming their heads off at Speaker Boehner and the rest of the Republican leadership...In this context the Republicans will do exactly what they did with the TARP. They will cut deals, make the threats and do whatever else is necessary to round up the votes needed to raise the debt ceiling.

"When everyone remembers that this is what the endgame looks like, they will realize that there is no need to put essential programs like Social

Security, Medicare and Medicaid on the chopping block to get Republican support for raising the debt ceiling...(A)t the end of the day, President Obama holds the cards. He could say that he wants a clean debt ceiling bill and no deals on cutting back the country's key social insurance programs. Of course, that may not be President Obama's agenda."

Interesting game of chicken, isn't it? It seems that Wall Street, the bankers and the capitalist ruling class as a whole have to decide how close to come to the brink of default, in order to force through their program of austerity on a terrified population. The smart money is betting, based on experience, that president Obama and the Democrats will cave in - it may be "President Obama's agenda " to actually look for the excuse to do so - and agree to another "historic bipartisan compromise" of cuts that depress the economy and weaken the president's reelection prospects in 2012.

There's the outside possibility, however, that the Republican leadership in Congress, which is supposed to pay close attention to what corporate capital demands, might misread the signals or be too frightened of the Tea Party faction to pull back from the brink in time. In that case, we might find out what a U.S. default - even if it's only a brief one - looks like. No one really knows whether it would look like an economic blip or an apocalyptic moment.

For those of us at the sharp end of the austerity stick, it might not be a bad idea after all to look at Greece - where an enraged population has inserted itself into the arrangements between their government and the International Monetary Fund. The threat of a social explosion imposes some limits on how far the domestic and international masters feel they can push down the Greek people's standard of living. Not a bad example, considering what's at stake for us.

Stop payment - Cancel the Debt - Nationalize the banks under workers control - Leave the euro zone and the EU now!

4 August 2011, by **Antarsya**

The measures associated with the decisions of the EU summit are geared to save time and protect the interests of banks and the international lenders. The national bankruptcy facing Greece has simply been deferred to the future. In addition, it has become clear that the current debt crisis concerns not just Greece, but the euro zone and the EU as a whole – precisely because it represents a manifestation of the general contradictions and crisis-prone tendencies of global capitalism. Today Greece is the victim. Tomorrow the same is likely to happen in Spain and Italy.

Similarly, the measures themselves – along with the new loan package of the EU, the IMF and private banks – tighten the chokehold of debt. The total debt Greece has committed to pay off for the next 30 years has been dramatically increased. The interest alone reaches a height of 450 billion €, which is far above the current total debt of 350 billion. At an average interest rate of 5%, the Greek budget will have to pay 15 billion annually simply to cover interest payments. In this way, the treaty on "international economic control" which was completed with the Memorandum and the Midterm Program is being extended dramatically.

The overseers of the international institutions, the Troika, will continue their activity in the coming decades to enforce and monitor a relentless austerity policy, along with the selling off of public enterprises and state property. Greece remains the laboratory for the application of the most aggressive capitalist neoliberal prescriptions. The Papandreou government has chosen to pursue the

most brutal attacks on the living standards of broad popular layers. To illustrate the scale of these attacks it is only necessary to note that the Memorandum No. 1 reduced the deficit by 6% of GDP, but now, with the Memorandum No. 2, a reduction by 10% is required. During the entire term of the current policies, therefore, we will see no "growth" and no "wealth." There will simply be further Memoranda and more Midterm Programs, tougher austerity, rising unemployment, "internal devaluation," more privatization, and a continuing policy of social destruction.

Precisely for this reason there can be only one answer at the present time: The resolute and complete reversal of this policy, i.e. the fall of the PASOK government and of the right-wing "New Democracy" which again would like to take the helm, plus the fall of the entire political system composed of "willing" representatives of this cruel policy. The massive uprising in recent months by broad segments of the population, the general strikes and the great movement to occupy public squares need to continue to the point where it becomes uncontrollable. The next steps must lead to the immediate organization of resistance to fend off attacks by Health Minister Loverdos and Minister of Education Diamantopoulou, aimed at leveling the hospitals and schools, also to prevent the selling off of state-run enterprises, new pay cuts, and the layoffs in public and private sectors.

The "social bankruptcy" the rulers want to impose on us must be opposed with the only real "bailout," which is represented by the mass mobilization:

- Immediate withdrawal from the Memorandum and the Midterm Program! A relentless fight against their practical implementation!
- Immediate suspension of payments on the debt and debt cancellation!
- Withdrawal from the Euro! Anti-capitalist disengagement from the EU!
- Nationalize the banks and corporations under workers' control! No to the privatizations; no to the sale of public enterprises and public property; no to environmental destruction in the name of "investors" and "debt repayment"!
- Radical redistribution of social wealth in favor of the workers! Prohibition of layoffs!
- Escalate the battle; expand the strikes; for the emergence of a workers' and popular movement and the unity in action of the left to promote radical change and the overthrow of the existing conditions; for the emergence of a genuinely anti-capitalist and revolutionary left! Such an approach is required if we want to open the road to a genuine alternative. The combination of a new round of actions by the militant trade union movement with a broad mobilization of those involved in the occupations of public spaces can create new organs of militant action and of self-organization by activists against the rotten bourgeois political system.

The militants of ANTARSYA and of the anti-capitalist left will participate with all their energy in this great struggle.

Wednesday, 27 July 2011

Translator: A. Kloke

Barack Obama: The change that didn't happen

4 August 2011, by **Daniel Munevar, Éric Toussaint**

While 89% of the benefits of economic growth in the United States during the Obama administration have gone to the corporate sector, ordinary citizens continue to face a harsh situation characterized by high levels of unemployment, a reduction of income as well as record numbers of foreclosures across the nation. It is precisely the inability of the administration to provide answers and solutions to the pressing problems of the population that calls into question its ability to win the election, despite having an advertisement budget of more than a billion dollars available for this purpose.

However, this situation is not surprising if we take into consideration the decisions Obama has made since 2008. A large proportion of the millions of voters who supported him were expecting for the new elected president to appoint a team of progressive economists which would promote a modern version of the New Deal. A large proportion of the millions of voters who supported him were expecting for the new elected president to appoint a team of progressive economists which would promote a modern version of the New Deal, with the objective of reforming

capitalism and starting a new era of regulation of the economy. As it happened, reality was quite different. Obama instead decided to chose the most conservative economists close to the Democrats. Those responsible of promoting the de-regulation of the financial system under President Bill Clinton. When we stop and observe three emblematic names, the coherence of his choice is revealing.

The first of these advisers is Robert Rubin, Secretary of the Treasury from 1995 to 1999, and previously co-chair and co-CEO of Goldman Sachs (1990-92). [39] Upon arrival to the Treasury, Rubin was faced with the first major failure of the neoliberal model in the nineties, the Tequila Crisis in Mexico. Afterwards he strongly supported, along the IMF, the implementation of harsh austerity measures that aggravated the financial crisis experienced by South East Asia countries in 1997-1998, shortly followed by the crisis in Russia and Latin America. Rubin has never doubted the benefits of liberalization and decisively contributed to impose policies on developing countries that undermined the living conditions of its population and greatly increased

inequality. In the United States, exerted its powerful influence to secure the repeal of the Glass Steagall Act, enacted in 1933.

This law, among other things, made emphasis in the incompatibility of deposit and investment banking, creating a clear cut division among the two activities. Once Glass Steagall was abolished, the door was open for all sorts of greedy rentiers eager for maximum profits regardless of the risk, which ended up creating the conditions for the recent economic crisis. To close the loop, the repeal of the Glass Steagall Act allowed the merger of Citicorp with Travelers Group to form the banking giant Citigroup.

In 2000, Robert Rubin joined the leadership of Citigroup, which the U.S. government had to bailout in November 2008, guaranteeing more than 300 billion dollars in assets! Its important to point out that the services provided by Rubin as chairman of Citigroup's executive committee were generously rewarded. According to the Financial Times, Rubin received over 118 million dollars in salary plus bonuses and stock between 1999 and 2008. [