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Call to action - Reclaiming our future: Rio +20 and Beyond

27 February 2012, by **Via Campesina**

Twenty years later, governments should have reconvened to review their commitments and progress, but in reality the issue to debate will be the “green economy” led development, propagating the same capitalist model that caused climate chaos and other deep social and environmental crises. La VÃa Campesina will mobilize for this historical moment, representing the voice of the millions of peasants and indigenous globally who are defending the well-being of all by implementing food sovereignty and the protection of natural resources.

20 Years later: a planet in crisis

20 years after the Earth Summit, life has become more difficult for the majority of the planet’s inhabitants. The number of hungry people has

increased to almost one billion, which means that one out of six human beings is going hungry, women and small farmers being the most affected. Meanwhile, the environment is depleting fast, biodiversity is being destroyed, water resources are getting scarce and contaminated and the climate is in crisis. This is jeopardizing our very future on Earth while poverty and inequalities are increasing.

The idea of “Sustainable Development” put forward in 1992, which merged “development” and “environment” concerns, did not solve the problem because it did not stop the capitalist system in its race towards profit at the expense of all human and natural resources:

The food system is increasingly in the grips of large corporations seeking profit, not aimed at feeding the people.

The Convention on Biodiversity has created benefit sharing mechanisms but at the end of the day, they legitimize the capitalization of genetic resources by the private sector.

The UN Convention on Climate Change, instead of forcing countries and corporations to reduce pollution, invented a new profitable and speculative commodity with the carbon trading mechanisms, allowing the polluter to continue polluting and profit from it.

The framework of “sustainable development” continues to see peasant agriculture as backwards and responsible for the deterioration of natural resources and the environment. The same paradigm of development is perpetuated, which is nothing less than the development of capitalism by means of a “green industrialization.”

The “Green Economy” - Final Enclosure?

Today the “greening of the economy” pushed forward in the run-up to Rio+20 is based on the same logic and mechanisms that are destroying the planet and keeping people hungry. For instance, it seeks to incorporate aspects of the failed “green revolution” in a broader manner in order to ensure the needs of the industrial sectors of production, such as promoting the uniformity of seeds, patented seeds by corporation, genetically modified seeds, etc.

The capitalist economy, based on the over-exploitation of natural resources and human beings, will never become “green.” It is based on limitless growth in a planet that has reached its limits and on the commoditization of the remaining natural resources that have until now remained un-priced or in control of the public sector.

In this period of financial crisis, global capitalism seeks new forms of accumulation. It is during these periods of crisis in which capitalism can most accumulate. Today, it is the territories and the commons which are the main target of capital. As such, the green economy is nothing more than a green mask for capitalism. It is also a new mechanism to appropriate our forests, rivers, land... of our territories!

Since last year’s preparatory meetings towards Rio+20, agriculture has been cited as one of the causes of climate change. Yet no distinction is made in the official negotiations between industrial and peasant agriculture, and no explicit difference between their effects on poverty, climate and other social issues we face.

The “green economy” is marketed as a way to implement sustainable development for those countries which continue to experience high and disproportionate levels of poverty, hunger and misery. In reality, what is proposed is another phase of what we identify as “green structural adjustment programs” which seek to

align and re-order the national markets and regulations to submit to the fast incoming “green capitalism”.

Investment capital now seeks new markets through the “green economy”; securing the natural resources of the world as primary inputs and commodities for industrial production, as carbon sinks or even for speculation. This is being demonstrated by increasing land grabs globally, for crop production for both export and agrofuels. New proposals such as “climate smart” agriculture, which calls for the “sustainable intensification” of agriculture, also embody the goal of corporations and agri-business to over exploit the earth while labeling it “green”, and making peasants dependent on high-cost seeds and inputs. New generations of polluting permits are issued for the industrial sector, especially those found in developed countries, such as what is expected from programs such as Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD++) and other environmental services schemes.

The green economy seeks to ensure that the ecological and biological systems of our planet remain at the service of capitalism, by the intense use of various forms of biotechnologies, synthetic technologies and geo-engineering. GMO’s and biotechnology are key parts of the industrial agriculture promoted within the framework of “green economy”.

The promotion of the green economy includes calls for the full implementation of the WTO Doha Round, the elimination of all trade barriers to incoming “green solutions,” the financing and support of financial institutions such as the World Bank and projects such as US-AID programs, and the continued legitimization of the international institutions that serve to perpetuate and promote global capitalism.

Why peasant farmers mobilize

Small-scale farmers, family farmers, landless people, indigenous people,

migrants - women and men - are now determined to mobilize to oppose any commodification of life and to propose another way to organize our relationship with nature on earth based on agrarian reform, food sovereignty and peasant based agroecology.

We reject the “Green Economy” as it is pushed now in the Rio+20 process. It is a new mask to hide an ever-present, growing greed of corporations and food imperialism in the world.

â€¢ We oppose carbon trading and all market solutions to the environmental crisis including the proposed liberalization of environmental services under the WTO.

â€¢ We reject REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) which allows rich countries to avoid cutting their carbon emissions by financing often damaging projects in developing countries.

â€¢ We expose and reject the corporate capture of the rio+20 process and all multilateral processes within the United Nations.

â€¢ We oppose land grabs, water grabs, seeds grabs, forest grabs - all resources’ grabs!

â€¢ We defend the natural resources in our countries as a matter of national and popular sovereignty, to face the offensive and private appropriation of capital;

â€¢ We demand public policies from governments for the protection of the interests of the majority of the population, especially the poorest, and landless workers;

â€¢ We demand a complete ban on geoengineering projects and experiments; under the guise of ‘green’ or ‘clean’ technology to the benefit of agribusiness. This includes new technologies being proposed for adaptation and mitigation to climate change under the banners of “geo-engineering” and “climate smart agriculture”, including false solutions like transgenic plants supposed to adapt to climate change, and “biochar” purported to replenish the soil with carbon.

â€¢ We resolve to protect our native seeds and our right to exchange seeds.

We demand genuine agrarian reform that distributes and redistributes the land - the main factor in production - especially taking into account women and youth. Land must be a means of production to secure the livelihood of the people and must not be a commodity subject to speculation on international markets. We reject "market assisted land reform", which is another word for land privatization.

â€¢ We struggle for small scale sustainable food production for community and local consumption as opposed to agribusiness, monoculture plantations for export.

â€¢ We continue to organize and practice agroecology based production, ensuring food sovereignty for all and implementing collective management of our resources

Call to action

We call for a major world mobilization to be held between 18-26 June in Rio de Janeiro, with a permanent camp, for the Peoples Summit, to counter the summit of governments and capital.

We will be in Rio at the People's Summit where anti-capitalist struggles of the world will meet and together we will propose real solutions. The People's Permanent Assembly, between the 18 and 22, will present the daily struggles against the promoters of capitalism y the attacks against our lands. Today, Rio de Janeiro is one of the cities which receive the most contributions from global capital and will host the Soccer World Cup and Olympics. We will unite our symbolic struggles from the urban to the landless movements and fishers.

We also declare the week of June 5th, as a major world week in defense of the environment and against transnational corporations and invite

everyone across the world to mobilize:

Defend sustainable peasant agriculture

Occupy land for the production of agroecological and non-market dominated food

Reclaim and exchange native seeds

Protest against Exchange and Marketing Board offices and call for an end to speculative markets on commodities and land

Hold local assemblies of People Affected by Capitalism

Dream of a different world and create it!!

The future that we want is based on Agrarian Reform, Peasant's based sustainable agriculture and Food Sovereignty!

GLOBALIZE THE STRUGGLE!!

GLOBALIZE HOPE!!!

Against the Rule of Capital; For the General Strike

27 February 2012, by **Radical Socialist**

For a long time, India has been trumpeting about high growth rates. Contrary to all claims, however, there has been no trickle-down effect. The bulk of the labour force remains badly paid, without health care, without education, without even the minimum daily wage promised by the government. Meanwhile, over the last few years, the numbers of millionaires and billionaires has been steadily rising.

Among the general demands, common to all, there is the demand that the proposed Pension Bill must be withdrawn. In the name of "regulating" Pension funds, the bill is a move to make pensions dependent on volatile market driven financial

instruments. This will in fact benefit financial sectors at the cost of workers.

Peasant associations have joined in, demanding that the government must buy from them at a minimum base price, instead of forcing them to sell at a loss to profiteers.

It is estimated that as many as 100 million workers might take part in the general strike. The ruling class is not taking it easy. In West Bengal, where the CITU, the CPI(M) dominated union, is strong, the Trinamul Congress government has announced that no government employee will be given leave for any reason on 28 February. In other words, taking part

in the strike can be met with docking a day's pay, or even causing a break in service and losing seniority. The TMC has also announced that it will counter the strike actively. What this means concretely was shown yesterday, 22 February, when a CPI(M) rally was attacked by TMC thugs, and two CPI(M) leaders murdered. One had old charges. This was used by the Chief Minister to claim that internal conflict within CPI(M) had led to the death. But all accounts agree that it was a TMC force that organised the attack, and literally smashed the man to death.

A government that is unwilling to discuss minimum rights and dues with workers is willing to discuss the

financial problems of Kingfisher airlines. The priorities are clear. Only united and repeated strikes by the workers can make the government yield ground.

The New Trade Union Initiative, in its Calcutta General Council meeting of January 2012, adopted a resolution supporting the strike which said in part:

NTUI has consistently demanded equal wage for equal work, strict implementation of the eight hour work

day and universal social security in order to articulate comprehensively the interests of working people as a whole.

The NTUI welcomes the inclusion of demands of equal pay for equal work for contract workers and will continue to strive for the inclusion of the demands of all sectors of the working class, while also supporting the 10 demands formulated by the Central trade unions in their call and agitation for the strike.

â€¢ Support the strike

â€¢ Oppose the Pension Bill

â€¢ Fight for equal wages for equal work

â€¢ Fight for implementation of the eight hour day

â€¢ Build democratic, multi-tendency trade unions and organise the unorganised as the best route to opposing the exploitation by capital

24.02.2012

Condemn the killings of CPI(M) activists, stand up for democratic rights for all

27 February 2012, by Radical Socialist

India :

Revolutionaries have to take a clear stand on this. We say this because a number of arguments will be trotted out.

First, it will be said that the CPI(M) in its day (years, actually) had also killed opponents. This is quite true. But in a bourgeois democracy, the worst victims of violations of law as well as of the bias in the law are the toiling people. While we admit that bourgeois democracy is inadequate, indeed while we make our best efforts to explain to working people that bourgeois democracy is primarily democracy for the bourgeoisie and an instrument to exercise bourgeois hegemony over toilers, workers, agricultural labourers and poor peasants, we do not say or act in any way that suggests that presence and absence of bourgeois democracy does not matter to us. And if we demand implementation of the promises of democratic rights made by bourgeois democracy we cannot say that it should be implemented

selectively, for those we like.

Second, it has been said, by the CM, and will be repeated by her acolytes, that not the TMC but internal conflicts of the CPI(M) are responsible. This does not matter at all, apart from being an evident untruth. If it was an internal conflict, why did the police not intervene till people died ?

Third, it will be argued that we are taking up the issue because district level leaders have been killed. Our response is, we for our part have taken up issues, whenever they have come up. We have rejected the violence, including killings, on Maoist party members and sympathisers. But we reject any argument that says till you prove that you had condemned every case of violence you have no right to condemn one case.

So rightwing is the present government, so anti-people its policies, including attacks on trade union rights, attacks on campus democracy, economic policies that

have contributed to a crisis among peasants, that less than a year after being thoroughly annihilated, the CPI(M) has started regaining many of its supporters. We have no illusion in the CPI(M). But nor do we agree with the false and pernicious theory of social fascism, according to which the CPI(M) is a fascist party and so worse than the TMC and others. It is an unfortunate reality that even now it commands much support among the working class. Attacks on the CPI(M) on the eve of an all India general strike have to be taken as parts of an attack on the general strike itself. It is in the class interest of every class conscious worker to defend the CPI(M) against such attacks, not because we want the CPI(M) restored to its pre 2007 position, but because we want the rights of all workers. In a workers' democracy, it is the working people who will extend democracy, and who will decide by their freely given vote which parties will be allowed in a workers' democracy.

23.2.212

Coup bid reveals extremism within

26 February 2012, by **Naimul Haq**

On Jan. 19, the army brass disclosed that it had foiled a coup attempt masterminded by some mid-ranking army officers and that several have been either confined or put under the scanner.

At a rare press conference in the Dhaka cantonment, Brig. Gen. Masud Razzaque, flanked by senior officers, said: "Specific evidence has been unearthed that a group of retired and serving officers have been involved in the conspiracy to topple the democratic government through use of the armed forces."

Razzaque said two of the alleged conspirators had admitted to having connections with the outlawed political party, Hizbut-Tahrir (HuT), suggesting that religious extremists continue to maintain links within the country's armed forces.

The HuT website openly urges army officers to "Remove Hasina, the killer of your brothers and establish the Khilafah to save yourselves and the Ummah from subjugation to U.S.-India."

"Initial investigations suggest that links with non-resident Bangladeshis could not be ruled out," Razzaque said, hinting that forces inimical to Bangladesh's 1971 liberation from Pakistani rule were at work and may also have had a hand in the coup conspiracy.

The HuT is known to have strong links with Bangladeshi expatriates in Britain along with other Islamist groups such as the Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI) opposed to the professed secularism of the AL and to the 1971 liberation. This was the first time that the defence establishment has admitted to extremists in its midst, though the country has seen a series of coups, starting with the one in which Sheikh Mujibur Rehman, the founder of Bangladesh and father of

Sheikh Hasina was killed.

Indeed the army is known for the deep divide that exists between officers who fought for Bangladesh's liberation and those who did not and this has fomented no less than 19 coup attempts.

Significantly, the January coup attempt follows the execution of a number of officers convicted for the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur, 40 years ago. Hasina has also put on trial several religious political leaders, including the former chief of the Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI), Golam Azam, for alleged collaboration in the genocide committed by the Pakistani military in trying to bludgeon Bangladesh's struggle for independence.

The JeI is one of the key allies of the four-party main opposition led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) of former prime minister Khaleda Zia. The path for the trials was cleared on Mar. 25, 2010 when the government set up a special tribunal to try the religious leaders for their alleged crimes against humanity committed during the country's liberation war four decades ago.

Five of the JeI's top leaders, including its party chief, Prof. Motiur Rahman Nizami and secretary general, Ali Ahsan Mojaheed, both former ministers in BNP government, are currently being held in prison.

Soon after taking office for the second time in January 2009, the Hasina government banned 12 religion-based organisations suspected to have strong militant bases across the country.

Among them was Jamaat-ul Mujahideen, Bangladesh (JMB), the second largest Islamist organisation and one that is believed to have links to the banned Pakistani terrorist group Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT).

After the JMB carried out 500 synchronized bombing attacks in almost all the 64 districts of the country on August 17, 2005, police have arrested over 200 of its members.

Many of its leaders have been executed, including its founder - Shaikh Abdur Rahman and the man known to be second in command, Siddiquil Islam, popularly known as "Bangla Bhai".

But, the arrest of about 100 JMB activists since October 2008 and the unearthing of huge caches of firearms, explosives and ammunition demonstrated the JMB's ability to regroup, recruit and reorganise.

The Hasina government faces increasing challenges in restoring a secular outlook for the country's polity originally promoted by her father and the Awami League (AL) party as opposed to the more Islamist face of the opposition.

Significantly, Khaleda Zia alleged at a rally held in Chittagong on Jan. 9 that the government had kidnapped certain army officers and was torturing them. While Khaleda's statement was refuted by the army, it admitted to trying officers for "dereliction of duty".

Over the years Hasina's pro-liberation, secular AL party has faced violent challenges from the so-called Islamic nationalist and anti-liberation forces which apparently also do not believe in democratic principles.

Hasina's government has also been extending friendly gestures to India which helped Bangladesh in its struggle for freedom from the military junta then ruling Pakistan.

After being swept back into office in January 2009 with a two-thirds majority in parliament, Hasina's 14-

party grand alliance restored the four fundamental secular principles of the constitution enacted by her father. That step angered many religion-based political parties. In February 2009, the national border guards, then known as the Bangladesh Rifles mutinied killing some 70 people including 57 army officers.

The revolt was believed to have been orchestrated by anti-liberation forces and the names of the religious extremist groups were not far down the list of suspects.

It is unlikely that the Bangladesh army

would venture to take over power from a democratically elected government - that would jeopardise its prized role as top international peacekeeper - but it will certainly have to deal with extremism within its ranks, as the January events show.

Dhaka Feb 2, 2012

Occupy, longshore workers challenge anti-union bosses

25 February 2012, by Jeff Mackler

Time, among the most popular mainstream news magazines in the United States, has a point of sorts. No one can predict whether a specific event will ignite mass struggles that can change the course of history. But history does repeatedly demonstrate that the importance and interconnection of seemingly isolated events depend in great part on the historical context in which they take place. Today this context is the worldwide crisis of the capitalist system and the total incapacity of the ruling rich to offer any solution other than deeper incursions into the quality of life of working people everywhere.

In this context, the Occupy movement's resounding proclamation of the class divide—"We are the 99 percent; the bankers, corporations, and their government are the one percent"—has been seared into the consciousness of millions. In the blink of an eye, yesterday's impossible challenges can today become the order of the day. The nearly 40-year virtually uninterrupted series of concessions and defeats imposed by capital against labor can be reversed only on the condition that the 99 percent organize to fight back, and that in the course of this fightback a mass revolutionary socialist party is constructed to challenge the capitalist system itself.

A seemingly instant turn of events was sparked by the late December call of

the relatively small numbers actively engaged in Occupy Oakland to mobilize a mass force in January to help embattled International Longshore and Warehouse Workers Union (ILWU Local 21) workers challenge a major union-busting effort by the EGT corporation. EGT's union-busting ship, to be escorted by the U.S. Coast Guard, military ships and helicopters, and an expected mass force of land-based police and military personnel, seeks to dock and upload a grain cargo at its new \$200 million non-union facility.

This won't be the first time that EGT has moved to make its scab facility operational. Last July, 1000 ILWU members and supporters responded by blocking a train carrying grain to the Longview terminal. And again, on Sept. 7, according to a flyer distributed by Local 21, "400 union supporters blocked a grain train in Vancouver, Washington, and then again in Longview. The next morning hundreds of longshore workers arrived from all the Northwest ports before dawn, and news media reported thousands of tons of grain ended up on the tracks. The ports of Seattle, Tacoma, Everett, Vancouver and Portland were shut down—the workers were all in Longview."

Today, ILWU Local 21 and the Bay Area-based ILWU Local 10 have joined to put some teeth into Occupy Oakland's call for a January mass

mobilization in Longview. They are supported in this effort by the San Francisco Labor Council, which will be joining a Solidarity Caravan headed for Longview. The labor council, which subsequently approved \$1500 toward the caravan's expenses, passed a Dec. 19 solidarity resolution that states:

"Whereas, EGT Development, a joint venture of multinational corporations Bunge, Itochu and STX Pan Ocean, agreed to hire union Longshoremen when accepting millions in taxpayer funds to build a massive grain exporting terminal at the Port of Longview, and once the terminal was built has tried to void its contract and has refused to hire ILWU labor, ...

"Whereas, with the use of police and courts and the 220 arrests in the 225-member ILWU Local 21, EGT has managed to get enough grain across ILWU picket lines and into the terminal that EGT appears poised to load a ship soon in violation of their agreement with the Port of Longview, ...

"Whereas, an ILWU Local 10-endorsed solidarity caravan of union members and community activists from the Bay Area is being organized to bolster our brothers and sisters of ILWU Local 21 in Longview, WA, for an emergency mass protest when requested to do so, therefore:

"Be It Resolved that the San Francisco

Labor Council endorses the solidarity caravan, will spread the word about the caravan to its membership and constituency groups, and encourage their participation."

Similarly, the Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Counties (Washington) Central Labor Council adopted a Jan. 2 resolution stating in part: "It is estimated, sometime in late January or early February the [scab] EGT facility at the port of Longview will receive its first grain ship to be loaded at its berth. The name and timing of this ship will undoubtedly be kept secret until the last possible moment. It is likely there will be a few days to as little as 24 hours notice of when the ship will dock. Notification will be given via the Internet and any other relevant means of networking throughout the country.

"We are imploring all able working-class people willing to take time out of his or her own lives, to come to Longview, Washington for a historic protest. ...

"The class struggle never really goes away. Right now the rich and the ruling class are attempting to deal a blow that labor might never recover from. The ILWU has always been the vanguard of labor everywhere. Today, the ILWU's value of "An Injury to One, Is an Injury to All" couldn't be any more pertinent for all organizations. So please, if you believe in a better future for the 99% of us that work for a living, do what you can to support ILWU Local 21."

The stakes in the Longview ILWU struggle are high. If EGT's planned scab-operated effort is successful, the door will swing open for the corporations to attempt to smash unionized ILWU port workers on the entire West Coast—one of the most important union bastions in the country. As with the massive defeats they imposed on the United Automobile Workers in recent years, the government and bosses now seek to take their pound of flesh from the ILWU. They aim to reduce labor costs to the near minimum wage rates that have been imposed on other once powerful unions.

A defeat in Longview will resound throughout the world—as will a

union victory. The highly unionized West Coast ports are the point of entry and departure for commodities worth hundreds of billions of dollars that are traded on world markets. The historic ILWU victories against powerful corporate and government forces in the 1930s and 1940s were a product of the 1934 San Francisco General Strike of 65,000 workers that won the union collective bargaining rights, model wage scales, benefits, and working conditions that persist to this day.

"Third-party" pickets

The Occupy Oakland call to close down the port of Longview was no idle bluster. It was the Occupy Oakland activists who first issued a call for a city-wide "general strike" on Nov. 2 to protest the police attack a few days earlier that had demolished the encampment at Frank Ogawa Plaza (renamed Oscar Grant Plaza by the Occupiers) and brutalized peaceful Occupiers with tear gas, pepper spray, and clubs. A police-fired missile that night that smashed the skull of the encampment leader and U.S. Marine veteran of the Iraq War, Scott Olsen, was a shot heard around the world.

The reaction shocked more than a few when 30,000 working people mobilized in response to shut down a good number of Oakland's banks and other corporate institutions and the multi-billion-dollar Port of Oakland itself. In the face of this power in the streets, the very city officials that ordered the crackdown felt compelled to instruct their subordinates that no punishment was to be implemented for city and country workers who chose to join the "general strike."

In solidarity with the Longview workers and with some 22 Los Angeles truckers fighting for a union contract who were fired by a port corporation owned in part by Goldman Sacks, Occupy Oakland's General Assembly proceeded to organize for a Dec. 12 West Coast port shutdown, in which 6000 protesters took part in Oakland alone. Support was won from the Longview ILWU Local 21 members, from the Los Angeles Labor

Council and from several unions up and down the coast. Major efforts were undertaken to win the solidarity of ILWU workers at most of the West Coast ports.

This partially successful second effort to challenge the bosses' austerity drive and organize solidarity for port workers from Los Angeles to Longview caused a bit of a stir in the labor bureaucracy. Some ILWU officials and other class-collaborationist labor bureaucrats argued, for the first time, that "third-party pickets"—that is, Occupy Oakland supporters and their allies who mobilized at the docks up and down the state—were flaunting what they called the "democratic right" of ILWU members to decide whether or not to engage in solidarity actions.

The corporate press and employers took it a bit further, claiming that the Occupy-initiated pickets were causing ILWU members to lose pay.

This was a peculiar development, and especially so in light of the ILWU's longstanding tradition, and the contract provision won in struggle, that allowed the union to respect third-party picket lines when the "health and safety" of ILWU workers was in question. For decades, the ILWU ranks have utilized this "health and safety" contract provision, as well as others, to respect political picket lines and to effectively demonstrate solidarity with working-class causes around the world.

Over the years, the ports of Oakland and San Francisco, and sometimes the entire West Coast, have been periodically shut down for 24 hours, and sometimes longer, in solidarity with a broad range of struggles. These have included the fight against South African apartheid, protests against the slaughter of Salvadoran trade unionists by that nation's then death-squad government, freedom and justice for Mumia Abu-Jamal, opposition to non-union ships arriving from unionized ports in other countries, and antiwar actions demanding the immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq and Afghanistan.

These political and symbolic strikes have been widely acclaimed by trade

unionists and social activists. The implication that today's one-day port shutdowns to defend ILWU Local 21 are done behind the backs and against the wishes of ILWUers is not credible, and especially so when Local 21 and a broad range of other trade unionists clearly understand the major threat posed to the entire labor movement.

ILWU International President Robert McEllrath's Jan. 3 statement entitled, "Prepare to take action when EGT vessel arrives" was issued to all ILWU locals. The statement expresses the union's solidarity with Local 21's cause and condemns the employers, government, and anti-union laws like Taft-Hartley that restrict solidarity pickets.

But McEllrath's statement appears to differ in at least one critical aspect from the call for mass mobilizations issued by Local 21 and Local 10 and the San Francisco and Washington State Labor Councils. These organizations appear to be aiming their calls for solidarity to the coast-wide ILWU ranks and to the broader labor movement and its allies in the Occupy movement. Understanding that any confrontation with police and military authorities to thwart the operation of the EGT scab terminal must entail a labor and allied mobilization of massive proportions, not only in Longview but at all West Coast ports, they have not advised ILWU locals to refrain from mobilizing in Longview. By implication they seek to not only close down Longview but the entire West Coast.

McEllrath's statement, in contrast, takes great pains to do the opposite. It reads, in part: "Locals need to be aware of the narrow path that we must cut through a federal labor law (the Taft-Hartley Act) that criminalizes worker solidarity, outlaws labor's most effective tools, and protects commerce while severely restricting unions. Because Local 21's labor dispute is with EGT, federal labor law entitles the Local to conduct picketing and other collective actions directed at EGT. Further, while the NLRB, which administers Taft-Hartley, sought and received an injunction in federal court on behalf of EGT against the ILWU and its members, the federal court denied the NLRB's motion to ban

picketing at the EGT facility in Longview, preserving our First Amendment rights to peacefully picket the company.

"The NLRB is currently seeking a second injunction, this time on behalf of PMA, on the theory that any disruption of work by the ILWU on the West Coast docks at the same time that the Union is protesting EGT constitutes a violation of Taft-Hartley. However, we have no dispute with PMA or its member companies. Thus, any showing of support for Local 21 at the time that a vessel calls at the EGT facility must be measured to ensure that the West Coast ports have sufficient manpower so as not to impact cargo movement for PMA member companies. A call for a protest of EGT is not a call for a shutdown of West Coast ports and must not result in one." (Emphasis added.)

McEllrath's statement also cautions ILWUers as to the severe penalties, including imprisonment, that might be imposed on would-be Longview protesters. And while condemning the government's anti-worker collusion with corporations, McEllrath warns ILWU leaders to "take extreme caution" against those who might take non-ILWU-sanctioned actions against EGT.

Experienced trade unionists have long been aware that the ILWU and many other unions have often been compelled to take great care in their formulations to the ranks in order to avoid government-aided company attempts to impose serious fines and other sanctions against unions that exceed the limitations imposed by contracts. Indeed, most all of the politically powerful ILWU solidarity actions and one-day strikes over the years have been formally conducted in the name of ILWU members' "concern" over their "health and safety" should they cross a third-party picket line aimed at closing down a port. Few believe, however, that any of these third-party pickets would pose a serious threat to an ILWU member's safety.

This must be kept in mind when evaluating the statements of President McEllrath. The test of his fealty to

Local 21's cause will be in life itself, not in the words that might have been crafted to legally protect the union against massive employer damage claims. If the ILWU leadership mobilizes the mass forces necessary to seriously confront the planned scab operation in Longview, a battle of the first order is in the works. If not, the Longview struggle may well be lost, but nevertheless seen as an important component in labor's coming fightback.

One critical point seems clear. The ILWU International president's statement expressing solidarity with Local 21, however restricted, and its pledge to aid in the upcoming protests at Longview, would not have become a reality were it not for a dedicated small group of Oakland Occupiers and the solidarity they have lent to an ILWU local that faces destruction at the hands of a boss class that has hitherto run roughshod over workers around the world.

Workers' pent-up anger explodes worldwide

The Longview struggle takes place in the context of working-class mobilizations around the world. These include the mass mobilizations that forced the resignation of the U.S.-backed dictators in Tunisia and Egypt (though the victories are still incomplete), the eight or more one-day anti-austerity general strikes in Greece, the mobilizations of millions in France that challenged the degradation of the pension system, the millions in Spain who occupied public plazas to protest the government's austerity measures, and the 150,000 workers who occupied Madison, Wis., for a month to challenge the state's abolition of public employee collective bargaining rights.

Today's majority-supported Occupation Wall Street movement proved to be the spark that ignited the anger and pent-up class hatred of never-ending government and employer attacks on workers, oppressed nationalities, students, and youth in the United States. The 99

percent are coming to understand that their interests are diametrically opposed to those of the ruling-class rich and its government.

This government was quick to respond to the challenge to its political hegemony. In short order it systematically organized, military style, its ever-growing repressive police/military apparatus across the country to demolish virtually every one of the close to 1000 Occupy sites. In the course of a few weeks 5000 innocent protesters were arrested, many brutalized and jailed.

The power elite understood the modest campsites and meeting places of a few score to several hundred activists as the physical symbol of a challenge to its legitimacy, and thus deemed them unacceptable. The elite did not foresee that the brutal removal of Occupiers along with their tents and equipment would galvanize hundreds of thousands across the country.

The Occupiers found a receptive audience when they championed

virtually every demand of the oppressed and exploited, including opposition to capitalism's wars, its racist discrimination, its attacks on public education and soaring tuition, its increasingly for-profit and privatized prison-industrial complex, and its bail-out of multi-billion-dollar banks and other financial institutions at the expense of working people. Today, the call initiated by Occupy Oakland to stand in solidarity with beleaguered longshore workers is being watched closely around the world.

The shift in the public mood has been rapid and remarkable. A December 2011 Pew poll found that among young people in the age bracket of 19-29, 49 percent preferred socialism over capitalism. Forty-three percent favored capitalism. "Despite all of the declarations that socialism is dead," said the Chicago-based education publication Substance News, "a growing minority of people, especially the young, see socialism as a more human alternative." The Pew survey found that in the general population 60 percent to 31 percent favored

capitalism over socialism. Among Blacks 55 percent favored socialism as against 36 percent favoring capitalism. The figures mark a significant change from a similar Pew poll taken a year ago.

It is unfair to expect the Occupy Wall Street movement to spearhead the inevitable class battles to come. But history will record that at a time when capitalism's offensive was at full blast, Occupy was part of a series of struggles that evidenced the capacity of working people to resist and fight back. Such was also the case with the 2006 one-day strike of five million immigrants to protest planned punitive immigrant legislation.

Today Occupy stands tall as an example of what a dedicated core can accomplish if its politics and demands reflect the highest aspirations of the masses for a better life. Occupy's solidarity with ILWU Local 21 and its encouragement of a mass effort to reverse yet another ruling-class offensive will not be forgotten.

<http://socialistaction.blogspot.com...>

Hunger is man-made and man can unmake it

25 February 2012, by **Éric Toussaint, Jean Ziegler**

For all who seek to understand the issues concerning hunger in the world, this book is a must. In a style at the same time vigorous and straightforward this latest work by Jean Ziegler, ex United Nations rapporteur to the right to food, presents the necessary insights to understanding why one sixth of humanity is under nourished, sometimes to death, but always to the negation of the most elementary human rights. More than just an analysis of the causes, this book pleads for a radical change of system.

Eric Toussaint - What causal relationship do you perceive between national debts and the state of hunger from which a very

important part of the population of this part of the world is suffering?

Jean Ziegler - Before answering your question I would like to explain the extent of the disaster.

The annual massacre of tens of millions of human beings by hunger is the scandal of our times. Every five seconds a child under ten years old dies of hunger, 37 000 people die of hunger every day and one billion - of the seven billion that we are - are deformed by permanent malnutrition... On a planet that is overflowing with riches !

The same FAO food security report that gives these figures, says that world agriculture is actually capable

of producing food for up to twelve billion normal adults (2200 calories per adult per day). That is nearly double the actual world human population.

Starting this new millennium, there is absolutely no fatality for hunger nor are there any objective shortages. A child who dies of hunger today has been assassinated.

For eight years, I was the United Nations special rapporteur on the right to food. This book is the story of my struggles, my failures, my occasional fragile victories and also my betrayals.

The problem of the famished is not the general availability of food on the

planet, but their personal access to it, essentially their lack of money to buy it.

Structural hunger takes its daily toll because of insufficiently developed farming in the rural areas of the southern hemisphere.

Conjunctural hunger, on the other hand, hits when an economy collapses suddenly through war or following natural catastrophes.

To get back to your question. The relationship between debt and destruction by hunger is particularly apparent in the struggle against conjunctural hunger.

Between 2008 and 2010, the World Food Program lost almost half of its budget : from 6 billion dollars in 2008 it has fallen to 3.2 billion today. The industrial countries have become massively indebted in order to refinance their banks... and have scrapped or massively reduced their contributions to the WFP. Now it so happens that the WFP is the organization charged with supplying food aid to populations struck by catastrophe and/or war.

Consequently : the World Food Program can no longer purchase sufficient food for urgent famine aid : as in the Horn of Africa where UNO aid workers refuse entry into any one of the region's seventeen established camps to hundreds of starving families and refugees every day. The debt is responsible for the destruction of hundreds of thousands of human beings.

Considering this perspective, how do you relate the world famine crisis to the quasi-simultaneous 2007/2008 banking and economic crisis in the highly industrialized countries?

The 2007/2008 crisis provoked by banksterism has had two notable consequences. Firstly, after 2008, hedge funds and the big banks modified their fields of intervention, easing off from the financial markets to take heavier positions on the commodity markets, particularly in agricultural products. As a result, the prices of the three basic food-stuffs

(maize, rice and wheat), that cover 75 % of world food consumption, have exploded. In 18 months the price of maize has increased by 93 %, the ton of rice has increased from 105 dollars to 1010 dollars and the ton of milling wheat has doubled since September 2010 to attain the price of 271 euro. This explosion of prices makes astronomical profits for the speculators but kills hundreds of thousands of men, women and children in the slums, favelas and shanty towns.

A second consequence is the rush of the hedge funds and other speculators to buy up arable land in the southern hemisphere.

According to the World Bank, last year, 41 million hectares (over 101 million acres) were taken over by investment funds and multinationals in Africa alone, resulting in the expulsions of small farmers. The role of the World Bank must be denounced here, but also that of the African Development Bank, that finances these land grabs. To justify this they present the pernicious theory that African agricultural production is very low. This is true, but not because the African farmer is less competent or less hard working than any other. It is because these countries are strangled by their foreign debt. They do not have the money necessary to constitute disaster funds or for investing in subsistence farming. It is wrong to claim that the solution is to cede the lands to multinationals.

The real solution is to bring these countries to a state that would permit investment and to give their small farmers the necessary tools, irrigation systems, selected seeds, fertilizer, and so on, that would increase their productivity.

In fact, on the whole African continent only 3.8% of arable land is irrigated. There are no more than 250 000 draft animals and a few thousand tractors. There are practically no mineral fertilizers nor selected seeds.

What is the central thesis of your book, Destruction massive ?

That hunger, being caused by man's greed, can be eradicated by man's

actions.

The main enemies of the right to food are the ten or so private transcontinental companies which almost completely dominate the food market. They fix prices, control stocks and decide who will live or die, since only those with money have access to food. Last year, for example, Cargill controlled more than 26 % of all the wheat commercialized in the world. These trusts have at their bidding mercenary organisations such as the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. These are the three Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Even if they do acknowledge that famine is a terrible thing, they consider that any intervention in the market is a sin, and appeals for agrarian reform, a minimum wage or life-saving subsidies on staple foods for the very poor, heresy. These great trusts, which together control nearly 85 % of the food market, hold that famine can only be vanquished by the total liberalization of the markets and the total privatisation of the public sector.

The neo-liberal theory underlying these ideas is obscurantist and deadly. In 1991, the Soviet Union imploded (which was a good thing). Hitherto, one third of the world's population lived under a communist regime, while the capitalist mode of production was limited to certain regions. However, over the last 20 years, financial capitalism has spread like wildfire throughout the world. The only regulatory force to have emerged is the global market, the so-called invisible hand. States have lost their autonomy and the pyramid of martyrs has grown. Had the neo-liberals been right, liberalization and privatization should have brought an end to famine. Yet the opposite has happened. The pyramid of martyrs continues to grow. This collective murder by famine becomes more horrifying with every day that goes by.

But in spite of its title - Destruction massive - my book is a book of hope.

Democracy is never powerless. There are concrete measures that we, as citizens of the democratic states of Europe, can impose with immediate effect. We can ban speculation on food

products; block the theft of arable land by multinational companies; prevent dumping of agricultural produce; write off the external debt of the poorest countries to enable them invest in their own agriculture; have done with the use of bio-fuels, and so on. All that is within our reach, if people mobilize and campaign for it. I wrote "Destruction massive, géopolitique de la faim" to galvanize citizens' awareness. Even as we talk, I repeat, a child under ten years of age is dying of hunger every five seconds. There are mass graves to prove it. And those responsible can be clearly identified.

Furthermore, farmers' uprisings, totally ignored by the mainstream Western press, are taking place as we speak in numerous countries of the South : the Philippines, Indonesia, Honduras and Northern Brazil. Populations are re-occupying lands stolen from them by multinational companies, fighting, often dying, but sometimes they emerge victorious.

Georges Bernanos writes : « God has no other hands than ours ».

The present cannibalistic world order can be destroyed and material happiness ensured for all. I am confident that in Europe, the time when awareness turns to revolt is close at hand.

For years now, especially as Vice-President of the Consultative Committee of the UN Council for Human Rights, you have been working towards the adoption of an international pact or a similar international legal instrument that would guarantee smallholders' rights the world over. How far has that got, today?

The project for an international convention to protect smallholders' rights (the right to land, the right to seed, the right to water, etc.) will be submitted to the Human Rights Council in June. It gives substance to the principle of extra-territorial

obligation incumbent on States. As a concrete example of what this means, the French State could be held responsible for the violations of smallholders' rights in Cameroon or in Benin, by the Bolloré and Vilgrain companies.

The outcome is uncertain.

How can the CADTM's analyses and actions contribute to the fight for the right to food and, beyond that, for a radical change of direction in the matter of human rights ?

Neoliberal obscurantism has poisoned most governments and the majority of public opinion. The analyses undertaken and struggles waged by the CADTM are essential. Jean-Paul Sartre wrote: « Know the enemy, fight the enemy. » The CADTM is doing a magnificent job of carrying out this double action.

Translated by Vicki Briault and Mike Krolkowski for CADTM.

Face the enemy in unity or back the chauvinists and perish

24 February 2012, by **Vickramabahu Karunarathne**

On the other hand, they say that those who talk about human rights today did not raise their voice, when hundreds were brutally killed by terrorists. When terrorists targeted civilians, thousands of people died in bomb blasts. Apparently these elements who talk about human rights violations are trying to tarnish the country's image internationally by hatching various conspiracies.

Hence, pro government TU leaders are of the view that stern action should be taken against those who conspire against the country. Pro government TU leaders are led by W.H.Piyadasa, the president of Public Service Trade Union Federation.

Comrade Piyadasa has said;

"Some trade unions and media organizations are attempting to create political instability by causing turmoil. This move is driven by both anti-government political groups and extremist groups backed by some western countries"

What a hilarious statement to be made by a politburo bureau member of the communist party. As a partner of the regime he should know better. This government is supported by the western powers, in particular by the IMF. Not only the western powers but all others in the G20, including Japan and BRIC countries, support this oppressive reactionary government.

Comrade Piyadasa says;

"The accusation that there is a tangible oppression against trade unions and media is totally baseless. Nobody can prove that the government is suppressing the media and trade unions. This is a conspiracy with a sinister agenda."

What a shame; he does not realize that the very campaign organised by him against media and trade unions, accusing them of conspiracy backed by western powers, is a gigantic oppressive act.

Today comrade Piyadasa is a powerful member of the dictatorial government, with many privileges. He is now many light years away from the Piyadasa who participated in the general strike of 1980. He has also forgotten that

MR, with the 18th amendment, has concentrated more powers than JR ever could. Piyadasa while harping on a Yankee conspiracy drives the repressive power of this monstrous dictatorial regime against all of us.

However the railway strike has shaken the foundation of this monstrosity. Stationmasters, guards and signalmen took strike action that was called off following a discussion they had with transport minister Kumar Welgama. Pressing for several demands, including the elimination of their salary anomalies, the railway workers struck work, and train passengers were severely inconvenienced as a result. The strike which came without prior notice of the date and time hit the government like a thunder on a dry day.

Prison riot a conspiracy

Only last week, the government claimed that the prison riot to be a conspiracy. I am sure our comrade Piyadasa will claim that also to be a part of the conspiracy hatched by

western powers!

Few weeks back ministry of power exposed another conspiracy. A senior engineering assistant has alleged a Chinese conspiracy was behind the recurring technical issues at the Norochcholai coal power plant. The Chinese firm that has obtained the contract for maintenance and operating activities was plotting to keep the contract to themselves. U.R.A. Senaratne of the CEB technical engineering trade union has said.

Who gave this contract? Does that mean that minister Champika is also involved in the western backed conspiracy?

But the real western conspiracy will be launched in the coming period. We are told that the United States is set to table a resolution against Lanka at the next sitting of the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has mentioned the option of a resolution in a letter to Lanka's External Affairs Minister G.L. Peiris.

Western powers are concerned about the non implementation of the LLRC recommendation. That investigation, carried out by the government's own Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Committee (LLRC), was published in November. Though it is really an eye wash to save the government the recommendations given are important.

However, the government has so far, failed to implement the recommendation given. Therefore, many are positive about America's move to support a resolution against Lanka at the HRC. So the options for the regime are very clear.

It can start a bogus anti imperialist campaign based on chauvinist elements or else take the demands of the TNA seriously and close the door to foreign intervention. Mahinda has to decide whether he is going to unite the country and face the global powers or to be a prisoner of Sinhala chauvinism and push the country to civil war and slavery.

14 February 2012

From despair to resistance

21 February 2012, by Panayotis Sotiris

Greece is becoming the test site for an extreme case of neoliberal social engineering. The terms of the new bail-out package from the European Union, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the so-called Troika, equal a carpet bombing of whatever is left of collective social rights and represent an extreme attempt to bring wage levels and workplace situation back to the 1960s.

Under the terms of the new agreement the following drastic changes are going to be put to vote:

• The minimum wage, which up to now was determined under the terms of the National Collective Contract signed by the Trade Union Confederation and the Employers

Associations, is going to be reduced by 22%. For new workers under 25 the reduction is going to reach 32%. This is going to immediately affect around 25% of total workforce in Greece. Moreover, wage maturities (the increases in wages according to the years of workplace experience) are going to be frozen.

• This reduction is also going to affect all other private sector employees covered by collective contracts and agreements. With most contracts having reached or reaching their end, with a new system of collective bargaining and mediation in place that openly favors employers, the terms of the new agreement demand that also individual terms of employment are going to change leading in most sectors to wage

reductions of up to 50% (until now even when a collective agreement expired individual contracts signed under its terms could not be altered). These wage reductions are going to be devastating, taking into consideration that drastic reductions in public sector pay have already been imposed and that labor cost in Greece is already down by 25%, helped by unemployment having reached unseen before levels (the official unemployment in November exceeded 20%).

• All pensions are going to be reduced by more than 15%, a reduction that is following other reductions that had been earlier imposed. Moreover, the terms of the agreement demand a new overhaul of the pension system paving the way for

more reductions and raising of age limits. Pension reductions are not only going to affect the living conditions of older people but will also limit inter-generational solidarity, a crucial aspect of social cohesion in Greece.

â€¢ All forms of social spending are going to be drastically cut including funds for hospitals and health coverage and social benefits. Since hospitals are already in critical condition because of earlier cuts, this new wave of cuts is expected to lead to a dramatic deterioration of health services in a country that is already facing a deteriorating health indicators.

â€¢ A new wave of privatizations is demanded, including the sale of crucial infrastructure such as airports and ports and full privatization of public utilities.

â€¢ A new wave of lay-offs of public sector-employees is going to be implemented, helped by a wave of closures of public institutions, including primary and secondary education schools, university departments and agencies such as the one responsible for public housing. Moreover, terms of employment in Public Utilities (partly owned by the State) and Banks are going to change, with all provisions for secure employment eliminated, leading to another wave of mass lay-offs.

The social cost of this transformation is going to be immense. For the first time since WWII large parts of Greek society are facing the danger of extreme pauperization. And the first signs are already here: increased homelessness, soup kitchens and a new wave of people immigrating from Greece in search for employment. And things are only going to get worse as traditional forms of solidarity, mainly through family relations, can no longer cope with the situation.

It is obvious that most of these measures have little or nothing to do with dealing with increased debt. Indeed, private sector wage reductions are reducing pension contributions, leading to more deficits. What is at stake is an attempt from the part of the EU-IMF-ECB troika and the leading fractions of the Greek

bourgeoisie to violently impose a social 'regime change' in Greece.

According to the dominant narrative the problem with Greece is a chronic lack of export competitiveness which demands a new approach based on cheap labor and doing away with any environmental restrictions, urban planning regulations and archeological protections that could discourage potential investors. It aims at turning Greece into a big Special Economic Zone for investors. What is not mentioned in this narrative is that not only the social cost is going to be tremendous but also that low labour cost competitiveness necessarily would lead to a hopeless 'race to the bottom', since there are always going to be countries, even in the close vicinity such as Bulgaria, with lower wages. Moreover, it is a well known fact that competitiveness does not rely only on labour cost but also on productivity and this has to do with infrastructure, knowledge, collective experience and ability, exactly what is being dramatically eroded by the current economic and social situation in Greece.

What is missing from this narrative is the crisis of the Eurozone and of the whole European Integration project. It is becoming obvious that the problem is the euro, as a common currency in a region marked by great divergences in productivity and competitiveness. The euro in a previous period functioned as a constant pressure for capitalist restructuring through competitive pressure, but at the same time it created increased imbalances, mainly to the benefit of European core countries such as Germany. In a period of capitalist crisis the euro only makes thing worse, increasing imbalances and deteriorating the sovereign debt crisis. That is why the crisis of the Eurozone is a crucial aspect of the current global capitalist crisis and one of the main failures of neoliberalism.

At the same time, the European Union is going through a reactionary and authoritarian mutation. This is the logic of the European Economic Governance, as inscribed in the proposed new fiscal Eurotreaty. According to this member-states are going to include austerity measures

such as balanced budgets in their national constitutions and European Union mechanisms will have the power to intervene and impose huge fines and funding cuts whenever they think that a member-state is not prudent enough with its finances. And to this end the 'expertise' of the IMF in imposing austerity and privatization is also used. The prevailing logic is one of limited sovereignty and to this direction Greece is a testing ground. Already under the terms of the bail-out packages by the EU-ECB-IMF troika, there are supervision mechanisms in place in all Greek government ministries which dictate policies in an almost neo-colonial way. This is going to be the norm if the logic of European Economic Governance is imposed. That is why although the current Greek government is acting in an almost servile way towards the EU, it is only receiving humiliating blows.

European Union is rapidly becoming the most reactionary and undemocratic institution in the European continent since Nazism. Talking about a 'democratic deficit' is not enough. What we are dealing with is an aggressive attempt towards a post-democratic conditions, with limited sovereignty and accountability and little or no room for political debate and confrontation regarding economic policy choices, since there are to be dictated by markets through the mechanisms of EU supervision. Seeing ex-ECB central bankers becoming prime-ministers, such as Monti and Papademos, is more than symbolic.

But putting the blame only on the current aggressively neoliberal and almost neocolonial configuration of the EU is not enough. The most aggressive sectors of the Greek capital (Banks, construction, tourism, shipping industry, energy), are openly supporting this strategy. Although sectors of capital have suffered from the prolonged recession, and despite the fact that the crisis has curtailed plans for a leading role in the Balkans, the dominant fractions are investing upon austerity, workplace despotism and doing away with all forms of worker's rights as a means to regain profitability. However, the problem with this strategy is that an increase

in exports cannot possibly compensate for the shrinking of domestic demand, which can affect even dominant fractions of capital.

The Papademos government has been trying to pass the terms of this devastating austerity package by ideologically blackmailing Greek society through the threat of default and exit from the Eurozone. But the question is not if Greece is going to default but how. The measures imposed are simply leading to some form of creditor led default - they have already taken the step of a debt restructuring and "haircut" of previous debt - with society taking the full cost.

That is why Greece defaulting on its own sovereign terms, that is choosing the immediate stoppage of debt payments and of annulment of debt, is the only viable way to avoid social default. At the same time it is also necessary to immediately exit the Eurozone. Stoppage of debt payments and reclaiming monetary sovereignty will help public spending on immediate social needs and will help stop the erosion of the productive base by imports. It is not a nationalist choice, as some tendencies of the Greek and European Left have argued, but the only way to fight the systemic violence of the current policies of the EU. Moreover, it is truly internationalist in the sense of the first step towards dismantling the aggressive neoliberal monetary and political configuration of the EU, something which is obviously in the interest of the subaltern classes all over Europe.

Stoppage of payments to the debt and exiting the Euro are not simple technical solutions. They must be part of a broader set of necessary radical measures that must include nationalization of banks and critical infrastructure, capital controls and income redistribution. But even these measures are not enough, what is needed is a radical alternative economic paradigm in a non-capitalist direction, that must be based on public ownership, new forms of democratic planning and workers' control, alternative non commercial

distribution networks, and a collective effort towards regaining control of social productive capabilities.

Rethinking the possibility of such radical alternatives is not a simple intellectual exercise. It is also an urgent political exigency. Against the current ideological blackmail and the attempt by the government, the ruling classes and the EU to present extreme austerity as the only solution, what is needed is not just to say no to austerity but to bring back confidence to the possibility of alternatives. Hegemony in the last instance is about who has the ability to articulate a coherent discourse about how a country and a society is going to produce, cater for social needs, be organized and governed. The crisis of neoliberal hegemony is indeed opening up a political and ideological space for the emergence of such a counter-hegemonic alternative, but it is not going to last for ever. Moreover, in the absence of a positive vision the ruling classes are aiming at individualized desperation and sense of defeat as a means to maintain dominance. Rebuilding people's confidence in the possibility of alternatives requires the collective work for a radical program based upon the experiences emerging in the terrain of struggles. This is one of the most urgent challenges the Greek Left is facing.

Despite the fact that a coalition government of 'national unity' under Papademos was practically imposed in November the political crisis is far from over. PASOK, the Socialist party is facing its biggest crisis, the conservative New Democracy is facing increased pressure from its base not to accept the measures, the far-right exited the coalition government. 22 members of parliament from PASOK and 21 from New Democracy voted against the loan agreement and were subsequently expelled from their respective parties, marking a new phase in an open political crisis.

The extreme pressures from the Troika, with functionaries of the IMF such as Pool Thomsen acting as colonial Governors only makes things worse. Even though the agreement

passed through parliament, since the PASOK and New Democracy had a combined wide majority that could compensate for dissenting parliamentarians, the political system is being stressed to its limits. Attempts to create new political parties are under way, including an attempt towards a "Papademos" party that could gather self proclaimed all those supporting the "regime change" process in place, but they are far from gaining any momentum.

In such a conjuncture the Left is getting increased support, but at the same time is showing the limits of its strategy and program. SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left) is still insisting in the fantasy of a democratic EU and refuses to bring forward demands such as the exit from the euro. KKE, the Communist Party, despite its radical anticapitalist and anti-EU positions, has sectarian tactics and underestimates the necessity for an immediate transitory program. ANTARSYA the anticapitalist Left, has played an important role in the struggles and in articulating political goals such as the annulment of debt and the exit from the euro, but does not have the necessary access to large layers of the subaltern classes. What is needed is radical recomposition of the Greek Left, both in the sense of the collective elaboration of a radical alternative that can create the possibility of counter-hegemony and of a radical Left Front that could represent the emerging new subaltern unity evident in mass demonstrations and strikes, in forms of self-organization, in networks of solidarity, in collective experiences of struggle.

Currently Greece is entering a new phase of the protracted people's war against the policies of the EU-ECB-IMF Troika. The 48hr general strike on 10 and 11 February and the mass demonstrations and street clashes on 12 February have become the new turning points in the struggle. The 'people's war' is far from over. Facing the danger of an extreme historical backwardness, we refuse to despair. We insist on the 'windows of opportunity' for social change the current situation opens. We shall fight to the end.

In defence of the Ultras: their message and our response - Egyptian Revolutionary Socialists on the football stadium massacre

20 February 2012, by **Revolutionary Socialists of Egypt**

Was the message of this crime, which was committed just days after state of emergency was lifted, to say that there will be no security without the iron fist of the emergency laws? Or was the aim to raise the spectre of chaos and the burning of Egypt after the revolutionary forces succeeded in protecting the revolution's reputation and revealed the falsity of these scenarios? ??

Whatever message the crime carried, the revolutionary forces reply was loud and clear. We said, "No". Crimes committed against the revolutionary forces will not stop the revolution and will not intimidate the revolutionaries. The leaders behind the "Battle of the Camel" who are protected by the military council will not succeed. They will fail miserably just as they failed the first time, and like the Mubarak regime, they and the military regime will end up in the abyss. The state of emergency that did not protect Mubarak from the revolution will not protect Field Marshal Tantawi either. ??

The plot was clumsily-hatched. It could not conceal the shameless complicity of the police, who stood watching the slaughter and killing for

hours, not even attempting to protect the victims.

This carries only one message to the revolutionaries—the revolution must continue and achieve its goals by eliminating the regime established by Mubarak which has at its core his military and their supreme council that protected and still protects him.??

The Ultras [football fans] groups that joined the ranks of the revolution early on, and fought among the revolutionaries proved and are still proving every day that they are an integral part of our revolution. The Ultras, appeared in Egypt as a reaction to the dominance of the policy of profit and greed of capitalism over football turning it into a marketplace of advertising, rising ticket prices and a monopoly over broadcasting matches as well as the brutality of the security forces. Thus arose the Egyptian Ultras groups, like all movements that originated in Egypt in response to tyranny and exploitation.

It was not a surprise that the Ultras groups found their place in the heart of the Egyptian revolution in search of

freedom, justice, and that they have made all the sacrifices incurred by the forces of our militant revolution, rejecting the military council's looting of the revolution and re-building a system of oppression and exploitation.

The crime that took place on the anniversary of the "Battle of the Camel" is not only a new attempt to undermine the forces of the revolution after the failed policy of defamation, oppression and terrorism to dissuade the revolutionaries from their revolt.

And the Revolutionary Socialists as well as Ultras stand against this crime, all the revolutionary forces struggling invited to come together and stand united against attempts to undermine the revolution. With the Port Said Stadium plot being revealed; the punishment of its perpetrators and even those that failed to deal with it is our very first demand. ??

Long live the Ultras—a fighting faction among the revolutionaries.

Glory to the martyrs, victory for the revolution and shame on the criminals. ??

2 February 2012 ?

The Russia of the indignant

18 February 2012, by **Karine Clément**

Karine Clément

The figures do not mean much (but let us recall them all the same: 49.54 per

cent for United Russia, 19.16 per cent for the Communist Party, 13.22 per cent for Fair Russia and 11.66 per

cent for the party of the nationalist demagogue Zhirinovsky). So the ruling party has lost the constitutional

majority in the Duma and fallen below 50 per cent. But for most commentators, this figure overestimates the real score of United Russia by 10 to 15 per cent. And, in any case, it is a purely “designed” result, as the Russians say. It is the outcome of a concession made to the growing dissatisfaction of a large part of the population towards the “party of swindlers and thieves” (that is how the party in power is commonly designated, following a formulation invented and popularized by the blogger Alexeĭ Nabalny).

Indeed, at the beginning of the campaign, regional governors received from the federal centre objectives of the order of between 60 and 70 per cent of the vote. Unfortunately, this princely gesture was not enough to calm the anger, on the contrary. On the day after the elections, nearly ten thousand people demonstrated in the streets of Moscow, a few less in St. Petersburg. More than 300 people were arrested in Moscow, around 200 in St. Petersburg. That did not prevent the mobilizations from continuing in the following days, as well as the arrests. How to explain this reversal of the situation, whereas the majority of voters had for quite some time become accustomed to the fact that their votes were not worth much? Who are these people who took to the streets in spite of the threat of being arrested?

The mobilization results mainly from the increasing unpopularity of the party in power, not only because of its antisocial policies, but also and especially because of the arrogance of its representatives, of their contempt for ordinary citizens, of their corruption and greed. The most popular slogan during the electoral campaign, in any case among those who take even a little interest in politics, was: “Vote for any party, except that of the swindlers and the thieves!” And people began to hope that it would be possible to cock a snook at this party of bureaucrats and presumptuous leaders who think they can get away with anything.

Much more than during previous elections, ordinary citizens mobilized to be observers, for one or another of the opposition parties or even

independently (a campaign to encourage people to be volunteers was conducted by among others the association GOLOS, which was denounced by the government for being in the pay of “foreign powers”). And it is one thing to vaguely hear about fraud, quite another to be physically ejected from a polling station because you cramp their style, to watch ballot boxes being stuffed, to see whole busloads of closely-guarded voters arriving, to have a protocol of the results in your hands and to find completely different figures on the official site of the Central or Regional Electoral Commission. The Internet is awash with videos and indignant testimonies published by these observers. It’s personal, it’s stupefying, it shocks people!

Many of these observers took to the streets, as did many of their friends, colleagues and relatives. And then there were all those who are active on Internet social networks, and all those, disappointed, who were expecting a more marked defeat of United Russia.

There are many young people, much more disrespectful than their elders, who bring a new style, a different relationship with authority.

There are very great numbers of new people, who had never up to that point set foot in any demonstration. And some, among these beginners, found themselves for the first time in a police cell, waiting for 48 hours to appear in court, in police stations that were absolutely not prepared to detain so many people, crowded together, without food. And finally seeing themselves sentenced to be detained for up to 15 days in prison! And to judge by accounts coming from behind prison walls, instead of being intimidated and apologising, these beginners started hunger strikes and radicalized. And once released, they took to the streets again.

Indignation with fraud, with the brutality and cynicism of the fraud, anger at being dispossessed of their vote, solidarity with those who were wrongfully arrested simply for having wanted to express peacefully their rejection of rigged elections – those are the ingredients of the mobilization

which is now snowballing.

With, moreover, the support of opinion makers who are popular in their domain. Among them, there is a bit of everything: journalists, singers and other artists, columnists (including society columnists). That is also a sign, when these people openly start criticizing: is street protest becoming fashionable? (It was up to that point the exclusive realm of “losers” or “idiots”).

All the more so as, for once (this had not happened since Perestroika), events are taking place in the capital: it is Moscow, the overfed bourgeois Moscow, the privileged Moscow, which is setting the example. The media (apart from the two official television channels) cannot ignore such massive demonstrations in Moscow. The entire country watches attentively what is happening there, and follows in its footsteps. On December 10 a national day of protest against fraud has been prepared all over the country.

The parliamentary opposition parties play supporting roles, jump on board the moving train (and even then, not all of them and not in all the regions, and to a greater or lesser degree). People organize above all by themselves, through social networks and the Internet. Or else they use events organized by the political parties, but in order to completely take them over.

A word in particular on the liberal Right (represented by Boris Nemtsov, Ilya Yashin and Garry Kasparov, who are presented by the French press as the figureheads of the mobilization). Firstly, the mobilization is completely spontaneous and “from below”, without recognized leaders, and especially without party affiliation, neither to the parties of the official opposition (represented in the federal Duma), nor to those of the unofficial opposition. At most we can speak of sympathy towards this or that opinion leader (in particular the blogger already mentioned, Alexeĭ Navalny). But no party, no organization – political or social – can claim to be organizing the present wave of anger, even less to represent it. However, that is precisely what some people are

busy doing, particularly the stars of the political show referred to above, who lead anti-Putin organizations such as Another Russia and Solidarnost. To make such people the spearheads of the present mobilization in Russia is to be profoundly mistaken, it is to confuse the Orange Revolution in Ukraine with the spontaneous movement of revolt, largely self-organized and refusing to be in any way instrumentalised (people want precisely to get their own voices back!) that is developing in Russia today. As proof of the democratic piety of Nemtsov, for example, it is enough to cite the latest scandal to date: on the night of December 8, behind the backs of the official organizers, Nemtsov came to an agreement with the Moscow City Hall to move the big rally on December 10 from Revolution

Square to Bolotnaïa Square (which deserves its name: marshy) – without consulting any of the key people in the mobilization, and while one of the official organizers, Sergueï Udaltsov (Left Front) was lying on a hospital bed after a hunger strike started in prison, and while someone who is highly symbolic of the movement, Alexeï Navalny, was serving his 15 days custodial sentence, following the demonstration on December 5 in Moscow.

Another characteristic should be noted: the rather timid presence of the social movements, and even more so of the trade unions. Here there comes into play the fear of engaging in a fight that is too clearly political and the inflexibility of these movements to open out to causes not directly related

to their primary objective of struggle. But although the social movements as such participate little, most of their activists are present on the ground. In Moscow, for example, Yevgenia Chirikova, leader of the movement in defence of the forest of Khimki (in the suburbs of Moscow) and rising star of the new social movements, is one of the emblematic figures of the mobilization in the capital.

To sum up, it is an atmosphere of street democracy of that is being created, something that has been rather foreign to post-Soviet Russia up to now. It is the awakening of those who refuse to be manipulated in silence. A big test for the durability and the perspectives of this movement will take place tomorrow, December 10, during the national day of protest.

What priorities, tasks and ambitions for the citizens' audit in Europe?

18 February 2012, by **Yorgos Mitralias**

Having said all that, a first fundamental warning note is essential: while being very rich in practical and theoretical lesson, the Ecuadorian experience of a (successful) audit of the national debt cannot be repeated in Europe today. The reason is very simple: outside of an authentically (pre) revolutionary situation, there will never be a European president Rafael Correa to sign decrees facilitating the task of an independent debt audit commission. And in the event of such a pre-revolutionary situation, the question of the debt audit will tend to be eclipsed before the urgency of other tasks.

This first observation is rich in very practical lessons. Initially, it helps us locate with more precision the ambitions and the mission of the campaigns for the audit of the public debt emerging in Europe. Indeed, the “objective” impossibility of having a “European Correa”, results in the impossibility of the independent audits

penetrating state secrecy concerning debt, i.e. having access to all the documents necessary to identify the illegitimate (and scandalous) part of this debt. At a time of the diktats of the supranational Troika, when the bourgeoisie violates its own Constitution and empties its parliamentary system of almost all democratic content (see the case of Greece which is very far from constituting an exception to the rule), it would be illusory and also naive to believe that the invocation of democratic rights alone could force the guards of the capitalist temple to open their files to facilitate the realization of an audit of (their) national debt.

However, the difficulties of the European debt audit are not summarized only in the active obstruction of the authorities of the country in question. Actually, it is from now on the Holy Alliance of the International Monetary Fund (IMF),

the European Central Bank (ECB) and the European Commission, supported by all the European chancelleries, which prohibits by all means or at least makes very difficult the realization of any full debt audit because it considers it - rightly moreover - as a veritable crime of lèse-majesté. The practical consequences are obvious: to conclude a full and detailed citizens' audit of the national debt in Europe is now practically almost impossible. This truth must be allowed, explained and stated openly because if not harsh reality will take vengeance on unfounded illusions, by quickly causing the discouragement of the activists if they become aware that they are pursuing a chimera.

However, this objective impossibility in the long term of carrying out an integral citizens' debt audit does not mean it is impossible to translate the “philosophy” of this audit into a powerful mass movement. Moreover,

only the development of such a powerful movement could create a relationship capable of breaking the resistance to such an audit.

To undertake - and advance as far as possible - an audit of the debt first of all means to publicly pose the question of its transparency and its democratic management. This has the almost immediate consequence of demystifying this debt in the eyes of the citizens who have been educated not to concern themselves with affairs which come within the province of the "experts" and the governors, not to exert their democratic right of control of the acts of the "authorities". It is a task which the campaigns for debt audit must assume in all priority if they want to accustom society to the idea (A) that it should not let others decide in its place, and (b) that it must take its destiny in its hands.

Is the audit the business of the experts only?

The indispensable condition to undertake and advance the debt audit successfully, to make it fulfil its highly educational mission towards society, is that it is not, from its beginning, the business of experts alone, even of left or radical experts. Indeed, considering the impossibility of collaboration from governments and the state, it is only a mobilized society and the "anonymous" citizens in the ministries, public services and the municipalities, the enterprises, faculties and offices who can inform the commission and its experts of the existence of illegitimate and scandalous debts, and who can provide confidential documents and direct the audit correctly. All in all, without collaboration or better, without the active participation of these "anonymous" persons having a direct knowledge of the scandals, the audit either will not exist, or will be condemned in advance to general information without ever being able to enter the subject of the illegitimate debts.

Obviously, such an approach to the audit must always take account of the

fact that sooner or later there will be an intervention - even a muscular one - by the state to stop the investigation and to suppress the voices disputing the legitimacy of its debt. This means (A) that we do not maintain illusions on the possible final result of the audit, and (b) that we prepare the activists in the audit campaign, but also the whole of society, for the brutal intervention of those who want to block the investigation.

This realistic approach to the debt audit has the merit of not limiting in advance the field of investigation to the "official" public debt alone. Indeed, from the time we encourage the active participation of the citizens in the audit, we should expect that these citizens and their social movements, trade unions and other networks approach the audit commission (or campaign) to ask for its assistance and expertise to carry out audits of the debts whose existence was previously unknown. And, we must acknowledge it, it is especially the audit of these debts which is the most likely to lead to concrete and politically useful results because it is founded on the irreplaceable contribution of those who bring their knowledge of the area and the documents obtained thanks to their struggles.

Another practical consequence of this "realistic approach" to the debt audit is that the time at the disposal of this audit is not unlimited. In simple words, this means that the work of investigation cannot concern the totality of the debt in question, but that it must - from the beginning - concentrate on the few debts (two or three) which appear most scandalous so that the audit leads as soon as possible to tangible results. Because the credibility gained initially within society by the debt audit campaigns is not eternal, especially in these times of systemic crisis which quickly wears people out. Thus, to renew and keep intact this credibility we quickly need concrete results, however minimal.

The conclusion leaps to the eyes: we cannot have a citizens' debt audit worthy of the name without there being the active and direct participation of a mobilized society, without associating it, on a basis of

total equality, with the social movements, the trade unions and associations of citizens of any kind who want to fight against the debt and for its audit. This being said, the presence of workers and other citizens mobilized in the campaigns for the audit of the public debt cannot be limited to this "utilitarian" role. Being confronted with a cataclysmic crisis of capitalism and its political regime which forces, at least in some countries, a large majority of the citizens to radicalize and seek radical solutions, we must finally raise the question of the real finality of the audit of the debt, i.e. what is for or better, what it should be for.

Here, under the current conditions of systemic crisis and class struggle, our answer must be categorical: it is not the citizens who must put themselves at the service of the audit, but it is the audit which must be used for the struggles of resistance and emancipation of the citizens. The debt audit is not an end in itself, it is only an instrument, a means to serve the struggle for the emancipation of employees and all citizens subjected to capitalist oppression.

So this must be the mission, the very first priority, the task, the ultimate goal and even the *raison d'être* of such a campaign: the encouragement in deeds of the mobilisation of the masses of citizens in anti-systemic revolt through the generalization of the audits undertaken by themselves, where they live, work, consume, study, care, breathe, communicate, express themselves, or spend their leisure or personal time.

Then, while respecting the autonomy of the social movements which are, in the last analysis, alone able to choose their objectives and their forms of struggle, the watchwords of such an approach can be only: "Let us ourselves control those who control us! Let us ourselves open their account books! Let us take our destinies in hand!"

But what does this "encouragement in deeds of the mobilisation of the masses of citizens in revolt" amount to? The answer is obvious: the first thing which this campaign must do is to address itself directly to society to

explain clearly its intentions, the why, how and the final objective of what it wants to do. In other words, to accustom people to the idea that they are able, that they can and that they must be organized to carry out their own audits where they live, work, study and live.

It goes without saying that these rank and file committees of citizens enjoy a total independence in relation to the debt audit commission while joining it within the framework of the campaign. Here obviously, the key question of the autonomy of the social movements arises, which continues to pose problem for all the formations of the left. The debate around this question is practically as old as the workers' movement and we would not like to repeat here the arguments of principle in favour of the independence of the social movements. However, not to show a total respect for the autonomy of these movements is to cut off in advance movements such as the Indignad@s, Aganaktismeni or Occupy Wall Street which defend their independence jealously and are characterized by their pronounced mistrust towards the traditional political world.

But, will it be said, what would remain of the relations of an audit commission with its citizens committees if the latter were completely independent of it? The answer is not difficult: this independence does not exclude at all the existence of sustained relations on condition, naturally, that these relations develop voluntarily and on an equal footing. More concretely, the debt audit commission can and must gain the confidence of the citizen committees by showing itself, quite simply, useful to their struggles and daily interventions. How? By offering them assistance (possibly material also), advice, expertise, national and international contacts, but especially its global vision of the situation and its prospects according to the needs for the anti-capitalist struggle.

The debt audit commission can and must also be useful as a major (programmatic and political) reference for all these committees, it must put them in a network, facilitate their coordination, give them the concrete possibility to come into contact with

similar campaigns and movements abroad, make them benefit from their experiences, organize for their activists courses of formal and practical education and so on. That is how a commission can gain the confidence of the committees and develop solid relationships with them, while scrupulously respecting their independence and their autonomy.

It is obvious that the placing of all these committees in a network cannot be done in one day, it takes a certain time. However, the prospect for this network creation must be stated and explained as of the beginning, not only because that would correspond to the truth but also because it is necessary that the action of the committees is impregnated as soon as possible with this tolerant and unitary spirit in the absence of which there is no social movement capable of inspiring the exploited, or disputing the power of the capitalist system. But, there is more: in systemic cases of prolonged crises and exacerbated class confrontations (such as for example in Greece today), we should not lose sight of the potentialities of the dynamics developed by the extension of such committees. Insofar as they are essential to the everyday existence of broad sectors of society, these committees can start to appear as the embryos of an incipient and alternative countervailing power. Although appearing still quite remote, such a prospect is no longer political fiction, if we take account of the gravity of the current systemic crisis, the radicalism of the popular revolt which it generates within our societies. Thus, a congress of all these committees daily exerting their control - and possibly their right of veto - on the management of the various public and private, national and local, authorities would represent an enormous qualitative leap.

The same goes for all the movements which fight for the cancellation of the illegitimate debt. For example, in Greece the "Women's Initiative Against the Debt and Austerity Measures" which, while being completely independent, maintains relations of close cooperation with the campaign for the audit of the public debt, has in a few months been able to develop a solid argument explaining

and "legitimizing" the specificity of the fight of women against the debt and its effects, and has led some exemplary actions. Such movements against the debt - for example against the debt of young people, journalists, artists, the unemployed and so on - can network with each other and enlarge the ranks of the movement of committees.

Unity is strength

In addition, with the widening of the crisis, a debt audit campaign only carried out inside national borders is from now on ever harder to conceive. In relation to a supranational class enemy which is united, tested, coordinated, armed, and above all determined on a long confrontation with the working class, the wage earners and all the oppressed, any attempt at resistance to neoliberal barbarism which remains locked up in its national borders is condemned in advance to failure. This assertion which was valid already yesterday for all social movements, is today even more true for any movement of radical contestation of the debt since the latter and the Draconian austerity policies that it generates are completely internationalized. While the extension of the debt crisis across Europe and its Arab periphery has a positive consequence: it gives birth to resistance whose climax is the creation of debt audit campaigns in a dozen countries.

Meetings, experience sharing, networking, coordination and especially programmatic development and common action of all these movements and campaigns in Europe (but also non-European, it is enough to think of those of Egypt and Tunisia) are currently a priority task for us all. As the saying goes, "United we stand, divided we fall".

In conclusion, we can say that the true *raison d'être* of a debt audit commission or campaign is to contribute to instigate, radicalize and start towards its emancipation a society already in revolt against the austerity plans and the system which generates them. How? By encouraging and, where appropriate by directly helping the self organization of the

citizens in collective struggle against the debt and austerity, so that they

are able to manage democratically their daily lives. All in all, so that they

take their life and their destiny in their hands. No more, no less.

Is the "Green economy" the new Washington consensus?

17 February 2012

The "Green Economy": A New Phase of Capitalist Expansion and Structural Adjustment

Today we are facing great risks – even a civilizational crisis – manifest in many dimensions and exacerbated by unprecedented inequalities. Systems and institutions that sustain life and societies – such as food and energy production, climate, water and biodiversity, even economic and democratic institutions – are under attack or in a state of collapse.

In the 1980s, faced with a crisis of profitability, capitalism launched a massive offensive against workers and peoples, seeking to increase profits by expanding markets and reducing costs through trade and financial liberalization, flexibilisation of labour and privatization of the state sector. This massive – structural adjustment – became known as the Washington Consensus.

Today, faced with an even more complex and deeper crisis, capitalism is launching a fresh attack that combines the old austerity measures of the Washington Consensus – as we are witnessing in Europe – with an offensive to create new sources of profit and growth through the "Green Economy" agenda. Although capitalism has always been based on the exploitation of labour and nature, this latest phase of capitalist

expansion seeks to exploit and profit by putting a price value on the essential life-giving capacities of nature.

The Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit of 1992 institutionalized important bases for international cooperation on sustainable development, such as polluter pays, common but differentiated responsibilities and the precautionary principle. But Rio also institutionalized the concept of "sustainable development" based on unlimited "growth". In 1992, the Rio Conventions acknowledged for the first time the rights of Indigenous communities and their central contributions to the preservation of biodiversity. But, in the same documents, the industrialized countries and corporations were guaranteed intellectual property rights to the seeds and genetic resources they stole throughout centuries of colonial domination.

Twenty years later, in 2012, the plunder continues. The "Green Economy" agenda is an attempt to expand the reach of finance capital and integrate into the market all that remains of nature. It aims to do this by putting a monetary "value" or a "price" on biomass, biodiversity and the functions of the ecosystems – such as storing carbon, pollinating crops, or filtering water – in order to integrate these "services" as tradable units in the financial market.

What and Who is

Behind the Zero Draft?

The "zero draft" outcome document for the Rio +20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development is called "The Future We Want." [1] At the heart of this short text is the section "The green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication."

The zero draft – as with all the vicious attacks of capitalism – is full of generalities to hide the real intentions. The ideological force behind the zero draft is the 2011 UNEP report Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication that shows clearly the ultimate goal of achieving "green capitalism". [2]

At a global scale, the "Green Economy" seeks to disassociate economic growth from environmental deterioration through a three-dimensional capitalism that includes physical capital, human capital, and natural capital (rivers, wetlands, forests, coral reefs, biological diversity and other elements). For the "Green Economy," the food crisis, the climate crisis and the energy crisis share a common characteristic: the failed allocation of capital. As a result, they try to treat nature as capital – "natural capital." The "Green Economy" considers it essential to put a price on the free services that plants, animals and ecosystems offer to humanity in the name of "conserving" biodiversity, water purification, pollination of plants, the protection of coral reefs and regulation of the climate. For the

"Green Economy," it is necessary to identify the specific functions of ecosystems and biodiversity and assign them a monetary value, evaluate their current status, set a limit after which they will cease to provide services, and concretize in economic terms the cost of their conservation in order to develop a market for each particular environmental service. For the "Green Economy," the instruments of the market are powerful tools for managing the "economic invisibility of nature."

The main targets of the "Green Economy" are the developing countries, where there is the richest biodiversity. The zero draft even acknowledges that a new round of "structural adjustments" will be necessary: "developing countries are facing great challenges in eradicating poverty and sustaining growth, and a transition to a green economy will require structural adjustments which may involve additional costs to their economies..."

But the "Green Economy" is not a fiction of the future: it is already here. As the zero draft states, "We support policy frameworks and market instruments that effectively slow, halt and reverse deforestation and forest degradation". This is referring to REDD (Reducing Emissions through Deforestation and Forest

Degradation), an initiative of the UNFCCC which consists of isolating and measuring the capacity of forests to capture and store carbon dioxide in order to issue certificates for greenhouse gas emission reductions that can be commercialized and acquired by companies in developed countries that cannot meet their emission reduction commitments.

We have already seen that the market for carbon credits based on forests will lead to: a) noncompliance with effective emission reduction commitments by developed countries; b) the bulk of resources being appropriated by intermediaries and financial entities and rarely benefitting countries, Indigenous peoples and forests themselves; c) the generation of speculative bubbles based on the sale and purchase of said certificates; and d) the establishment of new property rights over the capacity of forests to capture carbon dioxide, which will clash with the sovereign rights of States and the Indigenous peoples that live in forests.

The postulates promoted under the "Green Economy" are wrong. The current environmental and climate crisis is not a simple market failure. The solution is not to put a price on nature. Nature is not a form of capital. It is wrong to say that we only value that which has a price, an owner, and brings profits. The market

mechanisms that permit exchange among human beings and nations have proven incapable of contributing to an equitable distribution of wealth. The main challenge for the eradication of poverty is not to grow forever, but to achieve an equitable distribution of the wealth that is possible under the limits of the Earth system. In a world in which 1% of the population controls 50% of the wealth of the planet, it will not be possible to eradicate poverty or restore harmony with nature.

The "Green Economy" agenda is a cynical and opportunistic manipulation of the ecological and social crises. Rather than addressing the real structural causes of inequality and injustices, capital is using "green" language to launch an aggressive new round of expansion. Corporations and the financial sector need governments to institutionalize the new rules of the "Green Economy" to guarantee them against risks and to create the institutional framework for the financialization of nature. Many governments are willing partners in this project as they believe it will stimulate a new phase of growth and accumulation.

Indeed, this "Green Economy" is the new Washington Consensus which is to be launched at Rio+20 as the next stage of capitalism to recover lost growth and profits. This is definitely not the future that WE want.

Eleftherotipia's Workers are back with their own newspaper !

16 February 2012, by Moissis Litsis

From Wednesday, Feb. 15th, kiosks all over the country are displaying one more newspaper next to the usual ones, a newspaper written by its own workers. This is a newspaper which not only aims at bringing the fight of Eleftherotipia's workers to the fore, but also seeks to be a newspaper giving real information, especially at such critical times for Greece.

The 800 men and women workers at the firm H.K. Tegopoulos, which edits the Eleftherotipia newspaper, from journalists to technician staff, from cleaners to clerks and caretakers, have gone on continuous strike since 2011, Dec. 22th as their employer stopped paying their salaries in August 2011

Eleftherotipia workers, seeing that their employer has requested application of section nr. 99 of the Bankruptcy Act, in order to protect himself against his creditors, i.e. in reality his workers to whom he owes a total of approximately 7 million euro in unpaid salaries (!) have decided to have their own newspaper published, at the same time as continuing

mobilisations and taking legal action. A newspaper distributed by news agencies all over the country, at the price of 1 euro (against the usual 1.30 euro for the other newspapers), in order to provide financial support to the strike fund.

As they haven't been paid for the last seven months, the female and male workers at Eleftherotypia are being subsided by a solidarity movement from various collectivities or even isolated citizens who donate money or make donations in kind (foodstuffs, blankets, etc.). By publishing their own newspaper and thanks to the money collected through its sales, they will be able to support their strike financially without any kind of mediation. In other words, they are making progress towards some kind of self-management.

The newspaper has been produced in a friendly workshop, in an ambiance that is reminiscent of clandestine newspaper editing, since the management, as soon as they found out that the journalists were going ahead with their publishing enterprise, first cut off the heating, then the system used by the sub-editors to write their articles, and last, shut down the workshop itself, even

though access to the newspaper's offices still remains free for the time being. Worker's Eleftherotypia was printed at printing works that do not belong to the company, with the support of the press workers' unions, because the staff of its own printing works felt reluctant to occupy their work place.

The management, afraid of the possible impact of the self-managed publication of the newspaper, have threatened to take legal action; they are using intimidation by threatening to fire the editorial committee who were democratically elected by the general meeting of strikers.

However, Greek public opinion, and not only Eleftherotypia readers, had been eagerly waiting for its publication - we were overwhelmed by messages cheering the journalists for publishing the newspaper themselves - since dictatorship of the markets is coupled with media dictatorship that makes Greek reality difficult to read and interpret. Had it not been for the general consensus that was maintained by most media in 2010, based on the argument that there was no alternative to Papandreou government signing the first Memorandum, whose patent failure has now been acknowledged by everyone, we might have seen the

Greek people rising up much earlier in order to overturn a policy that has proven disastrous for all Europe.

The case of Eleftherotypia is not unique. Tens of private sector enterprises have long ceased paying their employees, and their stockholder have virtually abandoned them waiting for better times... In the press, the situation is even worse. Because of the crisis, the banks have stopped lending to companies while employers refuse to pay for it out of their pockets and choose to call on section 99 - at least 100 listed on the stock exchange companies have already done so - trying to save time in view of a possible bankruptcy of Greece and a probable exit of the euro zone.

Eleftherotypia was created in 1975 as "its sub-editors' newspaper" during the period of radicalization that followed the fall of dictatorship in 1974. Today, in times marked by the new "dictatorship of international creditors", Eleftherotypia's women and men workers have the ambition to become the bright example of a totally different way of information, resisting against "terror" from the employers as well as the press lords, who would not like at all to see workers take in their hands the fate of information.

The roots of the world economic crisis

15 February 2012, by **François Chesnais**

In Europe, the attention of workers and young people is concentrated, understandably, on the consequences of "the end of the road" and of "everyone for themselves" of the European bourgeoisies. The political crisis of the European Union and the euro zone and the pussyfooting of the European Central bank (ECB) concerning direct financing of the countries that are in the most difficulty are the most conspicuous expressions. The other side of the coin is the reinforcement of austerity policies and the accelerated

installation of all-encompassing security measures from which no country escapes. However, the European situation cannot be understood independently of that of the world economy taken as a whole. UNCTAD wrote right at the beginning of its report in September 2011 that "the extent of economic integration and interdependence in the world today is unprecedented" [3]. That represents unquestionable intellectual progress, from which many commentators and even left activists could draw useful inspiration. The

field of the crisis is that of the "world market that has been constituted", about which Marx speaks very early on in his economic writings [4]. Today, since the reintegration of China and the full incorporation of India into the world capitalist economy, the world market is experiencing a degree of density of relations of interconnection and speed of interactions that was previously unknown. It is within this framework that the most essential questions - over-accumulation and overproduction, the colossal power of financial institutions, inter-capitalist

competition - must be approached.

No “end of the crisis” is in sight

In the current economic language of Keynesian inspiration, the formula “way out of the crisis” indicates the moment when investment and employment start up again. In Marxist terms, it is the moment when the production of value and surplus value, through hiring workers and putting them to work and through the sale of commodities that makes it possible for them to be appropriated by capital, rest again on an accumulation of new means of equipment, on the creation of new production capacities. Very rare are the economies which are inserted in relations of interdependence but which continue, like China, to enjoy a certain autonomy, and where the way out of the crisis is conceivable on the level of the economy of the nation-state. All the others are inserted in relations of interdependence in which the completion of the cycle of capital - M-C-P-C'-M' - by a large number of companies, in any case all the big ones, is done abroad; the biggest groups simply relocate the whole cycle to part of their subsidiary companies.

This is what constitutes the significance of the impasse that we saw at the time of the last G20 (in Cannes, November 2011). More than four years after the beginning of the crisis (August 2007) and more than three years after the convulsions caused by the bankruptcy of the Lehman Brothers bank (September 2008), the overall situation is marked by the inability of “capital” - governments, central banks, the IMF and the private centres of the centralization and of the power of capital taken collectively - to find, for the moment at least, the means of creating a dynamic of the kind that is necessary on the level of the world economy, or at least of very large sectors of it. The crisis of the euro zone and its impact on an opaque and vulnerable financial system are one of the expressions of this. This inability is not synonymous with political passivity. It means simply that the action of the bourgeoisie is driven

more and more completely by the sole aim of preserving its class domination in its most naked form. In terms of what affects in an immediate and direct way workers in Europe, the capitalist decision-making centres are actively seeking solutions which would protect the banks, which would avoid the large-scale financial shock that Italy or Spain defaulting and the collapse of the euro would represent, and which would more than ever make the popular classes bear the full weight of the crisis. Witness the arrival at the head of the Greek and Italian governments, within a few days of each other, of representatives of finance capital, named directly by it, at the cost of some “distortions of democratic procedure”. Witness especially the different versions of a project of authoritative “governance” which are under discussion within the euro zone. This project has political implications that are all the more serious for workers because it goes hand in hand with a hardening of the pro-cyclical character of policies of privatization and austerity, and contributes to the new recession which is underway.

On the other side of the North Atlantic, the incessant appeals to the European leaders from Barack Obama and the Treasury Secretary, Tim Geithner, urging them to provide a political answer to the crisis of the euro as quickly as possible, expresses the fact that “the American motor”, as the journalists call it, has broken down. The macro-economic functioning of the US economy was built almost entirely after 1998 (the aftershock of the Asian crisis) on the forced indebtedness of households, small and medium-sized enterprises and local government authorities. This “mode of growth” is deeply anchored. It has reinforced so strongly the operation of mechanisms of unequal distribution of revenues (the slogan of Occupy Wall Street (OWS), “we are the 99 per cent”, is an expression of the yawning gap between the very, very high incomes and those of the remainder of Americans) that the only perspective to which the leaders are really clinging is that of the - distant - moment when people will be able to, or will absolutely have to, get into debt again. The “irreconcilable” disagreements between Democrats

and Republicans relate to two interconnected questions: how best to reduce the indebtedness of the Federal state, from this point of view? And can and must the state become even more indebted in order to achieve this goal? This inability to conceive of any other “mode of growth” is the expression of the almost intact economic and political power of finance and of the politico-financial oligarchy of the one per cent (see the graph on the evolution of income in the United States, which highlights the growth of the degree of monopolization by the one per cent; source: *The Economist*, October 26, 2011; Congressional Budget Office). The OWS movement is a first sign of cracks in this domination, but as long as a world earthquake that also involves the United States does not occur, American economic policy is reduced to injections of money by the central bank (the FED), in a word to the operation of the money-making machine, without anyone knowing how long that can last.



China and India can help, as they did in 2009, to limit the contraction of production and trade. China in particular will continue, but with more difficulty than before, to establish a floor for the contraction of the world economy. It is from the full integration of India and China into the world economy that the qualitative leap in the dimensions of the industrial reserve army at the disposal of world capitalism as a whole came. In a complementary way, it is in China that there are some of the most important sources of over-accumulation and overproduction. The scissors effect between the drop in the GDP of the “old” industrial capitalist countries and the rise of the “big emerging economies” has often been underlined. The crisis has also accelerated the end of the period of world hegemony of the United States; economic, financial and monetary hegemony since the 1930s, unchallenged military hegemony as from 1992. Nevertheless China is in no way capable of taking over from the United States as the hegemonic power.

The novelty of the major policy issue of the period

The purpose of this article is to bring out the roots and the nature of capitalist crises, which are particularly salient in the present crisis, and to locate this crisis in the “long history”. The present crisis broke out at the end of a very long phase (more than fifty years) of almost uninterrupted accumulation, the only phase of this duration in the entire history of capitalism. The crisis can last for years, even for a whole decade, because its substratum is a particularly high over-accumulation of production capacities and because it has generated an excrescence of fictitious capital of an amount that is also without precedent. On the other side, the very difficult situation of workers everywhere in the world, differentiated though it is from one continent and even from one country to another, as a result of their former historical trajectories, results from the strong position that capital has acquired thanks to the globalization of the industrial reserve army, as a result of the extension to China of the liberalization of exchanges and direct investment.

Although there is not a “way out of crisis” for capital in the foreseeable future, in a complementary and antagonistic way the future of workers and young people depends very largely, if not entirely, on their ability to open up their own political spaces and “breathing spaces”, starting from a dynamic of which from now on only they can be the driving force. We are in a world situation where what has become decisive is the ability of movements, having appeared without advance notice, to organize themselves in such away as to generate a “self-perpetuating” dynamic and to do so even in the absence of a clear and well-defined political solution in the short term. That is what is being expressed in Tunisia, in Greece and in Egypt; but also in the United States with the Occupy Wall Street movement, in the particular national context of the leading capitalist power in the world

and of a continental geographical space. The most useful thing that political militants can do is to help those who are the actors of these movements to face the obstacles, many and varied, which movements having this potential encounter, and to defend in these movements the idea that in the last resort the crucial questions are: “who controls social production, with what aim, according to what priorities and how can this social control be built politically?”. That could be the meaning of the terms “transitional” process and demands today. Some people will tell me that it always been that way. For a very great number of militants, put in the terms which have just been used, such an appreciation is largely, if not completely, new.

Valorisation, “endless and unlimited”, of capital as the motor force of accumulation

Before coming back to the crisis that began in 2007, it is necessary to clarify the mechanisms of capitalist accumulation. Let us look for a moment at the theory of accumulation over a long period. Its function is to help clarify, starting from a precise understanding of the mechanisms of capitalist production, the nature of crises and to locate each great crisis in world social and political history. As Paul Mattick writes, commenting on a remark of Engels, “every real crisis can only be understood in connection with social development as a whole” [5]. The extent and the specific features of the great crises result from the means to which capital, understood as including the governments of the most important capitalist countries, has resorted during the previous period, in order to “go beyond the limits which are inherent to it” before seeing “the same barriers drawing themselves up before it on an even more imposing scale”. Crises break out at the moment when capital is again “caught up with” by its

contradictions, confronted with the barriers which it creates for itself. The greater these means have been, the longer the period during which the means of surpassing the crisis have achieved their goal, the more the revelation of over-accumulation has been put off, the greater will be the crisis and the longer and more difficult will be the search for new means of “going beyond the inherent limits”. It is in this way that history invades the theory of crises.

Each generation reads and re-reads Marx. It does so both to follow the historical evolution and to take account of the experience of theoretical dead ends against which it has run up. For many decades, it was the problematic of the development of the productive forces in its various alternatives which dominated, with the memories of the theories of progress it could still represent. Today, the Marx whom we need to read again as militant-researchers is the one who helps us to understand what the seizure of power by finance - M, money in all its brutality -, the Marx who writes in the Manuscripts of 1857-58 (the *Grundrisse*) that “capital inasmuch as it represents the universal form of wealth - money -, is the limitless and measureless tendency to surpass its own limits” [6]. Or who writes in *Capital* that the “circulation of money as capital possesses its goal in itself; because it is only by this constantly renewed movement that value continues to be valorised. Thus the movement of capital has no limit.” [7] During the twentieth century capital demonstrated, even more than at the moment when Marx was studying it, a profound degree of indifference as to the social use of the commodities produced or the finality of investments.

For the last thirty years, “abstract wealth” has increasingly taken the form of masses of money-capital - masses in search of valorisation, deposited in institutions - big banks, insurance companies, pension funds and hedge funds - whose “trade” is to develop their assets in a purely financial way, without leaving the sphere of the markets in financial assets and in fictitious credits “derived” from them, without passing

through the sphere of production. Whereas shares and debt bonds - public, of companies or of households - are only "advance payment", rights to appropriate part of value and surplus value, immense concentrations of money-capital use the "shortened cycle A-A'" which represents the supreme expression of what Marx calls the fetishism of money. Expressed through increasingly abstract, fictitious, "notional" money shapes (the term used by the economists of finance), the indifference to the consequences of endless and limitless valorisation of capital impregnates economics and politics, even in "times of peace".

The major features of capital-bearer of interest underlined by Marx - "externality to production" and conviction that "interest represents the fruit, properly so-called, of capital, the first thing, the profit from an enterprise appearing as a simple accessory and additive, which is added during the process of reproduction" - set the capitalist leaders against the whole of society, distribution (the one per cent against the 99 per cent of OWS) being only the most easily understandable expression of much more profound processes. At the top of the big financial groups, those that are called "mainly industrial" as well as all the others, there is a quasi complete fusion between "capital-property" and "capital-function" as identified by Marx in order to partly counterpose them. The "era of the managers" has given way to a new era when there is an almost complete identity of views between shareholders and managers. For a capital where finance is in command, the continuation of "endless and limitless" valorisation must be carried out all the more pitilessly because the system is in crisis. The "advance payments" on production, whose appropriation in the form of dividends or of interests is threatened, attains amounts which have never been so high since the 1920s. That is why, whether we are talking about workers whom capital still manages to employ given the situation of overproduction, about the basic resources which are becoming increasingly rare or about taking a position faced with climate change and its foreseeable consequences, the reflex which wins

out within capital taken as a whole is the exploitation of the "two sources from which comes all wealth, the land and the worker" [8] ; exploitation without limits, until there is nothing left to exploit, whatever the consequences. In this article, it is not possible to extend the analysis to ecological questions and their interaction with the movement of accumulation and its contradictions. The crisis has made the interactions still closer, as the last report of the International Energy Agency (IEA) shows [9].

Centralization and concentration of capital and intensification of inter-capitalist competition

The idea associated with the expression "the masters of the world", that of a planetary company in the style of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, has just been consolidated by the publication by three researchers of the Department of Management, Technology and Economics (D-MTEC) of the ETHZ in Zurich of a statistical and mathematical study ("The Network of Global Corporate Control") which is very thorough on the financial interconnections between the biggest banks and transnational corporations [10]. Another article would be necessary in order to examine the methodology, the source data and the conclusions of this study. It is ambitious, the implications of its results are important, but these results need to be cross-referenced with other facts. How should we interpret the classification of five French financial groups (including Axa in fourth place and Société Générale in twenty-fourth) among the first fifty world groups defined by the number of their links, characterized as being of "control" with other banks and companies? How should we reconcile this information with the need to bail them out? Doesn't the density of financial interconnections express especially flows of financial

transactions of which the groups in question are the intermediaries, those with the greatest number of links having only the status of nodes in the system, and not that of centralizers of value and surplus value? [11]

The publicity given to this study makes it necessary to make two series of theoretical observations, which are moreover essential to the comprehension of the world situation. The processes of liberalization and privatization have strongly reinforced the mechanisms of centralization and concentration of capital, on both the national and transnational levels. These processes have concerned the "South" as much as the "North". In given sectors of the countries known as "emerging" - banks and financial services, agribusiness, mines and basic metals -, we have seen centralization and concentration of capital and its expansion towards adjoining countries. In Brazil and Argentina for example, the formation of powerful "modern" oligarchies has proceeded hand in hand with strong endogenous processes of financialised accumulation and the advantageous exploitation of "comparative advantages" which correspond to the needs for raw materials of this world accumulation, of which China has become the pivot. Oligopolies competing with their North Americans or Australian homologues in the extraction and transformation of metals and in agribusiness have been constituted there, in particular in Brazil. Because of globalization, the interconnections between banks and between them and companies engaged in industrial production and services have become more strongly transnational than they have ever been. The field of action of what Lenin called "intertwining" is that of the economy. But that does not mean that capitalism is monolithic. Intertwining does not suppress competition between oligopolies, which have rediscovered during the crisis national features and behaviour that is not very co-operative. What prevails today in the world arena is what Marx calls "the anarchy of production", whose pivot is competition, even though monopoly and oligopoly are the absolutely dominant shape of the "many capitals" which decline capital taken as a totality. States, or more

exactly certain states, those which still have the means, are more and more the active agents of this competition. The only country in continental Europe which still has the means is Germany. That is not the case for France, where the bourgeoisie has once more become financial and rentier, has allowed a process of deindustrialization to take place, has locked itself into the energy choice of nuclear power and is now seeing its "national champions" sink one after another. That is the source of interrogations on the meaning of the presence of French banks among the fifty "masters of the world".

The other main remark concerning the centralization-concentration of capital brings us back to the guiding theme of our argument. The reason for which the coercive laws of competition undo the tendencies going in the direction of agreement between world oligopolies is that capital, however centralized it is, does not however have the power to free itself from the contradictions which are consubstantial to it, any more than it can block the moment when it finds itself face to face with its "inherent limits".

Capital "caught up with" by the methods chosen for forty years to surmount the inherent barriers

The crisis that began in August 2007 thus appears at the end of a very long phase (more than fifty years) of almost uninterrupted accumulation. The bourgeoisies benefitted fully from the policies implemented, in the first place by the USSR and later by China (in particular in Indonesia between 1960 and 1965) to contain the anticapitalist and anti-imperialist social revolution everywhere where it appeared and to break the revolutionary anti-bureaucratic movement, from Berlin in 1953 and Budapest in 1956 to Tiananmen in 1989. Capital - the governments of the principal capitalist

countries in changing relations with the private centres of centralization of capital and the power of finance and big industry - was able to find, starting from 1978-1980, responses to the barriers resulting from its internal contradictions. In 1973-75, the period known in France as "the thirty glorious years" - the foundation of which, we can never repeat this often enough, was the immense destruction of productive capital and means of transport and communication caused by the successive effects of the crisis of the 1930s and the Second World War - ended with the recession. Capital found itself confronted again with its internal contradictions, in the form of what some people have called "the structural crisis of capitalism".

Three successive answers - which were not substituted for but added to each other - made it possible for capital to prolong accumulation by more than thirty years. There was initially, after a final attempt at a "Keynesian stimulus" in 1975-77, the adoption from 1978 of the neo-conservative policies of liberalization and deregulation from which the globalization of capital has resulted. The "third industrial revolution" of information communication and technology is closely associated with this. Even though ICT was a factor which contributed to ensuring success, this response was above all political. It rested on the very strong ideological-theoretical base constructed by Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman [12]. Then, starting from the first half of the 1990s, the second response was the establishment of the "mode of growth" described above, in which private and, to a lesser extent, public debt became the central support of accumulation. The third answer was the incorporation in stages of China into the mechanisms of world accumulation, of which its entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) was the crowning point.

Taking the idea that capital sees "the same barriers rising up before it on an even more imposing scale" as the guiding theme of our argument, it is by starting from these three series of factors that the extent and the probable duration of the great crisis that began in August 2007 can be

appreciated.

Over-accumulation as fundamental substratum of the crisis

The exceptional length of the phase of accumulation - which experienced moments of deceleration and a growing number of warnings (including in particular the Asian crisis of 1998), but not a real caesura - and the integration at the end of the period of China into the world market make over-accumulation the most important barrier which capital again finds before it. Over and above the specific features of each great crisis, over-accumulation of capital is the primary reason. Capital's insatiable thirst for surplus value and the fact that capital "wants production to be exclusively for it, whereas the means of production should be used for a continuous extension of social life" [13] explains why crises are always basically crises of over-accumulation of production capacities, whose corollary is the overproduction of commodities. This over-accumulation and overproduction is "relative" [14], the point of reference being the minimum rate of profit at which capitalists continue to invest and produce. The scale of over-accumulation today is due to the fact that the specific conditions which led to the crisis, and which are prolonging it, masked for a long time the underlying movement of falling profit. What we have here is quite different from the classical euphoria of booms at the end of a cycle. Even less is it ascribable to the actions of traders. There has been, in the case of the United States and of the countries of the EU, a deactivation through the level of indebtedness, still high, made possible by "financial innovations", of warning mechanisms. In the case of China, it is political reasons which prevent the fall in the rate of profit, which is absolutely identifiable, from slowing down the accumulation of new production capacities, far less stopping it.

In every great crisis, the over-

accumulation of production capacities and the overproduction of goods are those of specific sectors and industries. The crisis then causes by contagion a state of overproduction in other industries and sectors. The relevant level of analysis is sectoral and often national. From the moment when the financial crisis started, in 2007 and 2008, to undermine the mechanisms of indebtedness and cause the contraction of credit (the "credit crunch"), certain sectors (real estate and the building industry in the United States, in Ireland, in Spain and in the United Kingdom) and certain industries (the car industry in the United States and in all the countries in Europe which produce cars) proved to be in a state of very great surplus production capacity. Today still, we find stocks of homes and offices that are neither sold, nor even rented. In the electrical and engineering industries, the surplus production capacities of the weakest oligopolistic rivals (Renault, Peugeot, FIAT, Goodyear) and their suppliers were absorbed by the closing of sites and the destruction or delocalization of machinery. World surplus production capacities remain intact.

Evolution of the share of the components of Chinese GDP



The lines correspond to Private consumption, investment, exports, imports in that order

At the end of 2008 and in 2009, there was destruction of "physical capital", of production capacities, in Europe and in the United States. Its cleansing effects in view of a "recovery" were countered by the continuation of accumulation in China. From 2000 to 2010, the growth of China's gross fixed investment was on average 13.3 per cent per annum, so that the share of fixed investment in GDP climbed from 34 per cent to 46 per cent (see the graph Evolution of the share of the components of Chinese GDP, source:

Letter n° 75, June 2010, of the Head Office of the Treasury, Ministry of Economy, France). This expansion of investment is less due to the rise in governmental expenditure, with which the other members of the G20 were very happy in 2009, than the result of profound mechanisms which reveal uncontrolled processes, and even a headlong forward flight. The first of these mechanisms concern the fierce competition between provinces and big municipalities to invest in manufacturing industries and the building industry [15]. It is a question of prestige, but also of the occult revenues of sections of the Chinese "bureaucracy-bourgeoisie". The ministries in Beijing recognize the existence of very great surplus production capacities in heavy industry [16]. Why then not intervene? Because the political and social relations proper to China have trapped the Chinese Communist Party in the vice of the following situation. As a condition of minimal social peace (see the increasing number of strikes), the leadership of the CCP has promised the people "growth". It has even calculated a growth rate of 7 to 8 per cent as being the minimum that is compatible with political stability. But growth cannot rest on consumption by the majority of the population. The CCP can neither concede to workers political conditions that would enable them to fight for rises in wages, nor establish public services (health, university education, old-age pensions), since, in the Chinese political trajectory of which Tiananmen was the major event, that would be interpreted as a sign of weakening of its political influence. The 7 to 8 per cent growth rate was thus obtained by an irrational expansion of the sole sector of investment goods (sector I in the schemas of expanded reproduction). The fall between 2000 and 2010 of the share of private consumption in GDP, from 46 per cent to 34 per cent, gives a dimension of the impasse which the CCP has created for itself. The trade surplus of China is "only" between 5 and 7 per cent of GDP, but its sales account for almost 10 per cent of world exports. Exports are the safety valve of Chinese over-accumulation, the channel by which it creates a depressive effect on all the countries

which suffer competition from Chinese products. This depressive effect creates a backlash, so that China has experienced since the summer a fall in its exports. The destruction of production capacities in manufacturing industry in many countries which do not get much attention (textiles in Morocco, Egypt and Tunisia for example), but also in others which get more and where this destruction has been the counterpart of the export of products resulting from the technological industries of ferrous and non-ferrous metals and from agribusiness (the case of Brazil), is an expression of the weight that Chinese overproduction exercises on the world market as a whole.

The crushing weight of fictitious capital and the almost intact power of the banks

We come to finance and to fictitious capital, which I have often dealt with in my articles since 2007, and in my book *Les dettes illicites* [17]. Indeed, the second specific feature of the current crisis is to have broken out at the end of less than twenty years of recourse to debt as the major form of support for demand in the OECD countries. This process comprised an extraordinarily high level of creation of financial instruments having the character of "advance payment" for present and future production. These "advance payments" had an increasingly narrow base. Alongside the dividends on shares and the interest on government debt, we saw the growth of consumer credit and mortgage credit which are direct deductions from wages. The weight of capital is exerted on workers both in their workplace and as debtors of the banks. It is therefore increasingly fragile "advance payments" which have been used as a basis for an accumulation (this word is used for want of anything better) of credits that are "fictitious to the nth degree". The crisis of subprime mortgage credits has temporarily destroyed a small portion of them. But even the

central banks do not really know their astronomical amount, nor the exact circuits and the holders, because of the shadow banking system. We have only rather vague estimates. What we have called financialisation has been the quasi-structural plunge into a situation described by Marx in a little commented passage of the first chapter of Volume II of Capital. He notes there that, as bizarre as it might seem in the epoch of the full triumph of industrial capital, "the process of capitalist production appears simply as (...) a necessary evil for the purpose of money-making", so that "all nations characterised by the capitalist mode of production are periodically seized by fits of giddiness in which they try to accomplish the money-making without the mediation of the production process" [18]. Starting in the 1980s, in the central capitalist countries, with the United States in the lead, the "giddiness" began to take on a structural character. Finance has given to this giddiness, the fruit of fetishism of money, very strong politico-institutional foundations. It has managed to make "the power of finance", and the fetishised beliefs that accompany it, rest on a degree of globalization, in particular financial, that is new in the history of capitalism.

The keystone of this power is the national debt of the OECD countries. In the first period, in the 1980s, debt servicing carried out, starting from taxation, an immense transfer of value and surplus value towards investment funds and banks, through the channel of the debt of the Third World of course, but on a much higher scale through the channel of the debt of the advanced capitalist countries. This transfer is one of the causes of the profound change in the distribution of income between capital and labour. The more capital strengthened its social and political power, the more enterprises, holders of financial assets and the greatest inheritances were able to act politically to free themselves from the weight of taxation. The necessity for governments to have recourse to borrowing constantly increased. From the first Clinton government, we begin no longer to be dealing in the United States with monetary policies which accommodate to finance, but with the beginning of the "capture of the state"

by the big banks [19]. The nomination of Robert Rubin, president of Goldman Sachs, represented one moment of this capture. The crisis of September 2008, with Henry Paulson holding the levers of command, completed the process. It opened the current phase, which is marked by the following central contradiction, which corresponds to support for growth over such a long period. We will become more and more acutely aware of it in the coming months! The "markets", in other words the banks and financial investors, dictate the conduct of Western governments, the axis being, as we see so clearly in Greece, the defence of the economic and political interests and policies of creditors, whatever the consequences in terms of social suffering. But because of the quantity and the conditions of accumulation of fictitious credit, a major financial crisis can break out at any moment, without anyone being able to predict either the moment or the point of rupture of the financial system.

The reasons go beyond those linked to the operations of the banks on which stress is generally laid: the nature of fictitious credits; the very incomplete purging of the toxic debts of 2007, in particular not by the European banks; the dimension of what is called "the leverage effect" [20], etc. Capital is suffering from an acute lack of surplus value, which the overexploitation of workers who are employed, thanks to the industrial reserve army, as well as the plundering of the resources of the planet, compensates for less and less. If the mass of capital engaged in the extraction of surplus value stagnates or contracts, there comes a moment when no increase in the rate of exploitation can counter the effects. What happens when the power of the banks is almost intact and there exists more than ever a mass, very great and very vulnerable, of "advance payment" on production, as well as fictitious derivative products and other credits "to the nth degree"? On a foundation of chronic over-accumulation and overproduction, the consequences are, among others, the following.

The first consequence is to lead to economic and monetary policies which pursue two objectives with contradictory effects. It is necessary,

by the method of privatizations, to open up to capital socially protected sectors, in order to offer opportunities for profit while waiting, or to put it better, while hoping, that the overall conditions of "a way out of crisis" are recreated. The projects of privatization and of "opening up to competition" that have been programmed are thus implemented, and new ones are conceived. But it is also necessary to try to prevent an economic collapse happening, which would necessarily see the destruction of a part of fictitious capital, to start with that having the form of credits, of debt bonds. However, the effect of the pro-cyclical character (of accentuating the recession) of the first objective is to reinforce this possibility.

There is, in parallel, the contradiction, a bit similar but nevertheless different, which sees the "markets" imposing austerity policies through fear of a default of payment and making this default increasingly inevitable due simply to the mechanical fact of the accentuated contraction of economic activity.

The other major consequence of the power of finance and of the ability that it has to limit very strongly the destruction of fictitious capital in the OECD countries is the existence of this enormous mass of money - a fictitious mass with real effects - which moves continuously from one form of placement to another, creating very great financial instability, generating bubbles which can be so many catalysts for a generalized crisis and often sharpening, in particular in the case of speculation on food products, social conflicts.

The extreme weakness of the tools of economic policy

The last great feature of the crisis is that it broke out and developed at a moment when policies of liberalization and deregulation had destroyed the geopolitical and macro-social conditions in which anti-cyclical instruments with a certain

effectiveness had previously been developed. For capital the policies of liberalization have their “good side”, but they have also a “bad side”. Liberalization put workers in competition with each other from country to country and continent to continent as never before. It opened the way to deregulation and privatizations. The positions of Labour as against Capital have been very greatly weakened, eliminating up until now the “fear of the masses” as a pivot of control of capital. The other side of the coin consists of this deficiency of anti-cyclical instruments, no substitute having been found for those of Keynesianism, as well as by the intense competition between the major protagonists of the globalized capitalist economy, in a phase where the hegemonic power in place has lost all the means of its hegemony, except for military means, of which it can use only a small portion, and in this case, for the moment, without much success.

The only instrument available is the emission of currency, the creation of money for governments (take the case of the United States, where the FED buys part of the Treasury bills), but especially for the benefit of the banks. This terrain is also the only one where a form of international cooperation functions. The announcement on November 30, 2011 of the creation of liquidities in dollars, by mutual agreement between central banks, on

the initiative of the FED, to counter the drying up of the refinancing of European banks by their US counterparts, is the last example to date.

Resist and take to the sea where we have never yet navigated

I have explained, as have others, [21] the absolute need, impossible to circumvent, to prepare, in the perspective of a major financial crash, to seize the banks. This article requires a broader conclusion. No “way out of the crisis” is taking shape for capital on a world level, in the foreseeable future. For the great singular centres of valorisation of capital that the European industrial groups represent, it is time to migrate towards more clement skies, towards economies which combine a high rate of exploitation and an important domestic market. The conditions of social reproduction of the popular classes are threatened. The increase in poverty and the creeping impoverishment which affects increasingly broad layers of workers are the expression of this. The United Kingdom was one of the laboratories for this, even before the crisis broke out [22]. The longer this lasts, the more distant will become any other

future for workers than precariousness and a fall in their standard of living.

The key words which are constantly harped on are “adaptation”, “necessary sacrifice”. From time to time, trade unions can, in order to maintain a minimum of legitimacy call days of action. The one day strike (November 30) of public sector workers in the United Kingdom is the most recent example. But as I wrote above, the future of workers and young people depends very largely, if not entirely, on their ability to open up their own political spaces and “breathing spaces”, starting from dynamics of which from now on only they can be the motor force. Another world is doubtless possible, but it can only take shape in so far as action opens the road to thought, which, more than ever, can only be collective. This is a complete reversal in relation to periods when there existed, at least apparently, pre-established plans of the future society, whether they were those of certain utopian socialists or the Comintern of Dimitrov [23].

English navigators forged in the sixteenth century the beautiful expression “uncharted waters”, seas where no one had ever yet sailed, for which there was no chart. That is our case today.

Written at the beginning of December 2011

From Lula to Dilma

14 February 2012, by **Michael Löwy**

Social apartheid

This inequality is especially striking in the countryside, where a handful of big rural proprietors monopolise most of the land, while the mass of peasants have only minuscule holdings, or no land at all. With the development of capitalism in the countryside, and the replacement of crop or livestock by

extensive cattle ranching “for export for the MacDonald chain” the peasants are expelled from the land by the “pistoleiros”, the hired thugs of the landowners.

With the worsening of living conditions in the rural areas, notably in the north east, millions of peasants have flooded to the big cities, huge megapolises like Rio de Janeiro and

Sao Paulo. Some find work in industry or services, but the unemployment rate is very high and the majority remain excluded and trapped in the favelas, the miserable shanty towns which surround the cities, where there is neither running water nor electricity nor sewers and where survival is only possible through marginal activities (street trade, prostitution) or criminality, like the

drugs trade.

There is also a veritable social apartheid in the country, reflected in the big cities by a physical separation of the houses and neighbourhoods of the rich, surrounded by walls and electrified barbed wire, and guarded by private security units who carefully control all the entries and exits. A social discrimination which also has an implicit racial dimension, to the extent that the great majority of the poor are black or mixed race.

After twenty years of military dictatorship, Brazil has since 1985 experienced a return to democracy and to civilian governments. This undeniable political progress has not been followed by any effective social change. All governments, of the right or of the centre, in office since 1985 have only applied neoliberal "structural adjustment" policies demanded by the International Monetary Fund: privatisation of public services, reduction of health and education expenditure, and above all payment of the foreign debt, which has reached astronomical levels and which absorbs all of the exports surplus. This was notably the case with the centre right government led for eight years by Fernando Henrique Cardoso, a former left intellectual converted to the neoliberal religion who became one of the best pupils of the IMF in Latin America. Thanks to Cardoso, the last existing public companies like the electricity company were privatised and sold to foreign companies; since the latter did not wish to make the necessary investment there are periodic sudden power cuts which plunge towns or entire regions into darkness.

However democratisation allowed the rise across the country of a new worker, peasant and popular movement, which organised the struggle of the poor for their rights and against the neoliberal policies of the government. Part of this movement was the new class conscious and independent trades unionism which emerged at the end of the 1970s, and which organised in the CUT union federation around ten million employees; the MST movement of landless rural workers, which mobilised peasants for agrarian

reform, taking the initiative to occupy lands which were not being used by the big landowners; finally, the Workers' Party (PT).

The long march of the PT

How did the PT emerge? From 1978, the year of big workers strikes in the suburbs of Sao Paulo, several "authentic" trade union leaders began to agitate for the idea of an autonomous workers' party, probably starting from a reflection on the experience of the strike itself, of its confrontation with the military police apparatus of the state, and for some a first balance sheet of the social struggles in the recent history of the country (since 1964).

In October 1979 the first National Meeting of the PT took place in São Bernardo do Campo, a proletarian bastion of the metalworkers union, led by Luis Inacio da Silva, "Lula"; this was concretely the moment of foundation of the new party, and the election of its first provisional leadership took place. A brief political statement was approved at this conference, clearly affirming the goal of the party: "The PT fights so that economic and political power is directly exercised by the workers. It is the only way of ending exploitation and oppression". At the same time, the document called on "all democratic forces to constitute a broad mass front against the dictatorial regime". The PT thus proposed to fight for the formation of a single union federation, stressing that "its construction necessitates the overthrow of the current trade union structure subjected to the states".

In April-May 1980 the big strike of 250,000 metal workers broke out in São Bernardo; following the police and military intervention "the arrest of main leaders, military intervention in the union" the movement was stopped; but it revealed, by its exceptional length (42 days) and its capacity of mass organisation (daily meetings of tens of thousands of workers), the surprising force of the new unionism. In May-June of this year a new National Conference of the

PT met, with delegates from 22 states in Brazil, representing approximately 30,000 members of the party. A Manifesto and a Programme were approved, defining the PT as "the real political expression of all those exploited by the capitalist system" and as a mass, broad, open, democratic party. However, the PT was still far from having an elaborated "doctrine": many programmatic questions and definitions were deliberately left open to allow a broader debate and a progressive "ripening" of the activists as a whole.

The PT candidate, Luis Inacio Lula da Silva, lost the presidential elections of 1988, 1994 and 1998, beaten by the candidates of the neoliberal bourgeoisie (Collor de Mello and then F.H. Cardoso). Despite these defeats, the PT won several important municipalities in the country, and even some state governments. And it implemented, in the localities it managed, forms of rank and file democracy, like the famous "participatory budget". However there was a certain institutionalisation of the party and starting from the mid 1990s, an increasingly strong tendency, in the majority current of the PT leadership, to pragmatism and political and programmatic "deradicalisation". The socialist programme of 1990 was put on the back burner, and increasingly the party leadership rallied to social democracy, despite the opposition of the left currents in the Party "notably "Socialist Democracy" the tendency of the PT affiliated to the Fourth International, led by Raul Pont, the mayor of Porto Alegre.

The electoral defeats convinced Lula to change his strategy. In 2002 he imposed on a reticent PT a broad policy of alliances with bourgeois force, taking as his candidate for vice-president an industrialist, José Alencar, leader of the right wing Liberal Party. He was elected at the second round, with more than 61% of the vote, against José Serra, the candidate of the PSDB supported by Fernando Henrique Cardoso.

A social liberal government

The victory of Lula in the elections of 2002 provoked an immense hope of change among the poor and the oppressed in Brazil. However, five years later the balance sheet was globally negative; rather than a big change there was continuity with the previous economic policies. Certainly, not everything in Lula's period of office was negative: by the programme "Zero Hunger" and other social programmes, billions of dollars were distributed to the poorest, in various forms of aid (food aid, scholarships and so on). But in terms of neoliberal macroeconomic policies, he did not emerge from the framework established by his predecessors. The symbol of this continuity was the president of the all powerful Central Bank, which determines the country's interest rates and monetary policy; Henrique Meirelles, a senator from Cardoso's PSDB party and former director of the Boston Bank. Trusted by international financial capital, he enjoyed the unfailing support of the president, who imposed a "provisional measure" giving him the status of Minister and thus immunity certain judicial investigations for financial irregularities.

This neoliberal orthodoxy was reflected in practice by subordination to the demands of the IMF, the establishment of a huge tax surplus allowing payment of the external and internal debt, high interest rates to attract investment, neoliberal pensions reform, massive subsidies of export oriented agro-business rather than family agriculture, the opening of the country to Monsanto GMOs. Without speaking of various corruption scandals involving members of the government and the leaders or deputies of the PT.

We can define the policy of Lula and his government as social liberal. Social liberalism is not identical to neoliberalism as such: it maintains certain social concerns, attempts to improve a little the fate of the poorest and it prefers dialogue with the social movements "or to co-opt them" rather than to repress them. But on

the essential bases of economic policy, there is no substantial difference. And on certain questions "it was capable of imposing neoliberal policies that the right had not succeeded in pushing through because of PT opposition! One example illustrates the logic of social liberalism: 10 % of the budget for agricultural aid was distributed to millions of families involved in small peasant production "while 90 % went to a handful of big proprietors in capitalist agro-business, producing for export.

In 2003, three deputies and the senator Heloísa Helena were expelled from the PT for voting against the neoliberal pensions reform. They then formed a new Party, the P-SOL, Party of Socialism and Liberty, which identified with the PT's original socialist and democratic programme. It received support from groups of Trotskyist origin, Christian socialist activists (like Plínio de Arruda Sampaio, one of the best known Christian intellectuals in the country, author of an agrarian reform programme supported by the movement of the landless), and a number of well known trades unionists and left intellectuals, like Carlos Nelson Coutinho, Leandro Konder, Chico de Oliveira and Ricardo Antunes.

The PSOL activists mostly originated from left PT currents, but most of the supporters of these tendencies "notably the great majority of the "Socialist Democracy" current "remained in the PT and in government. They were up to a point critical of Lula's neoliberal policies, but remained prisoners of governmental solidarity.

To say that the Lula government is social-liberal means also that it did not remedy the "social fracture", the gigantic gap which separates the oligarchy from the masses in Brazil. The president and most of the ministers, whether from the PT or the other parties of the majority coalition, shared the conviction that there is no alternative economic policy to the neoliberal status quo, the "Washington Consensus".

Certainly at the beginning some ministers or higher civil servants had followed a more autonomous orientation based on national development, the internal market, the defence of Brazilian industry; however the main representative of this "developmentist" tendency, Carlos Lessa, director the important National Bank for Social and Economic Development (BNDES), was forced to resign.

Criticism by Frei Betto

Among those who left the government was the liberation theologian Frei Betto, who was one of the leaders of the Zero Hunger programme. He has drawn a lucid balance sheet of his experience and the government itself in his book "A mosca azul. Reflexão sobre o poder" (Editora Rocco, Rio de Janeiro 2006).

A Dominican priest who was imprisoned for five years (1969-1974) under the military dictatorship for having aided revolutionary militants to hide, and a personal friend of Lula since the late 1970s, Frei Betto was a faithful "fellow traveller" of the PT, ironically stating that he did not join it because he did not want the parties to reproduce the vices of the churches. During its early years, he says the PT had an ideological coherence and ethical principles, as well as a strategic objective: the workers to power, the construction of socialism. Imperceptibly, through the 1990s, these original colours lost their shine and the PT became distanced both from the social movements and its initial objectives, privileging instead the positions of institutional power. Betto attributes this change in grand part to the fall of the Berlin wall, which obscured the utopian horizon of the PT and its socialist perspective. This is the only argument in the book which strikes me as debatable: in fact most PT cadres, in various ways, did not have the countries of so called "actually existing socialism" as their central ideological reference point. And in 1990, one year after the fall of the wall the PT Congress approved a document reaffirming in a more categorical form the anti-capitalist and

socialist commitment of the Party.

In any case, Frei Betto was greatly enthused by Lula's victory in the 2002 elections, and agreed to be one of the leaders of the "Zero Hunger" programme. Two years later he resigned, believing that the government had essentially become the hostage of the dominant élites and financial markets. Betto notes that while in the trade unions Lula had shown he could insert himself in an impure structure without being co-opted, he had not succeeded in doing so in government. Shortly after Betto's departure from government the scandal of hidden payments of the PT broke out : "a small leading nucleus of the PT had succeeded in a few years in doing what the right had not been able to do over several decades, even in the darkest years of the dictatorship: demoralising the left". But for Betto, worse still than the corruption was seeing the fear faced with the diktats of the financial market vanquish hope.

What happened? The thirst for power and the adaptation to the religion of the market led to the loss of strategic perspective and the collapse of the historic horizon. Power ceased to be an instrument of social change and became "as predicted by Robert Michels in his classic study on mass parties" an end in itself. As Betto observes "Politics becomes hateful when it loses the utopian horizon".

Lula mark 2 and Dilma Rousseff

What happened in the 2006 presidential elections? Popular disappointment prevented Lula from being elected in the first round. In the second round he steered his discourse to the left, denouncing his opponent's privatisation plans. . He was comfortably re-elected at the second round, with around 61 % of the vote against 39 % for the candidate of the right wing coalition (PSDB-PFL), Geraldo Alckmin.

Rather than popular enthusiasm, Lula's success resulted from the fear aroused by Alckmin, a representative of the hard neoliberal right, close to Opus Dei) known for his pro US positions, his repressive policy of

criminalisation of social movements and his support for a policy of privatisation of public enterprises .

The candidate for the PSOL, Heloísa Helena (linked to the Fourth International) supported by a left coalition including the Brazilian Communist Party and the Trotskyist PSTU, received just under 7 % of the vote (more than six million votes) at the 2006 elections and the party elected three deputies to the federal parliament. A limited but not insignificant result. The PSOL refused to take a position in the second round, but some of its leaders called for a vote for Lula to block Alckmin. A critical vote for Lula was also the position of the MST, despite its deep disappointment with this government, which has not kept its promise to carry out real agrarian reform.

Lula's second term was no different from the first. A single solution was proposed to Brazil's social problems: the growth of GDP. Thus a Growth Pact was approved, with the objective of reviving production through state aid. Among the left and centre left governments of Latin America, Lula was closest to the most moderate, like Tabaré Vazquez in Uruguay and Michèle Bachelet in Chile, rather than the anti-imperialist pole represented by Hugo Chavez (Venezuela), Evo Morales (Bolivia) or Rafael Correa (Ecuador) "even if he refused, unlike the Chilean president, to sign a Free Trade Agreement with the USA. There was however a certain rapprochement with the Bush government around the project of replacing oil by "biofuels": ethanol, produced from cane alcohol. It was a dangerous project, replacing the cultivation of food products by that of sugar cane, with disastrous consequences for the food supply of the popular layers.

During this new government "where ministers from right or centre parties occupied a still more determinant place than before" there was a still greater distancing from the social movements. Not only the radical left (PSOL, PSTU) and the MST, but also the trade union left and other social movements protested against the government's policies.

One of the great limits of ten years of the Lula government has been the absence of a real agrarian reform, a central question for the future of Brazilian society. According to the MST, the Lula government which had committed itself to distributing land to 450,000 peasant families has only done so for 150,000. Millions of landless rural workers await a real reform which attacks the insolent privileges of the rural capitalist oligarchy, in increasingly precarious social conditions.

Forbidden by the Constitution from seeking a third term, Lula chose as his dauphin Dilma Rousseff, who became in 2011 the PT presidential candidate. Active in the armed resistance to the dictatorship "she organised some bank expropriations - she was arrested, tortured and imprisoned for three years. After her release, she became an effective and pragmatic "left technocrat", first joining the Democratic Labour Party of Leonel Brizola, and then joining the PT in 2000. Elected in the second round against Alckmin, she then succeeded Lula. The PSOL presented as candidate Plínio de Arruda Sampaio, who waged a good campaign but only gained 1% of the vote.

The policy of the Dilma government "shaken by several corruption scandals concerning various ministers, notably from the centre right PMDB, who have had to resign" has hardly been different from that of its predecessor. The social programmes are maintained and even strengthened, but the general orientation remains that of the Washington Consensus". Some control over capital flows has been established and the situation of the economy has stabilised. The demands of the landless for debt forgiveness have been totally rejected. The most disappointing aspect is probably the ecological balance sheet: a law on forests which favours impunity for the destroyers of Amazonia; and the decision to build the hydro-electric dam at Belo Monte, leading to the expulsion of the inhabitants and the destruction of a vast wooded area. The movements in defence of human rights have obtained a concession, in the form of the Truth Commission, which has presented a report on the crimes

of the dictatorship, but without punishment of those responsible, covered by the military auto-amnesty of 1979.

As in previous years, only the mobilisation "from below" of the workers, landless and homeless, youth

and women, environmentalists and indigenous peoples, can change the relationship of social and political forces.

Hundreds of thousands of protesters opposed repression at Syntagma Square - we will continue the fight until we drive them out!

13 February 2012, by Antarsya

The government met the demonstrators with the same force and fury as Mubarak in Tahrir Square one year ago, as he tried to evict the protesters. It will get exactly the same answer, and the one it deserves! We will not work with the wages of the memorandum and appeal to all to take the path of the steel workers and to start a continuous strike until we drive them all out!

The police were determined to expel and to hunt thousands of angry demonstrators, who stood for hours at Syntagma Square, with tons of chemicals, which even elicited damage to buildings and arson.

The mass popular movement can take the initiative and overthrow the ruling coalition government of the black front. It can abolish the credit agreement and the rule of the anti-

social slaughter-house of government - EU - IMF - capital.

The opposing camp, the political staff of banks, of the capitalists' association SEV and the multinational corporations, the parties PASOK, the right-wing "New Democracy", the far-right LAOS, DISY (an ultra-neoliberal split from ND), are further subjected to vibration. The bourgeois parties are in a decomposition process, the memorandum eats its children.

The ideological terror, mendacity, the vulgar blackmail and the state - police repression of a fascist type are the key instruments to impose the "rescue" measures.

Today's massive police operation, which early aimed at the dissolution of the demonstration at Syntagma Square, before the meeting began, the hours of brutal attacks on the

demonstrators bring the true intentions of the government against the "enemy nation" to the fore. This coincides with the attempt to create a "forbidden zone" for demonstrations at Syntagma Square.

The militant demonstrators and the rebellious young people are resisting for hours, still remain with undaunted courage on the streets, entered into the cordoned-off zone in front of the parliament and continue to demonstrate, despite all the terror police in front of parliament.

Such militant minded people are not to be defeated. The fight does not end today. It will continue tomorrow and every day until the final victory.

The victory is difficult, but it will be ours!

Sunday, February 12, 2012, 22.45.

Restructure, audit or cancel the debt?

12 February 2012, by OKDE-Spartakos

The first demand has been proposed by Synaspismos (and so by the majority of SYRIZA) and, in a more conservative version, by the Democratic Left of Fotis Kouvelis. The concept has been to negotiate with creditors in order to cancel part of the

debt, so that it can be bearable again. Nevertheless, this is more or less what is actually happening right now, on the government's and EU's own initiative, as it is obvious that the whole debt could never be paid off. So, creditors prefer to lose part of

their profits than lose everything, simultaneously being compensated by new, more benevolent conditions (low wages, deregulated labour relations etc) for future investments. This kind of negotiation is an explicitly bourgeois project, and it is the only

real process of “restructuring”. That is why the demand to restructure the debt has soon lost its credibility as a component of an answer in favor of working people and it has led left parties that stood for it in a rather embarrassing situation.

More discussion is needed about the demand for an audit commission that would check the debt contracts and prove that part of it is odious. The basic aim of this committee would be to reveal to the masses that the debt they are meant to pay is not fair or legitimate. Based on this concept, one and a half year ago some Greek economists, along with politicians coming from the left and former PASOK members (as the deputy Sofia Sakorafa) published a call for an Audit Commission (ELE). This proposal is today much less timely than it used to be, and it seems that few things have been done towards the direction of actually forming such a committee. However, it is still important to put its main idea under scrutiny.

A process of debt audit could be combined with the demand to cancel the debt or not, but it is not equivalent to that. In our case, the original call for ELE left this question open. However, this has not been the only problem about this initiative. The big issue is which viewpoint does one start from: to check if the debt is legitimate according to the national and international legislation and, if so, cancel a part of it? Or, on the contrary, to refuse that the working class pays it, whether it is formally legitimate or not?

There are 5 main reasons why we oppose the Greek Audit Commission (ELE) as being the sharp point of an anticapitalist response to the crisis, promoting the demand to cancel the debt instead:

1. The Greek public debt is not of the same type as the Third World’s debt. Economically, it is not imposed by foreign imperialist countries that plunder the country and profit by unequal exchange due to the different rate of productivity, even if unequal exchange does play some role indeed. The debt is product of a development strategy deliberately selected by the Greek bourgeois class, which is also

imperialist. This extra-aggressive strategy, that included excessive public borrowing and economic invasion in Eastern Europe with the help of the euro currency, has failed and is being punished in the inter-capitalist competition regarding who is to suffer the burden of the crisis. Moreover, it is getting ever more obvious that the debt crisis in Greece is not due to some kind of national specificity, but it is part of an international structural capitalist crisis, a crisis of over-accumulation in the final analysis, that hits firstly (but not exclusively) weak links like Greece. Technically, there are nearly no contracts for a commission to check, because public borrowing, unlike what usually happens in the Third World, has been carried out via government bonds, not loans (at least before the memorandum). So, if there is something to reveal regarding the debt this is not scandals, but its deeply exploitative structure as a mechanism that accentuates class exploitation. However, this task is not basically accomplished by auditing, but by marxist political analysis, political work and, of course, struggle.

2. It is not really a problem to convince workers and the oppressed in Greece that the debt is not fair. Most of them are already convinced about that, and the unwillingness of left parties to speak about cancellation so as not to “frighten” the mass has proved to be unreasonably conservative, if not mere hypocritical. It is indicative that the demand to immediately stop paying off the debt and fight for its cancellation (except for the part held by pension funds) has been one of the first to be voted for in the massive popular assembly of Syntagma square during the “indignants” movement, even if by that time it has been put forward only by the “far left” (most visibly by ANTARSYA). According to recent polls, more than one third of the so called public opinion stands for the cancellation of the public debt, a rate that is obviously much higher with respect to the working class. This is a very important percentage, given the brutal propaganda launched by Greek governments and the mass media which never stop shouting that a default on the public debt would mean total disaster for all of us. It is also

telling that the Communist Party, after having discredited the demand for more than a year, has now changed its stance and adopted it, without frightening the masses or losing its popularity for that reason. The real problem is not to explain to the masses that they shouldn’t pay the debt (they already know), but to indicate how they can actually avoid paying it, how they can impose its cancellation and how they can defend themselves against the national and international bourgeois class’s vindictiveness in case they manage to do so.

Of course things are quite different regarding an international solidarity campaign. In this case it may indeed be crucial to prove how exploitative and disastrous for Greek workers the debt is, in order to convince people that are not immediately affected by it. The point is not to blame militants who sign for the Audit Commission from abroad – from their point of view this could be a legitimate token of solidarity. Nevertheless, as a tactic in the interior of the country an auditing demand would be a clear step backwards.

3. Greece is a completely different case from Ecuador, which is usually referred to as a successful example of audit. In Ecuador it has been a progressive government itself to take the initiative to form an audit commission and check contracts concerning public borrowing – in that case there actually were such contracts. That government has been the outcome of mass movements and working class struggles, even if it simultaneously showed off their limits. On the contrary, both the present “national unity” government and the previous PASOK government in Greece are the main instruments of the brutal war that the bourgeois class has declared against working people. They are acting on behalf of the capital with no intention to accept the slightest class compromise. And it is well known that both the Greek state and Greek capitalists are determined to guarantee that creditors will not lose their money. A default on the debt would threaten their whole development strategy, as well as their own immediate interests, as many of them are creditors themselves (more

than one third of the debt is held by Greek banks). So, it is absurd to ask such a government to give its permission, or "requisite powers" as is the expression used in the original call for the Audit Commission, to check debt contracts. Such a demand would imply the idea that we have a common problem with the government, something like a "national question" or a national struggle against foreign "plunderers" of our land. On the contrary, our main task right now is to prove to the revolting masses that "our" government is not just to be blamed for being too much submissive to foreign bankers, but that it is an active key factor of the attack we are suffering and it should be overthrown. Besides, the amount of money that the Correa government refused to pay as being odious represents less than 5% of the current Greek government debt. The international financial system could tolerate that loss, but it can't do so in the case of Greece.

If Ecuador is not a proper example to compare Greece with, let alone how this is true about another example sometimes mentioned by economists of ELE: Russia in 1998. It is not really necessary to explain that in that case the cancellation of a part of the public debt was a 100% bourgeois project, concerning the inter-imperialist rivalries and not people's demands or interests of the Russian working class.

4. ELE is meant to be a purely scientific and technocratic committee supported by well-known "personalities". It is not a campaign or a front and it doesn't include trade unions, political or social organizations ("it will be independent of political parties", as stated in the call). A first objection would be that

this is quite a bureaucratic concept, as it is not clear how this committee of experts would be controlled by the mass movement. However, this is not the only problem. The political framework of ELE, as expressed in the original call, is not "neutral" at all, as hoped by the most radical of its co-signers. It is rather clearly social-democratic. Namely, its primary goal is to find a way out of the crisis without breaking with the rules of capitalism, but by managing the system. According to the call:

"The aim of the Commission will be to ascertain why public debt was incurred, the terms on which it was contracted, and the uses to which borrowed funds were put. On the basis of these considerations, the Commission will make appropriate recommendations to deal with debt, including debt that is shown to be illegal, illegitimate or odious. The purpose of the Commission will be to help Greece take all necessary measures to confront the burden of debt".

This kind of rhetoric reinforces a deceitful patriotism, seeking for a way to "save Greece", not the working class and the deprived and oppressed strata. Nevertheless, in the crisis there is no way to save Greece in general, because there is no way to save both capitalists and workers. Just one of them can be saved and in total expense of the other.

5. Technical arguments about the debt are useful, but secondary and complementary. Basically, the Greek public debt crisis is not a technical problem or a question of logistics, but a fundamental class dilemma: who pays for the crisis? Who takes the burden of the destruction process

triggered by the crisis? The debt that working people and the oppressed are obliged to pay is not unfair because it is violating the legislation, but because it is brutally violating their basic interests and rights. If the discussion is restricted to technical matters, it is obvious that the government and the bourgeois class, with all their specialists, experts, mass media and propaganda apparatuses, will have a clear advantage.

What matters is the political core of the demand to check the debt: the right of the working class to access data concerning state's finances, balance sheets and funds or, in other words, workers' control. We support this demand. But it is exactly a transitional demand, not achievable under the conditions of capitalism and the bourgeois state. And, of course, it is not at all helpful to ask for "requisite powers" by a bourgeois government in order to fight for such a goal.

Our disagreement with both the Audit Commission and the various left debt restructuring programs is strategic, but at the same time it involves our immediate priorities in the mass movement. We should not accept that we are all facing a problem that could be resolved in favor of the nation as a whole, no matter how "progressive" would be the solution promoted. The working class's and the deprived strata's primary task is not to convince the rest of the nation, but to blackmail it with struggles, general strikes, production blockings etc, in order to impose the debt cancellation - whether it is illegal, illegitimate, odious or not. They are not afraid of our arguments. They are afraid of our power to threaten the bourgeois class's domination.

The point of no return

10 February 2012, by **Charles-André Udry**

The recording, under all forms, by police and military forces, of tens of thousands of demonstrators and

oppositionists "every week, every day" in the various towns and villages of the country will lead to

supplementary deaths, tortures and imprisonments if the combat were to stop tomorrow. And if the regime of

the Assad clique remains in place. The terrible human price of this popular struggle is in accordance with the odious and implacable nature of the regime, with which no negotiation is possible and acceptable for the anti-dictatorial fighters.

On February 4, 2012, Khaled al-Arabi, a member of the Arab Human Rights Organisation, said: "The Syrian army bombards with rockets and missiles. It is now perpetrating a bloodbath of a horror never seen until now in the city of Homs..." Radio France Internationale (RFI), said on the same date: "In Homs, nearly 300 people were killed on one day yesterday, Friday February 3, 2012, according to the Syrian National Council (SNC). Even if it is difficult to know with precision what is happening in this country closed to the press and subject to a strict control, the images broadcast by the Arab television chains and the eyewitness statements evoke a growing and blind violence. The witnesses describe a pitiless bombardment, a city transformed into a warzone. No person or neighbourhood has been spared and a veritable bloodbath has been described".

Two elements emerge from the various sources. First the revolt against the dictatorial regime has grown since November 2011. It has reached the most significant urban zones. Then a movement from the periphery towards the centre has emerged and strengthened in recent months. At the social level, the layers who are participating in the mobilisation against the dictatorship – the term revolution should be grasped in this sense – have also broadened. Only the existence of such a "social front" allows understanding of the maintenance and strengthening of an organisation which assures the successive days of mobilisation, the slogans which give their meaning to each "Friday" of struggle against the regime of the Assad clan; the size of the funerals, often placed under the guard of soldiers who have defected, the care administered to hundreds and hundreds of wounded who cannot be cared for in hospitals, since the so called security forces would kidnap, torture and kill them, the establishment of transport and

communications networks in a war context. It is on this social basis that the activities of the local coordination committees rest. The people in revolt receive help from the Syrian Diaspora which disposes of material resources. But the fact that it does not depend on a "foreign" force has strengthened the feeling that it should count on its own forces. Which helps drive the multiple forms of mutual aid and self organisation?

The massacres, tortures of children, rapes, and murders have led, inevitably, to the appearance of forms of self defence. The defections multiply: from the regime's army, those who refuse to be the murderous arm of Assad; those of youths who reject conscription. These soldiers in revolt – known as the Free Syrian Army – dispose of light arms. In this sense, there is not a real militarisation of the anti-dictatorial struggle, even if direct confrontations, relatively limited, have happened and could spread following the massacre committed at Homs. These defections illustrate the failures of the regime. More exactly, faced with the extension and length of the revolt, such a regime cannot avoid the processes of relative autonomisation of its various centres of power; all the more so when it is more than 40 years old. Analogous episodes of struggle in history show that – the more the mobilisation lasts and strengthens and does not fall back – the processes of decision taking become more difficult. This reflects the hesitations of the sectors which are not in the closed circle of the few "families" who monopolise power and all the corrupting privileges which flow from it. An erratic dynamic settles then in the management even of repressive and political operations. And the uncertainties on their economic future worry the layers of traders, retailers, importers and exporters, as well as the milieus linked to tourism. The sanctions increase dependence on Iran; which is not considered as an attractive solution by various fractions of the middle bourgeoisie.

Certainly, the Republican Guard and the Fourth Division of Maher el-Assad (Bashar's brother) are the instruments of terror in the hands of the regime. But why should the regime commit so

much to monitoring and threatening with the Christian and Alawite milieus which constituted (and constitute still) its "official" base? To take the confessional minorities hostage is part of the regime's policy. It does not cease to brandish the threat of a vast settling of accounts – of which the "Sunni" would be the "future masters" – in the event of the fall of the regime and the Assad clan will do all it can – and already has done – so that confessional and community confrontations will happen. That is why it is important for the various forces in this titanic anti-dictatorial struggle to send a message: despite the suffering and humiliations endured, acts of indiscriminate vengeance are excluded from all the options of the forces struggling for the overthrow of the tyrant. It is one of the dimensions of an orientation seeking to broaden the social and political front, to neutralise certain sectors and to weaken the increasingly fragile base of the regime.

The cynicism of the so-called international community is without limits. The media speak constantly of the UN Security Council draft resolutions. Numerous governments cry crocodile tears about the "poor Syrian people" and denounce the "cruel despot" Assad, after having received him in great pomp or appreciated his role in the region, at least as a lesser evil.

The place of Assad's Syria in the "regional arrangement" poses a different problem from that of Gaddafi's Libya. A great part of the diplomatic coming and going hides the difficulty for the various regional and international "actors" – in the current context of socio-economic crisis and globalised disorder specific to a system of political hegemony whose flaws are visible – to define "roads of change" which do not end in a loss of control and centrifugal processes in such a strategic region.

The US is seemingly decided. Seemingly. In fact the irresolution on the written and rewritten resolutions to be presented to the Security Council does not worry them too much. To gain time and give "humanitarian" press conferences

suits the Obama administration perfectly. The fall of Mubarak and the present situation in Egypt have modified the game constructed by the US and Israel, since 1979 at least. The relations between the Lebanon of Hezbollah and Israel are not tranquil, which made Assad's Syria a more "secure" border than that of any new regime. The tensions with Iran are another factor in favour of sticking with the gangster you know — Assad — or better, a revised version of his political-security machine. Which requires time for manoeuvre. Because it should be carried out jointly with

various governments which are new actors in this regional area. Qatar can certainly finance the Muslim Brotherhood in Tunisia and in Egypt; to now add Syria to the list is an extremely delicate political task, even with external supports.

All the more so since Turkey wants its share of the cake and is capable of obtaining it. The Russian regime wants to be sure of keeping its positions (port installations among others), but cannot play an offensive card.

The complex game of interference — which has formed a great part of the history of this region — is today then carried out in a context where the shape of the old jigsaw puzzle is partially being erased, whereas the contours of the new are not yet defined. Hence the importance of contributing political support to the struggle of this people in revolt counting on its own forces as well as on solidarity; and also to oppose all foreign military intervention.

5th of February, 2012

Occupy Nigeria: A general strike against the "Cabalocracy"

9 February 2012, by Paul Fudder

But what set it off?

On Jan 3rd, the Nigerian Government, under President Goodluck Jonathan removed a subsidy for gas, which more than doubles the price at the pump for consumers (from 65 Naira — written N65 — to N141 / liter). Occupy Nigeria started on Jan 2nd, and a General Strike called by the 4-million-strong Nigerian Labor Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUC) kicked off on Jan 9th:

"After exhaustive deliberations and consultations with all sections of the populace, the NLC, TUC and their pro-people allies demand that the Presidency immediately reverses fuel prices to N65. If the Government fails to do so, they direct that indefinite general strikes, mass rallies and street protests be held across the country with effect from Monday 9th January, 2012.

From that Monday, 9th January 2012 date, all offices, oil production centres, air and sea ports, fuel stations, markets, banks, amongst others will be shut down."

http://www.nlcng.org/search_details...

From an American context, the effectiveness of this protest has been amazing to follow. Central Bank Governor, Lamido put the loss incurred during the period of strike at US\$617 million daily. <http://www.thisdaylive.com/articles...> The headlines in the international and industry media tell some of the story:

"Nationwide strikes cause complete shutdown of Nigerian terminals" (Port Technology Intl)

"Maersk says unable ship goods into Nigeria ports" (Reuters)

"Gasoline tankers unable to deliver to Nigeria-sources" (Reuters)

"Strike Grounds Nigeria For The 5th Day!" (The Street Journal)

Saturday's negotiations with the Government ended in deadlock, <http://saharareporters.com/news-pag...> and oil workers prepared to join the strike on Monday, Jan. 16 <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB100....> Afraid of a continuation and escalation of the strike, President Jonathan announced early that morning that he would unilaterally set the regulated price of gas at N97. This figure is still about 50% above the price on Dec. 31, but also much less than the

deregulated market price of N141 that he had imposed Jan. 3. In response, the NLC/TUC have claimed victory and called off all strike and mass protest.

<http://saharareporters.com/news-pag...>

But this struggle seems to be bigger than just the organized labor movement, and Occupy Nigeria activists vow to regroup and continue to push for not only a return to the N65/liter, but also their broader demands for economic reforms. <http://saharareporters.com/news-pag...> For example, the Joint Action Front has committed to "rallying Nigerians to defeat this unpopular imposition, and also ensuring a new political and economic order that will end the era of Privatization, Deregulation, looting and exploitation by the corrupt capitalist ruling cabals and ensure that wealth of the country is judiciously applied to benefit the majority working population (formal and informal sectors) and the poor."

Some context,

money spent on the current subsidy on oil. Second, protesters don't believe that the Government is capable of implementing those sorts of programs without most of the money being lost in corruption, and everyone else being left without. Occupy Nigeria activists say corruption is so rampant, they can't trust the government to carry out what it says it will. In fact, one of the Occupy Nigeria websites — www.theoccupynigeria.com is simply titled "We Don't Trust You".

The practice of siphoning off the public treasury has been honed to a fine art, with critics of the Government arguing that all the money Jonathan says will be saved by ending the subsidy could have been made simply by preventing the well-known graft of what's been termed the cabal of national and international companies and a political class conspiring with them. <http://allafrica.com/stories/201201...> On the political side, the ones that do the bidding of the capitalists, Nigerian governors make an average of 16,000 times the minimum wage that so many workers live on. <http://saharareporters.com/column/m...> This sort of practice makes the Nigerian Government one of the most grossly over-paid in the world.

And then there's the corporate side. One example, involving — not surprisingly — the process of buying refined gasoline back from oil companies, was exposed recently by Wikileaks: <http://theoccupynigeria.com/article...>

"According to the cable, the scandal concerns prices paid by the government for imported fuel, as international fuel traders, taking advantage of massive corruption loopholes in Nigeria, engaged in falsifying the dates of bills of lading to reflect particularly high market prices. By so doing, they overcharged the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) by over \$300 million."

The reality, of course, is that the World Bank and the capitalists behind it have no interest in the redistribution

of money or resources. Founded during the closing act of direct European and American colonial rule in much of the world after WWII, IMF and the World Bank are simply the current manifestation of the same colonial project. In this process, they are counting on the ability of the domestic Nigerian ruling class and it's form of government — what Occupy Nigeria is calling the cabalocracy — to steal from it's own people through all means of corruption and graft, putting the money back into the hands of those who pull the strings of the system. Though he doesn't address the colonial context from which it arose, Pius Adesanmi writes of the Nigerian political system — and the Presidency in particular — as a deadly weapon against the Nigerian people. He outlines the ways it is structured to perpetuate this status quo: <http://saharareporters.com/column/n...>

"Our presidency is an institutionalized travesty of democracy and Federalism. No President, no matter how well-intentioned, can escape the trap of despotism because even the most routine exercise of your constitutional powers, the most mundane performance of your constitutional duties, already makes you a despot in our strange democratic dispensation. It is precisely these immense and unheard-of powers [compared to the checks that Presidents have in other governmental systems] that make the Nigerian presidency extremely dangerous. In the wrong hands, the Nigerian presidency is a deadly weapon. Bad news: the Nigerian presidency has always been in the wrong hands, is currently in the wrong hands, will always be in the wrong hands unless Occupy Nigeria rises up to its historic potential by forcing a fundamental redefinition of the Nigerian project.

One paradox: as omnipotent as the Nigerian presidency is, it is almost the most vulnerable to hijack in the history of modern democracy. Because of the nature of our system and politics, there is no clean and decent way to become the President of Nigeria. You get there through an

accumulation of political and other dubious IOUs to "chieftains", "stakeholders", "elder statesmen", and "business cartels" whose selfish interests and private agendas are always antithetical to the common good.

Every president gets to office neck deep in political and other debts; every president gets to office a peon of the enemies of the Nigerian people; every president gets to office as a mere guarantor of the first function of the Nigerian presidency: the distribution of limitless patronage to the interests who put him there."

Taking the bait?

President Jonathan and the World Bank would have have believe that they will put in place wonderful social programs that would be enable Nigerians to pay market-rates for gasoline and still afford an improved quality of life. Thankfully, there happens to be few people who aren't buying the hype, and are willing to fight over it — well, few million people actually, and that's just in Nigeria!

Finally, the economic policies and planned-corruption implemented in Nigeria by their cabal, on behalf of North American and European capital, also requires the complacency of us folks North America and Europe, especially us white folks. They depend on us believing that corruption and inadequate infrastructure, poverty and crime, social programs that buy luxury for the elite, the informal 'black' market and wide-spread unemployment are all just part of the "developing world"; We're supposed to accept that these things are just part of what happens when an "inferior people" try to enter the "modern world". They rely on our white supremacy, which first makes the people sub-Saharan Africa invisible to our eyes, and second tells us that Nigeria's problems are their own fault! So stay informed, and stand in solidarity with the largest Occupy protests to-date as we bring the fight home to the belly of the beast!!

January 16th, 2012

The Real Ron Paul

9 February 2012, by **Solidarity Steering Committee**

Paul was one of the few congresspeople to vote against the PATRIOT Act. He's also against NAFTA and the World Trade Organization. Paul claims never to have taken government-paid junkets or voted to increase the power of the executive branch. In his weekly columns and on his web site he talks about how much federal legislation favors the wealthy.

Paul ran for president on the Libertarian Party line in 1988 and is running in the Republican primaries in 2012. A number of younger Republicans and independents able to crossover and vote in the Republican primaries see him as a "principled politician." Should working people, antiwar activists and those struggling for social justice vote for Ron Paul? We think that would be a big mistake.

Like many other Libertarians, Ron Paul does not believe in government regulation. It's his view there is no need for government to "level the playing field" and protect vulnerable individuals or groups. For example, he says a person who owns a business should be "free" to run it. If an individual agrees to work for an employer, regardless of the terms, Paul considers this a private matter needing no governmental "interference." Therefore he opposes minimum wages, voted zero funding of OSHA's ergonomics rules and voted No on restricting an employer from interfering in union organizing. He is for right-to-work (for less) legislation. He does not believe there should be laws holding an employer accountable for a violation of civil rights or sexual harassment at the work site.

In *Freedom Under Siege*, Paul discussed sexual harassment at the workplace and remarked: "Employee rights are said to be valid when employers pressure employees into sexual activity. Why don't they quit once the so-called harassment starts?

Obviously the morals of the harasser cannot be defended, but how can the harassee escape some responsibility for the problem? Seeking protection under civil rights legislation is hardly acceptable." (24)

If an employee has a problem with the employer or his management team, he or she is "free" to quit and find another job. This individualistic and abstract vision does not reflect the reality of working people's lives: a job with a living wage and benefits doesn't just grow on trees - it's something you want to keep and make better.

But for Ron Paul it's the right of the owner to "control property and run his or her business as he or she chooses." Of course Paul does cover himself by saying, "If force was clearly used, that's another story, but pressure and submission is hardly an example of a violation of one's employment rights." Ron Paul indicates that he's oblivious to the dynamics of power and control in the workplace or in the larger society, or is a master at covering them up with his rhetoric.

Thus Paul portrays racism as a simple case of what he calls "bigotry." This is a "problem of the heart, and we cannot change people's hearts by passing more laws and regulations." But racism is not equivalent to what is in people's hearts; it is also the institutional structures that perpetuate racial inequality. He feels free to say the Civil Rights Act violates the Constitution because it impedes individual liberties and he votes against renewing the Voting Rights Act.

Congressman Paul cannot even see how the current system provides some children with excellent education and other children "inner city African Americans and Latinos, Native Americans whether in rural or urban areas" education that perpetuates

their feelings of inferiority. For him, "taxes, restrictive regulations, corporate subsidies, racial set-asides, and welfare programs" are the ways "the government plays far too large a role in determining who succeeds and who fails." This is just the "polite" version of the myth of Black mother as the "welfare queen."

Sometimes his hatred for African Americans is out in the open. In analyzing the LA riots at the time of Rodney King's beating, he wrote: "The criminals who terrorize our cities" in riots and on every non-riot day "are not exclusively young black males, but they largely are. As children, they are trained to hate whites, to believe that white oppression is responsible for all black ills, to "fight the power," and to steal and loot as much money from the white enemy as possible." ("Los Angeles Racial Terrorism," Ron Paul Political Report <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2007/...>) He also remarked that "Order was only restore in L.A. when it came time for the blacks to pick up their welfare checks three days after rioting began."

Although now Paul says he did not read his own newsletters, he did not disavow them at the time. In fact, these newsletters earned Ron Paul almost one million dollars a year.

In essence Ron Paul fits the portrait of a rightwing libertarian populist. He's right wing on a number of social issues because he believes people should make individual decisions to remove themselves from positions where they are victimized, without realizing the power dynamics at play. He defends the right of workers to self-organize but balances that with the employers' right to harass and intimidate those who try to organize a union. He tells people who need medical care but don't have coverage to look for charitable institutions to help them.

If he's good at exposing much of the way legislation is written to aid the wealthy, Ron Paul perpetuates myths as well. He claims that the social security system "is broke and broken" and opposes giving benefits "to anyone who has not paid into the system." By that he means undocumented workers "actually they pay into the system but are rarely able to collect. Most frequently those who receive benefits but didn't contribute are the young, the widowed, and the disabled. But the idea behind social security is that the pool of funds is large enough to take care of those who are the most vulnerable.

Despite Ron Paul's comments, and all kinds of other rightwing propaganda, the social security system is not in a crisis. As one of the few mechanisms that bind together the different generations, it remains an efficient symbol of social solidarity. Yet Paul has nothing positive to say about it; instead he undermines it by calling on younger workers to be able "to save and invest" on their own. Realistically, few can.

In general Ron Paul's libertarian creed is one of less governance. There are, however, exceptions to that yardstick:

In the area of reproductive freedom, Paul, who is an OB/GYN doctor, sees the right of the unborn "at the heart of the American ideals of liberty" and who has been the prime sponsor of HR

300, which would "negate the effect of Roe v Wade by removing the ability of federal courts to interfere with state legislation to protect life."

Although he voted against using government funds for the victims of Katrina, he has won billions in special projects for his own congressional district.

In the area of immigration "reform," Paul puts forth a six-point plan: militarize the borders and coastlines, track visa holders and deport all who overstay or violate U.S. law, refuse all requests for amnesty, deny any undocumented access to hospitals, clinics, schools, roads and any social services, end the constitutional right of citizenship to those born in the country pass "true immigration reform" that would apply the same rules and waiting periods across the board.

Instead of understanding that the passage of NAFTA and other corporate globalization policies have undercut the ability of Mexicans and Central Americans to sustain themselves and their families, and thus given rise to a new wave of migration to the United States, instead of understanding that U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East has forced millions from their homes, Ron Paul proposes to "solve" a social problem Washington has created by militarizing the borders. If one understands the problem, the solution is absurd.

Paul was the first presidential candidate to cross the picket line of striking Hollywood writers so that he could appear on ABC's "The View." He follows the "free market" economics of Ludwig von Mises and Milton Friedman, supports "states rights" over federal legislation around workers health and safety, challenges evolutionary theory with discredited "creationism," and, despite his position on militarizing the borders, claims to support civil liberties. He receives prominent billing on rightwing websites that perpetuate conspiracy theories based on ethnicity and was a co-sponsor of the Marriage Protection Act.

Just like a stopped clock, Ron Paul tells time correctly a couple of times a day. As a mainstream politician, he may be refreshing and occasionally on target. But he does not have a political program that is able to solve the war of inequality we face at home and the violent war Washington is perpetuating abroad.

Instead of narrow-minded solutions to today's problems, we need to look for candidates with forward-looking answers. We certainly won't find them within parties that are controlled by the corporate elite. So the candidates of the Democratic and Republican parties talk about "change," but notice how little substance there is.

February 2, 2012

The Aggravating Crisis Cannot be Solved Even with Wen Jiabao's Push for Political Reform

8 February 2012, by Zhang Kai

Wen Jiabao's

Proposal for

Political Reform

On September 14, 2011, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao made a high-profile plea for political reform when he attended the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting of the New Champions, also known as the Summer Davos Forum, in Dalian, a coastal city in northeast China's Liaoning Province. Wen offered his "five points of political reform": 1. ruling the country by law, and ensuring separation of the party and government; 2. promoting social justice, addressing unfair distribution of wages and closing the gap between the rich and the poor; 3. ensuring an impartial and independent judiciary; 4. protecting the democratic rights of the people and expanding grassroots elections; 5. opposing corruption, requiring government officials to make public their financial affairs.

For the past two years, Wen repeated his idea about political restructure in different public events. Wen presented himself as a modest reformist within the Chinese Communist Party, whose position is similar to Zhao Ziyang. In 1989, Zhao, accompanied by Wen, visited the students and protesters on Tiananmen Square. Later Zhao stepped down and Wen disappeared from sight for a long time.

President Hu Jintao's speeches to mark the 30 years of the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone supported Wen, to a certain extent. Hu stressed that China should push for economic, political, cultural and social reforms. On the other hand, the conservative faction of the leadership dismissed any notion of political reform. Wu Bangguo, the chairman of the National People's Congress, advocated the five NOs: "no multi-party election; no diversified guiding principles, no separation of powers, no federal system and no privatization."

Modest reformists such as Zhao and Wen urged resolving the serious tension between the bureaucracy and the people. But it is still extremely difficult to restructure the political system.

The Background of Wen's Speeches

In the absence of political reform, social unrest is everywhere. The Beijing International City Development Institute has recently released China's first Social Stability Risk Assessment Index System Report, at the International City Forum 2011 in Beijing on September 15. Lian Yuming, president of the Institute, warned that because of the incubation period and uncertainty of these risks, crises could be massively spread and magnified if risks are not solved now.

Furthermore, Lian pointed out that the gap between the rich and the impoverished was widening, and the Gini Coefficient exceeded 0.5, seriously challenging social tolerance. Second, social contradictions were increasingly emerging. Third, public security problems were severe, with protests by disgruntled people on the rise. Fourth, the social mentality of resenting the rich, officials and the authorities could result in social crises. Fifth, unconventional security hazards were becoming main threats of society.

Lian also remarked that nine categories of disputes — land disputes, relocation disputes, property disputes, restructuring disputes, medical disputes, labor disputes, pollution disputes, loan disputes, and disputes between locals and foreigners — could easily be transformed into social risks. He examined that these disputes are caused by the complicated and profound roots of economic and social development process.

Civic disputes and social tragedies forced the People's Supreme Court to issue an emergency notice on September 9 that all people's courts should seriously settle the cases and solve the disputes based on law. However, scuffles have continuously broken out between police and protesters. For example, Wukan villagers of Guangdong Province protested against the land grabbing by the local government and a Hong Kong capitalist. Longtou villagers also complained about the illegal land

confiscation by the developers. Irritated by land disputes, Yilong villagers attacked the developer's industrial park. There are many social conflicts yet to be disclosed.

Consequences of Capitalism

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has committed a serious mistake in implementing capitalism with corruption and negligence. The mushrooming growth of factories brought harm not only to people's health but also to the environment. For example, the Dalian PX protest was a public protest up to 80,000 people against a toxic PX (paraxylene) chemical factory built in Dalian city. The government agreed to move the factory out of the city, although the new location of the factory and the date of its move were not announced. More than a thousand people blocked the main road in Gutian county, Fujian Province, to protest the death of tons of fish in the river Min, caused by the discharge of chemical waste.

Worse still are the most destructive and widespread pollutants — tiny particulates widely known as PM 2.5. According to the research of China Environmental Science Institute, cities in the Pearl Delta, Yangtze Delta, Sichuan plain and northeast region are seriously affected by PM 2.5. Air particulates with a diameter of 2.5 microns or less (hence "PM 2.5") have serious health implications. They are small enough to penetrate human lung tissue and can cause asthma, lung cancer and cardiovascular disease. The research states that 58% of cities in China have exceeded five times the standard for PM 2.5 set by the World Health Organization. In 2004, air pollution killed 358,000 people.

Poor Public Health Services

Public health services have become worse. China Central Television reported that hospitals made fivefold profits from the most 20 popular drugs, some even 65-fold. Doctors were involved in sharing the profits.

People's Daily, dated 1 September, reported two cruel medical events. In Wuhan city of Hubei Province, a doctor immediately tore open the stitched wound of a peasant worker once he admitted he did not have enough money. In Anguo-City of Hebei Province, a mentally handicapped street girl was abandoned into the remote area by a hospital. She died soon after. It is not only a question of morality, but also a question of the public health system because of the implementation of a market economy in which profit-making is the first priority.

Moral Decline

Capitalist economy has led to social indifference, moral decline, profit-orientation and selfishness. In Foshan City of Guangdong Province, a two-year-old girl, Yueyue, was knocked down by two cars, but the 18 passengers all turned a blind eye. In Shandong Province, a five-year-old boy was dying due to the collapse of the house, but no one gave him a hand. These events stirred national debates about moral decline. Wen Jiabao criticized the moral decline but the editorial of Guangming Daily refuted the fact. Nonetheless, according to Wen Wei Po dated 23 October, research conducted by the Global Net and Global Public Opinion Research Center found that 86% of respondents thought moral standards have largely declined in today China, and officials, doctors and businessmen were

considered to be the most immoral groups.

Other figures prove that there is widening gap between the rich and the poor in China. The Gini Coefficient has already gone beyond 0.4, the acceptable line. [The Gini coefficient is a number between 0 and 1, mathematically measuring income inequality. In the United States, after taxes, the Gini coefficient hovers around 0.38. Hence inequality in China today is somewhat greater than in the USA.]

According to Wen Wei Po dated 6 December, the gap between the highest income group and the lowest income group in the city is also enlarging. It increased from 2.9 times in 1985 to 8.9 times in 2009. According to Xinjing Daily dated 8 December, the research conducted by Guangzhou Popular Opinion Research Center showed that in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, the elites with high income were 81% satisfied with the situation, but at the grassroots only 18%. Meanwhile, Fang Xiaojian, the head of Poverty Alleviation Office of the State Council, estimated that at the end of 2011, there would be 128 millions rural poor, accounting for 13.4% of whole rural population.

According to the research on peasants in current development situation conducted by Central China Normal University in Wuhan, the percentage of peasants who felt they were respected by doctors, officials and the

rich were respectively 4.7%, 3.7% and 2.5%; even when they were shopping, only 10.7% felt they were respected. They were not interested in national policies that did not concern peasants, and only half of them had heard of the 12th Five-year Plan.

From the above, we can conclude that the political system has caused serious consequences and it should completely be reformed. But the conservatives within the party refused to make any change even when reformists such as Zhao and Wen proposed modest reforms. Hence, only radical reforms will be the solution to solve the problem.

2 December 2011

Postscript

In the following 20 days, Wukan villagers continuously protested and then self-organized in the "Temporary Representative Council." Other villages also followed suit. It seems that a new peasant movement has appeared. At last, Guangdong's deputy Party secretary Zhu Mingguo met with the protest leader and agreed to make concessions: (1) to release those arrested within three days; (2) to disclose the postmortem report of Xue Jinbo who died in custody; (3) to acknowledge the legitimacy of the Temporary Representative Council. This is indeed a victory of the people, which will affect the struggle for democracy and livelihood in China.

Revolutions are not over

7 February 2012, by Adam Hanieh, Farooq Sulehria

The outcome of elections in Tunisia and Egypt went in favour of Islamist parties even if the revolutions in these countries had a secular character. They are also an integral part, if not the dominant force, in the revolutions in Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Bahrain. Is the Arab Spring in fact

a victory for the Islamist movements?

No, I think this is the wrong way to read the Arab Spring. It is true of course that the Islamist parties were the major victors in the Egyptian and Tunisian elections and have been prominent actors in the other

uprisings across the region. But we need to take a more circumspect view of the Islamist movements and the difficulties they will likely face in the coming period. First, we should remember that the initial phases of the revolutions (certainly in Egypt and Tunisia) arose largely outside the orbit of established movements such as the

Muslim Brotherhood (MB). In general, the Islamist movements have played – and continue to play – a conservative role. During the protests in Egypt in December, for example, the Muslim Brotherhood took a clear stance against the popular forces. Likewise with the important Egyptian strike wave in September. These examples (and many others) indicate that while Islamist parties may have received significant electoral support, their relationship with the popular movement is fraught with tension and has the potential to quickly shift. This has also generated schisms and debates within the MB itself.

The election results in Tunisia and Egypt are not particularly surprising. In Egypt, the strong showing of the Muslim Brotherhood is partially indicative of their deeper implantation throughout the society and greater access to resources. Under Mubarak, the Muslim Brotherhood was, in effect, a semi-legal opposition and they have a long history of organizing across the country. Many other parties (including some of the parties of the Left) have only recently formed or begun organizing openly, and it is impossible to expect them to have the reach of the Brotherhood at this stage. The Islamist parties were also very well-funded (particularly from the Gulf states) – and this makes a big difference in their capacity to run campaigns across the country. Furthermore, in the rural areas, the other parties have a much weaker presence than the MB, which has built established patronage and support networks over many years.

Despite the symbolic significance of elections the real questions in front of the revolutions remain unaddressed. The revolutions have raised enormous expectations for a real change in the daily lives of people. After decades of neoliberal ‘reform’, Egyptian society has seen an extreme polarization of wealth and deterioration in living conditions for the vast majority. Millions of people have been marginalized and are struggling to eke out survival in the informal sector. There is also the question of the long-standing servility of the Egyptian government and military towards US power in the Middle East, expressed most clearly in

the decades-long process of normalization with Israel. These political and economic issues are intertwined and it is not possible to solve the question of ‘democracy’ without pushing the revolution forward and addressing all of these issues. Indeed, the position of the military is very much linked to the country’s political economy and the relationship with the US and Israel. For these reasons, Egyptian capitalism has a strong tendency towards an autocratic form – whether through the rule of a single individual (like Mubarak) or a veneer of liberal democracy in which the military retains ultimate power behind the scenes.

In this context, I think it is clear that the Islamist forces are not up to solving these problems. They have explicitly stated that they do not intend to break in any significant fashion with the economic programme of the old regime. This means continued privatization, increased exposure to global financial markets, further deregulation of labour markets and more reliance on loans from international financial institutions such as the IMF and World Bank. The impact of this neoliberal programme over the last two decades was a key factor in the uprising that overthrew Mubarak. For this reason, I think we can expect a widening gap between the expectations of the Egyptian people for jobs, food, health and other social rights – and the actual policies likely to be implemented by the MB and their allies once in power. While they hold the reins of government, it is much more difficult for these movements to hide behind an oppositional rhetoric. The contradictions will be posed much more sharply: between their claims around social justice and their support for neoliberal economic policies, or their ‘anti-imperialist’ language but simultaneous willingness to work with the US and Israel. There are many indications that this is already happening and, for these reasons, I think it is way too early to characterize 2011 as an ‘Islamist victory’.

The victories of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and En-Nehda in Tunisia, the possible

demise of the Assad regime, and the crushing of the revolt in Bahrain all appear to favour the regional interests of the Saudi monarchy. Is Saudi Arabia the ultimate beneficiary of the Arab Spring?

Saudi Arabia, along with other Gulf states such as Qatar, have been key protagonists in the counter-revolutionary wave unleashed against the uprisings. Indeed, 2011 has clearly demonstrated that imperialism in the region is articulated with – and largely works through – the Gulf Arab states. The example of the NATO-led attack on Libya is a clear example of this, with Qatar and the UAE, in particular, playing a very important role in this invasion. There are many other examples – we can see it in the billions of dollars that are being promised by the Gulf states to the regimes in Egypt and Tunisia; the military intervention of Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE in Bahrain; the offer made to Jordan and Morocco to join the Gulf Cooperation Council (thereby bringing together all the monarchies in the region within a single bloc); and the centrality of the Gulf states attempting to mediate and steer the uprisings in Syria and Yemen. And, perhaps most significantly, the escalating threats that are being made against Iran.

In one sense, the role of Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf countries is a political reflection of how central these states are within the regional economic system. Over the last decade, Gulf capital (both privately-owned and state-run) was a prime beneficiary of neoliberalism in the region. Across Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and elsewhere, liberalization saw massive flows of Gulf capital into newly privatized sectors (particularly real estate, finance and telecommunications). For this reason, the autocratic social structures that characterized political rule in Egypt, Tunisia and elsewhere are themselves part of how the Gulf established its place atop the hierarchies of the regional market. The struggles against dictatorship that the uprisings represent are, simultaneously, intertwined with the way that capitalism has developed across the region and, in this sense, are also struggles against the Gulf.

This fact - coupled of course with the centrality of the region's oil supplies and financial surpluses to the US and other imperialist countries - is a key reason why the counter-revolutionary response has essentially been conducted through the tripartite alliance of the Gulf states, the United States and the European Union.

Understanding this fact, however, is very different from saying that Saudi Arabia is the 'ultimate beneficiary' of the Arab uprisings. The revolutions are by no means over and - for some of the reasons I outlined in the last question - the demands of the revolution have not been fulfilled. The level of mobilization remains high in both Egypt and Tunisia, and it will be very difficult for the new governments to continue business as usual. It is an unstable situation. Yes, there are very many difficulties facing the Left and the popular movements. But we shouldn't underestimate the problems that the other side also faces, or overestimate their ability to reimpose their rule in a global context of multiple, systemic crises and a very limited legitimacy for patterns of governance associated with the old regime.

What implications will a failed uprising in Bahrain and a possible overthrow of the Assad regime in Syria have for Iran?

Obviously, over recent weeks, there has been a ratcheting up of rhetoric against the Iranian regime. But there remain many factors that militate against an attack and I don't think that a strike by Washington or Tel Aviv is categorically determined. In the case of Syria, it is clear that the Western states, Israel, and the Gulf countries want to see a more pliant regime and this is partially motivated by a desire to undermine Iran's regional influence (connected of course to Hizbullah in Lebanon).

I don't believe, however, that the toppling of Assad will necessarily lead to a regime that is more closely aligned with Western interests. The overall anti-imperialist sentiment remains strong among the Syrian population and the attempts by parts of the Left to smear the entire uprising as a stand-in for imperialism

belies a Manichean worldview that badly misunderstands the country's history. I don't see any contradiction in opposing intervention and simultaneously being against the Assad regime - which, we need to remember, has embraced neoliberalism and consistently used a rhetoric of 'anti-imperialism' to obfuscate a practice of accommodation with both the US and Israel. But we need to remember that there is a correspondence between the brutality of the regime and internal support for intervention. In this sense, the violence of the Assad regime further serves the broader interests of imperialism in the region (as this violence has long done).

In the case of Bahrain, I think it is mistaken to see the uprising as some form of Iranian 'plot'. Certainly that is the way it has been portrayed by the Bahraini monarchy and some of the other Gulf Arab states. But the 2011 Bahraini intifada was the latest in a decades-long line of uprisings against sectarian discrimination that is reinforced by the unevenness of capitalist development in that country. One indication of this is the very high unemployment levels, with unofficial estimates ranging from 15-30% among Bahraini nationals, which disproportionately impacts Shi'a citizens. In 2004, the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights estimated that over half of Bahraini citizens were living in poverty and yet, simultaneously, the richest 5200 Bahrainis had a combined wealth greater than \$20 billion. These - and other issues such as inequalities in landownership, widespread use of torture against political opponents, a lack of democracy, political exclusion of the Shi'a population, and the regime's close alliance with the US - are much more convincing explanations for the uprising than any interference by Iran. These issues have not been addressed in any fundamental way by the Bahraini regime, and for this reason we certainly haven't seen the last of the uprisings in the country.

Washington appears to have taken a contradictory position towards the uprisings - lending support to those in Syria and Libya and undermining or ignoring those in other countries. Is it accurate to say that the US welcomes

the Arab Spring, and that the mass movements of 2011 have lacked an anti-imperialist character?

No, I think that is a completely false characterization. The question of imperialism is intractably linked to the issues innervating these uprisings. The nature of the Mubarak regime, for example, was not just a question of domestic repression. US imperialism relied upon this regime to build a major pillar of support for its wider hegemony over the Middle East. This was expressed most clearly in the decades-long process of normalization with Israel, as well as the billions of dollars in US support for the Egyptian military. As I noted above, the political and economic issues are intertwined and inseparable - if the mass movement is going to win social and economic justice it will necessarily have to take up the question of imperialism. Moreover, I don't think Washington's position has been contradictory - rather, it has been entirely consistent with its policies over the last few decades. The overall strategic 'line of march' of the US (and that of the EU) has been to find a way to defuse, weaken and deflect the uprisings. The way this has been attempted differs in each context.

What implications does the Arab Spring hold for Israel?

I think the Egyptian revolution, in particular, is potentially the most important development to have occurred in the Palestinian struggle at any time over the last two decades. Egypt is strategically central to the Palestinian question. This is clearly understood by imperialism - witness the absolute priority placed by the US and Israel on normalizing relationships with Egypt from the time of Sadat up through the Mubarak period. I think a revolutionary government in Egypt that refuses to enter into economic or political relationships with Israel, open the borders with Gaza, and supports the Palestinian struggle in meaningful ways, would see a rapid and qualitative change in the regional balance of forces.

Now obviously we are very far from seeing this scenario occur in the current circumstances. But, as I

pointed out above, the autocratic and repressive nature of the Egyptian state cannot be separated from its linkages with imperialism in the region (seen primarily in its support for the state of Israel). Any effective challenge to this autocratic nature means confronting the linkages with US power. There is a dialect between these two sides of the Egyptian state - and this means that solidarity with the Palestinian struggle is not an optional extra of the revolution, but central to it moving forward.

What should now be the left attitude towards Arab Spring?

Overall, it is important for the Left to support the ongoing struggles in the revolutions as the contradictions of the new regimes continue to sharpen. Concretely this means offering solidarity to labour strikes and popular mobilizations; publicizing the ongoing abuses of the military; agitating against foreign military and political intervention in the region; exposing the role of the Gulf Arab states and their linkages with Western powers; finding ways to support

campaigns to cancel the multilateral and bilateral debt of these countries to Western financial institutions; and preventing new financial actors (such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development) from entering these areas. Most importantly, however, there is a need to learn from the revolutionary experiences themselves. We need much more humility, and to realize that the movements of 2011 in the Middle East and North Africa have a great deal to teach the Left in the Western world.

Lahore factory blast: Lift Ban on Factory inspection, better health and safety measures for the workers

7 February 2012

Activists of Labour Party Pakistan and Communist Mazdoor Kissan Party held a demonstration in front of the factory few hours after the incident to demand the arrest of the owners, more effective relief work, a compensation of at least one million for those who lost their lives, five hundred thousand for all the injured, lifting of ban on labour inspection and to provide all the necessary safety measures to the workers. Hundreds of workers gathered to raise voices against the Punjab and central government and also against capitalism. Women Workers Help Line and National Trade Union Federation participated in the demonstration as well.

"In Punjab, it is the rule of the companies and not by the representatives of the people. The incident proves that bosses have been given free hand to violate all the labour laws, child labour is employed, workers are under paid, no job contract is given to the workers, women are sexually physically abused and no measures taken for the health

and safety of the workers" said Farooq Tariq, spokesperson Labour Party Pakistan speaking on the occasion.

According to the details, the Orient Labs (Pvt) Ltd. which deals in veterinary injections had been sealed by government agencies at least twice in the past. It was illegally operating in the area and residents had filed a case in a civil court seeking closure of the factory because it was in the residential area. There are hundreds of such small factories operating in residential areas and violating all the labour laws.

The relatives of those who were trapped inside the rubbles spoke at the demonstrations describing the horrendous working conditions at the factory. Salma, an elderly women who was aunt of one the women worker spoke at the demonstration and said that workers in this factory are paid Rupees 3000, to 5000. They are working over 12 hours and no facility of proper toilet is available at the factory.

Most of the private factories are paying less than the minimum wage of

Rupees 7000 fixed by the government. The labour department is been paralyzed by the ban on labor inspection.

Azra Shad, chairperson Women Workers Help Line who had visited this factory earlier to organize the women workers told the gathering that women workers are the worst exploited here in this factory. They are paid a very little amount and most of them are under 16 years. "I was always discouraged by the bosses to enter this factory" she said. "This is because the factory owner never wanted any union in this factory, she said. " We will not leave the workers alone, we demand an immediate arrest of the bosses and police must register a murder case against the owners she said.

Daily Dawn reported today that Khalid Habib, whose house was partially damaged, said the factory was sealed on the orders of a judge after residents had filed a case for removal of the factory from the residential area. But the owners broke the seal 15 days after the court's decision.

According to him, the owners had built more illegal structures and the authorities concerned did not respond to several pleas made by the residents. The DIG (Operations)

Ghulam Mehmood Dogar said three brothers, Sheikh Zaheer, Sheikh Zafar and Sheikh Zubair, were running the factory and a few other outlets in

different parts of the city. Hunjarwal police has registered a case under Section 302 of the PPC against the three owners of the company on behalf of the state.

Our AAA : Audit, Action, Abolition

6 February 2012, by Damien Millet, Éric Toussaint

AAA... Three letters that ring like the laugh of the hyena as creditors reap profits while people's rights are sacrificed with the active complicity of the heads of European States, the European Commission, the International Monetary Fund and the Central European Bank. Lenders and speculators have taken the most reckless risks, convinced that the public authorities would bail them out in time of crisis. Up to now they have been right. Bank bailouts have been organised, States have provided guarantees amounting to thousands of billions of euros, the wishes of creditors have been pandered to. States have spent colossal sums to bail out banks before imposing massive austerity measures which the people often oppose with determination. Street protests, general strikes, the Outraged (Indigné) movement and social struggles are reasons for hope if they can succeed in federating at European level. It is time for peoples of Europe to unite.

For three decades, neo-liberal policies have raised indebtedness to an intolerable level for the middle and lower-middle classes who largely carry the burden of repayment. The public debt of European countries has two main causes: on the one hand, the fiscal counter-revolution starting in

the 1980s that favoured the richest, and on the other hand, the responses of States to the present crisis brought about by unbridled investments by bankers and hedge funds. Financial deregulation has removed essential safeguards and enabled the creation of increasingly complex products, leading to serious excesses and a global economic and financial crisis. The present policies protect those responsible for the crisis and oblige the victims – in other words the people – to pay the cost. For this reason the debt is largely an illegitimate one. As long as the current logic persists, the dictates of creditors will bring constant social regression. A citizens' audit of the public debt, together with a penalty-free moratorium on repayments, is the only solution for determining the illegitimate, or even odious, part of the debt. This part must then be unconditionally abolished. And for this illegitimate debt to be Abolished, the people must continue to mobilise and by their concerted Action impose a different policy that finally respects fundamental and environmental rights.

This Action must be the way to building a Europe based on solidarity and co-operation, a Europe that refuses the competitive dictates of the

present system. The neo-liberal logic has brought about the crisis and revealed its own failings. This logic, which underlies all the founding documents of the European Union, in particular the Stability and Growth Pact and the Stability Mechanism Treaty, must be vigorously undermined. Budgetary and fiscal policies should not be uniform, since European economies are very disparate, but should rather be coordinated in order to find a solution that raises the standard. Europe must also drop its under-siege attitude towards immigration applicants and become a just and supportive partner for peoples in the South. The first step must be to unconditionally cancel Third World debt. It is clear that the present European treaties must be repealed and replaced by new ones in the context of a genuine democratic constituent process that will be the cornerstone for a different Europe.

Audit-Action-Abolition: this is the AAA we want, an AAA of the people, not the ratings agencies. We place this demand at the very heart of the public debate to affirm that alternative political, economic and financial choices are possible. Only powerful social struggles can make this "peoples' AAA" a reality and a means of effecting a radical change in logic.

The CADTM downgrades its IMF rating and

places this institution on very negative outlook

6 February 2012, by **CADTM**

The IMF was very active in the Global South since the 1980's and into the 2000s, imposing structural adjustment plans in favour of creditors: drastic reductions in social spending, massive privatisations, deregulation of the economies and the local markets favouring multinationals rather than local producers. The recipe has been unsavoury.

Totally de-legitimised by the social failures of its poisonous remedies, the IMF found itself bordering on bankruptcy during 2007 - 2008 as most of its principal debtors made advance repayments to free themselves from the IMF's burdensome supervision.

Thanks to the present crisis the IMF has managed a come-back in Europe. Back in the saddle with the assistance of the G20 summits, the IMF has multiplied its lending to Greece, Ireland and Portugal, which, in their difficult situation, are forced to compensate by the implementation of brutal and unjust austerity measures.

The same causes produce the same effects, Europe has now been affected but fortunately the people are not just letting it happen. Even if the IMF wants to make the most of its thirty years of unequalled experience in the safeguarding of private financial interests to the detriment of the people, the emergence of citizens'

public debt audit groups in numerous countries have led the CADTM to downgrade the IMF's rating and to issue a serious warning. We hope that these citizen resistance movements against an institution that is increasingly unpopular and illegitimate, will very soon incite us to downgrade this rating even further.

The CADTM insists on the immediate abolition of the IMF and its replacement by a radically different and democratic institution focused on the satisfaction of fundamental human needs.

<http://www.cadtm.org/The-CADTM-donations>

Pakistan, theatre of war

5 February 2012, by **Pierre Rousset**

However, Pakistan is a key piece in a geostrategic area ranging from former Soviet republics of Central Asia to China. The consequences of the "Geronimo" operation will not only be local. [24]

This article will only focus on Pakistan, but will nevertheless begin with a brief detour on the United States. The summary execution of bin Laden during a major political offensive aimed at rehabilitating American imperialism, which had been undermined in the eyes of public opinion through the lies and scandals of the Bush era, giving a new legitimacy to targeted assassinations, the hell of Guantanamo prison (which Obama promised to close), the use of torture (the hunt for bin Laden is

believed to have been facilitated by a confession obtained under repeated torture), the need for secret intervention on foreign soil in the name of national interest, the setting aside of any rule of law and morality... All of this is set against an ideological background of extreme nationalism by a great power.

This ideological offensive is even more pernicious because it is led by Obama, a black Democratic president whose election had raised the enthusiasm of many progressives in the United States and across the world.

Let's return to Pakistan. The case of bin Laden revives the image of a country where the population is held hostage to regional conflicts - the

Afghanistan war and confrontation with India "Islamic terrorism, the intelligence services, the military and profiteering war lords, the pressure of foreign intervention (mostly from the United States, but also Saudi Arabia and many others). Unfortunately, there is much truth in this image and we must try to understand why.

A warning: Pakistan is particularly complex "probably more than most other states. Even in relatively "simple" cases, it's never easy to perceive the realities underlying the superficial appearances. What does it mean that most Pakistanis are from the Sunni branch of Islam? How do the different tribes interrelate? How do the cultures of Urdu, Pashto, Baluchi or Sindi interrelate? What are

the specific power relations in each province of today's "Pakistan" – and how do they relate at the federal level? I do not pretend to answer such questions. This article confines itself to what we can call a first level of analysis. It pursues only limited objectives: to show this complexity, evaluate the national and international issues that are features of this crisis and identify some substantive issues.

Pakistan's crisis has paroxysmal aspects, perhaps because of the conditions that led to its birth (the partition of British India in 1947), of the carelessness of its ruling classes and the historical weakness of the left. This is the case, for example, with "Talibanism", with the nuclearization of the conflict between India and Pakistan, or the successive dead ends resulting from the imperial policy of the United States. Lessons can be learned from such paroxysms that extend beyond this single region and that interest us all.

The christening present, a country on a war footing

Pakistan as a state is a late creation – in 1947 – with as a christening present the bloody population transfers made on a religious basis in the "partition" of the British Empire of India: some seventeen million were displaced in huge movements of people. The new state was formed in the north-west and north-east where Muslims were historically the majority. In addition, seven million Muslims from other regions of India also came to the new state – these are the Muhajirs.

Since the "vivisection" of 1947, there are very few Hindus in Pakistan. However, India still has a large Muslim community, which currently stands at one hundred and fifty million people, the same as Pakistan! This represents about 12% of the Indian population.

One can certainly find in Pakistan today its own ancient historical roots, particularly in its most populous provinces such as Punjab (centre) and

Sindh (south). But of all the major Asian countries this is the one whose border demarcation was the most artificial. It originally consisted of two wings physically separated by the width of India, with – in the West – West Pakistan (which monopolized political power) and – in the East – East Pakistan (then demographically bigger). This part gained its independence after the 1971 war, and took the name Bangladesh.

Even after the amputation of Bangladesh (a second partition!), the borders of Pakistan are doubly artificial, drawn on the western side by British colonization and on the eastern side by the partition in 1947 – but of course closed to the north by the Himalayas (beyond which lies China) and the south by the Arabian Sea. The very name of Pakistan suggests a puzzle, forming the acronym for "Punjab, Afgania, Kashmir, Iran, Sindh, Baluchistan" – where "Afgania" means the provinces of North-West Frontier which border Afghanistan.

There is actually more common historical identity among the peoples of both sides of each boundary than between different strands of the Pakistani state: Pashtuns or Pathans in the northwest as in Afghanistan, Baluchis in the west (Iran), Punjabis and Sindhis in the east (India) or Kashmiris northeast... The eastern provinces have been deeply influenced by British rule, but the western regions much less so: the former were directly involved in the partition of 1947 and its bloody strife, not the second. Causing an influx of displaced populations, partition has further complicated the mosaic of people living in what is now Pakistan: Muslim immigrants from India, the Muhajirs have somehow taken over Karachi, alienating people from the province of Sindh.

The unification of Pakistan was never completed and irredentism or national liberation armed movements have existed for years for example in Baluchistan that has seen five wars in 1947-1949, 1955, 1958-1969, 1973-1977 (eight thousand deaths), and since 2004...

Since its foundation, Pakistan has

been a country on a war footing, through internal conflicts and serious border tensions. It is also at the heart of important geostrategic issues both in South Asia and in the relations between world powers.

Geostrategic crossroads

South Asia consists of seven states (if one puts Burma in Southeast Asia), two of which are islands (Sri Lanka, Maldives) and two Himalayan (Nepal, Bhutan), with relatively small populations. The east and west ends are occupied by two of the most populous countries in the world: Pakistan (over 180 million) with its capital in Islamabad and Bangladesh (over 165 million) with its capital Dhaka. However, the whole sub-continent is dominated by a giant: India and its one billion two hundred million people with its capital New Delhi. By area, population, economy and armed forces, India has more weight than its neighbours (even if Pakistan is also equipped with nuclear weapons). It is the regional power.

In this region, Pakistani-Indian rivalry has always (that is to say, since the end of World War II) determined the policy choices of both states. Thus, Islamabad supported the government of Sri Lanka at a time when New Delhi was arming the Tamil Tigers against the Colombo regime, considered too pro-Western.

Moreover, Pakistan is geographically at the crossroads between South Asia, the Middle East and Central Asia and the former Soviet republics. It has India on its Eastern border, Afghanistan on its northwestern border, and Iran on its western border. Culturally, it is a meeting place between Iran and India. It is a Muslim country with a Sunni majority (75%) and Shia minority (20%), it is affected by the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran. In addition the port of Karachi (the main industrial centre of the country), is one of the best potential access routes to the ocean for oil from Central Asia.

Pakistan was an important geostrategic pawn in the era of the

Cold War and the Sino-Soviet conflict. Islamabad was then supported, against New Delhi, by both Beijing and Washington. Indeed, India, though capitalist, sought Moscow's help to protect itself from imperialist domination. In addition, there was a Sino-Indian conflict superimposed on the Sino-Soviet conflict. The Himalayas was and remains a very sensitive area. A war was fought on its higher slopes, in 1962, between India and China "where the latter succeeded" over a border dispute. From Tibet to Nepal and Bhutan, the Himalayan range is the scene of intense power struggle between the two Asian giants.

Through Afghanistan and Islamist movements operating in all this part of the world, Pakistan is also involved in ongoing conflicts between major powers to define the future of the former Soviet republics of Central Asia "a region located between approximately the Caspian Sea and China, including Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan (three countries bordering Afghanistan) and, slightly further north, Kyrgyzstan, where the U.S. first established their military base in this part the world, the Manas base, which is currently used to back NATO forces to the "Afpak" [25] theatre.

As a result of all this Pakistan has become a key piece in the great chess game between Washington, Beijing and Moscow that is played from the North-East Asia (Korea, Japan) to South Asia (sea lanes of the Indian Ocean), Central Asia (former Soviet republics) and the Near East (Iran). Today it is all the more significant a piece in that it has nuclear weapons.

A geostrategic crossroads, Pakistan is at the intersection of many regional and international tensions.

The wars in Afghanistan have tied everything together.

The shift from the Indian front to the Afghan front

For years, the "hot" border of Pakistan

was to the east "that with India" and particularly to the north-east with the focal point that is Kashmir, a Muslim majority country which New Delhi managed to keep control to a large extent at the time of partition (but part of which is still on the Pakistani side of the border). India denies the right of self-determination to the Kashmiri and various armed resistance movements operate with the support of Islamabad, a situation justifying the maintenance of a permanent state of war between the two countries, punctuated by open military conflict (there have been four "hot" wars between Pakistan and India since 1947).

While the major military confrontations were lost by Pakistan, the latent state of war with India helped the new state to impose unity (remember however that this was not enough to prevent the loss of Bangladesh). The army and security services (ISI) [26] could thus justify their dominance and omnipresence. Independent or separatist movements, the democratic opposition and the left could be repressed in the name of the national interest, and denounced as "fifth column".

The conflict with India allowed the Pakistani state (in particular the Pakistani army) to establish its legitimacy. India has the useful function of "hereditary enemy": the "partition" of 1947 created a gulf of blood that has been carefully maintained since. The ruling classes and elites on both sides of the border exploit the India-Pakistan conflict, so it is not surprising that all the negotiated peace processes between Islamabad and New Delhi have come to nothing. Today tension remains high between the two states, heightened by the massacres: Hindu terrorism against the Muslim (and Christian) population in India, Islamic terrorism endogenous to India or manipulated by Pakistan as in the murderous "attack" in Bombay (Mumbai) in 2008 by a suicide bomber.

But with the NATO war in Afghanistan, the North-West Frontier of Pakistan has become much "hotter" than its eastern border "and this changes many things. The current

conflict is not with the "hereditary" enemy. On the contrary, now Pakistan is opposing its former allies: Washington and Islamabad promoted the development of Islamist movements to fight the secular regime in Kabul [27], then the Soviets after they occupied the country in 1979. Following the deadly attacks of September 11, 2001 against the Twin Towers in Manhattan and the Pentagon, the American government could easily make enemies of its friends. It was not the same for the Pakistani leaders.

Faced with the demographic strength and geographical vastness of India, only Afghanistan can, in case of war, provide Pakistan the "strategic depth" it needs to reorganize and redeploy its forces. This requires a regime favorable to Islamabad in Kabul: the Taliban provided this. Sunni fundamentalism was used as ideological cement to this geostrategic alliance, facilitated by the fact that the Pashtun tribes are occupying the territory of both sides of this very theoretical international border.

The Afghan issue has become a domestic issue in Pakistan. The situation in the two states has become so intertwined that in diplomatic circles they commonly use "Afpak" "a word to combine the two countries. Washington now treats them as a single theatre of operations.

The conflict with India bound together the Pakistani state, the Afghan conflict destabilises it.

With the intervention of NATO, the Afghan crisis became a crisis inside Pakistan. It crystallized in 2009 in the Swat valley, a Taliban stronghold in the Northwest. It is now invading the Punjab and destabilizing the country (at the same time that it fuels massive arms trafficking).

Pakistan is now sick because of Afghanistan. But the crisis that undermines the regime has other roots.

A new geopolitical

instability

The days of the Cold War are behind us, days when international alliances were stable, structured by the division of the world into two "camps" in which "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" — when Pakistan could count on simultaneous and consistent support of Washington and Beijing. So, Islamabad enjoyed significant capacity to blackmail Western powers.

Since 1990 and the implosion of the USSR, geo-strategic alliances have become much more fluid in South Asia. The rapprochement between Washington and New Delhi is spectacular now, with the negotiation of a nuclear agreement and the entry of India into the neoliberal world order. Before the parliamentary elections of May 2009, the Congress government needed the support of the parliamentary bloc controlled at the federal level by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M) to ensure a majority, which gave the left the power to pressurise the government. This is no longer the case after the electoral defeat of the Indian CP. New Delhi has a freer hand again to get closer to the United States.

The General Staff of the Pakistani army is reluctant to abandon the Eastern front (India) in favor of the Western Front (Afghanistan). The Taliban and other fundamentalist movements still have a lot of support in the secret service. The Pakistani army has always played a double game on the question of Afghanistan: officially standing alongside NATO against "Islamic terrorism", while maintaining close ties with the Taliban and other religious "extremist" movements.

However, on the U.S. side, Pakistan is no longer sure of anything: it is now Washington that can increasingly blackmail Islamabad, making it more difficult for it to maintain the policy of the double game. Even though the intervention of the Americans in Afghanistan is destabilizing Pakistan and strengthening the feeling of "anti-Americanism", Washington may require more determined commitment from Islamabad against the Taliban. The U.S. government wants a return

for its money: Islamabad receives a windfall in dollars for its commitment on the front line, the Pakistani army does not want to lose this. Thus, the offensive in 2009 by the Pakistani army against the Taliban in the Swat valley was unprecedented in its scope — it was far from being a cosmetic operation!

As the case of bin Laden has vividly confirmed, all this has not prevented the Inter-Service Intelligence of Pakistan (ISI) continuing their double game, keeping the goose that lays the golden eggs warm (chasing the head of al-Qaida with financial assistance supplied by the US). Bin Laden was found in Abbotabad, a town near Islamabad housing the main military academy in the country! But extending the war beyond the Swat valley simultaneously caused a shift in the previous internal equilibrium.

Since 2009, Pakistan has entered a phase of increasing instability as a result of regional and geopolitical implications in the countries involved in the war in Afghanistan.

Between the army and the Taliban

The war in Swat has illustrated how the population has found itself caught between the anvil of the fundamentalists and the hammer of the military. The Taliban imposed a theocratic dictatorship. The population was ordered to leave the area before the start of the offensive to avoid being caught up in the fighting. Refugees were left to wander on the road or dumped in refugee camps in the blistering heat (when they are used to the cool of the mountains), often abandoned without water, unable to feed or care for themselves properly, without security. With perhaps 2.5 million people displaced throughout the country, the conditions for a humanitarian crisis of great magnitude are present.

The same criminal negligence manifested itself in a new humanitarian crisis of great magnitude (directly affecting some twenty million inhabitants), during the exceptional floods of 2010.

It is unfortunately common that "bourgeois" armies show such contempt for the people they are supposed to help. But in Pakistan, it is more than that. The military has been in power for most of the time since the creation of the state. The officers took the opportunity this gave them by seizing land and other economic interests. It not only serves the ruling classes, it has become a component of it. It reproduces the traditional arrogance and denial of democracy of the great proprietors of the upper castes in a particularly unequal society.

If the Pakistani army has become a caricature of the military, it is the same for the Taliban regarding the fundamentalist movement.

The picture varies according to region, but overall, Pakistan is not a country "naturally" filled with bearded men or where women are invisible. Men often prefer to have only a proud moustache. As for Pakistani women — one of them, Benazir Bhutto, became head of state before being murdered — left to choose for themselves, may wear no headscarf or just a light one that hides nothing of the hair, ears, neck — or, for working the fields, a thicker shawl to protect from the sun or the rain... The imposition of legalistic standards of behavior is not an expression of so-called "being Muslim". It is social violence. In matters of religion (not only in Islam!), prohibitions are used to establish social and patriarchal lines of authority, — and radical fundamentalists try to use and push this to extremes.

It is not enough to attach the label of a "belief" ("Muslim", "Christian"...) in order to define a movement. A "faith based" current, as it is cautiously said today, can be very left wing (this was notably the case in Latin America with the liberation theology, or the Philippines with the theology of struggle...) or far right (see, eg, close to Bush as in the U.S.!). We must therefore understand the political function of religious movements, if the terms "belief" and "religious references" are not to become dangerously misleading.

How should we describe the radical

fundamentalist movements in Pakistan and, particularly, the Taliban? Let's say (this is only an analogy) they occupy the place of fascism in Europe. They are in that sense "clerico-fascists". Thanks to the negligence of the regime, they gain some social support and this, especially since they guarantee absolute control of men over women. People displaced by the Swat war generally denounced the Taliban's terror (but do not necessarily support the army), but some support the use of Sharia law to finally resolve legal conflicts: justice in Pakistan has been totally uninterested in this type of business (inheritance, land ownership dispute...) when it involves only the common people and if cases are heard, they are decided in favor of the wealthy, the influential, the corrupters...

The Taliban are today fighting the United States. Is this in fact "progressive anti-imperialism"? They have not changed in nature since the time that they were closely allied with the Pakistani state, supported by Washington. They were reactionary, they remain reactionaries. Alliances are made and unmade, but, seen from Pakistan, the Taliban have nothing progressive to offer, this is a constant, and that is what matters above all. They impose a totalitarian, obscurantist regime, which, though ideologically backward looking, is part of the dominant neoliberal order.

The enemies of our enemies are not necessarily our friends. From the perspective of the working classes, conflicts are not always binary, a "progressive camp" fighting a "reactionary camp". They can be (and often are) triangular, when two opposing camps are reactionary. How to intervene in such cases is a matter of balance of forces, unfortunately, very poor in Pakistan. But it is not by lining up behind the army or supporting the Taliban that left forces can hope to improve the balance of power.

The Islamic Pandora's box

The radical fundamentalist movements are not only a creation of the "Afghan"

wars, although the support received by both the ISI and the Americans to counter Moscow was very important. Their development inside Pakistan has even been promoted especially since the 1970s and 80s by the security services and the main parties and in doing so they have opened a Pandora's box.

The Pakistani state was born Muslim, but not Islamic. The affirmation of the existence of "two nations" in British India, and thus justify partition on a religious basis certainly initiated a dangerous dynamic of ethnic cleansing. But the reference was or could be Muslim "culture" the claimed identity was that of a culture and not specifically of a religion or a sectarian interpretation of that religion. The major parties had secular origins. The laws were inherited from the English tradition, via India, or the recognition of common, customary, tribal laws. The unfinished Islamization of the Pakistani state was imposed. The turning point occurred in the late 1970s under the military dictatorship of General Zia-ul-Haq.

For several decades, in order to consolidate their power, the ruling class and elites, the military and clientelist, patronage, parties have each in turn played the card of the Islamization of laws and of the Pakistani state. This led, initially, to very violent sectarian conflicts (in some years with hundreds of deaths) between Shiite and Sunni Muslims. Indeed, today still, most of the religious conflicts are opposing Islamist currents to one another, even if it is not good to belong to a religious minority (Christian, Hindu... only about 3% of the population, not to mention that the Ahmadiyya [28] are not recognized as Muslims in Pakistan), often the scapegoat of the fundamentalists.

In a second period, against the background of Afghanistan, the Taliban have taken off in Pakistan itself (today they even settle outside the Pashtun communities, particularly in Punjab). They know how to use their links with the state apparatus and the widespread rejection of the United States. They have temporarily benefited from support or tolerance in "public opinion" the media and the

middle classes. But their image of fighters or victims has been eroded due to their extreme brutality: arson of shops guilty of selling music, destruction of girls' schools, throwing acid in the faces of women students for not wearing the veil even on the Punjab campus, summary justice and beheadings filmed and posted on the Internet, opponents slain, abductions and deadly attacks in the capital...

In February 2009, the government tried to reach a compromise with a wing of the Taliban by officially authorizing, through an alleged customary law, the imposition of Sharia (or rather a reactionary conception of "Islamic justice" [29]) in the Swat valley. There followed a succession of events that had a strong political impact on Pakistani opinion. As many commentators had predicted, the agreement has proved a fool's bargain: far from leading to a cease-fire, the said Taliban have pushed their advantage in the neighboring provinces, advancing their military units up to a hundred kilometers of the capital.

Moreover, the Internet broadcast of a secretly filmed video helped to show what the imposition of Sharia law means in this case. It showed a young woman being whipped for misconduct. A religious leader in Swat has thrown fuel on the fire by stating that the victim should actually have been stoned to death, according to his own interpretation of the Sahria. This raised a great reaction in the country and provoked many demonstrations by women.

Under these conditions, at the outbreak of military operations in Swat, the government and the military is given a much broader support than was usually the case in the past by the same opposition parties, the media, intellectuals, NGOs and progressive organizations, "the public" in a broad sense.

The whirlpool of religious bigotry

In terms of religious sectarianism, the situation in the country is getting worse. Contrary to what many would

have us believe with their social stereotypes and clichés, it is not the least educated classes which are necessarily the vector of intolerance and religious obscurantism, even though many poor families send their children to koranic schools – called madrasas – because of lack of access to public education. The educated “middle classes”, can be extremely conservative (that is currently the case in Thailand!), This is evidenced by the recent spread of the full veil in Pakistan (you don’t work in the fields in a burqa...).

Once engaged, the downward spiral of religious intolerance has no limits. A 1986 law makes blasphemy a crime punishable by death – what happened to it is a real case study. Anyone who criticizes this Act is guilty in the eyes of religious censors, of the crime of blasphemy. And on January 4, 2011, Salman Taseer, the powerful governor of Punjab province and a member of the ruling party, the PPP (Pakistan People’s Party), a layman, was murdered because he had bravely defended a Christian villager, Asia Bibi, imprisoned for blasphemy and sentenced to hang.

The governor was assassinated by one of his bodyguards in front of others who refrained from intervening. Religious radicalism has penetrated the whole state apparatus. More significantly, the murderer is a Sufi, while Sufism is regarded as a tolerant and spiritual tradition of Islam. His lawyers also assure us that we cannot accuse them of extremism, since they are Sufis, that is, almost by definition tolerant. Moreover, they explain, their client is not guilty: it’s not him who killed Salman Taseer, but God... Maybe the courts should condemn God?

What an irony: the fact that the Sufi community above all publicly cheered the murderer and made him a hero of Islam speaks volumes about the breakdown of Pakistani society. Four months after Salman Taseer, it was the turn of Shahbaz Bhatti, the single Christian cabinet member and Minister of Minorities, to be shot.

Half of those convicted of blasphemy belong to the small Christian minority. But this evil gnaws away at every

layer, providing opportunities for just settling scores. So a doctor was sent to prison because he had thrown into the wastebasket a card from a health visitor called... Muhammad. There was also the case of the young Shiite whose motorcycle collided by accident with a monument to Muhammad. He had the double misfortune of being a Shiite, a fisherman and opposing a rival tribe over the use of a lake. He was brutally murdered while he was in custody.

Over a thousand people have been accused of blasphemy – a charge that is social death, which forces people into hiding or flight, even when it is not followed by legal condemnation. Everyone is waiting for the next religious murder of a public figure opposing this blasphemy terrorist law: MP Sherry Rehman – whom the Interior Minister said they could not protect.

Between military dictatorships and democratic clientalism

There is no power in Pakistan invested with democratic legitimacy. The country has mostly been subjected to military rule, interspersed with interludes of parliamentary rule.

“Parliamentary” and not “democratic”, the distinction is important. Civilian governments have indeed been dominated by parties practising patronage, business and nepotism. The military has had a field day denouncing the parliamentary system, which is in the interests of political “clans”, representing the 22 families that dominate the country. The parties have had a field day denouncing the failure of the military to sustainably manage the state. By its negligence, the general staff was able to discredit the military regimes. By their greed, “the 22 families” have managed to discredit parliamentary systems. Both shamelessly spread their corruption. Hence the alternation between the direct exercise of power by the army and the direct grip of the civilian clans in parliament – a debilitating

alternation after which the country has been plunged into a deep crisis of legitimacy.

The alliance of Islamabad with Washington has exacerbated this situation. Seen from Pakistan, the United States also has no democratic legitimacy. They have supported the worst dictatorships and covered the worst corruption. They plunged Afghanistan into a war without end. They just apologize for repeated military “mistakes” which create a growing number of victims amongst the population living on the Afghan border. Bush stoked the fire of the “wars of civilization” citing *Urbi et orbi* the will of the Christian God to justify sending armies into Muslim countries – using even blatantly false pretences as in Iraq. Despite a more cautious style, for Obama “Afpak” is the major challenge of his presidency in the region and he demands an increased right to oversee Pakistani politics. He ordered the most flagrant breach of Pakistani sovereignty by sending his commandos to kill Ben Laden.

Massive financial support flooding from the United States to Pakistan after September 11, 2001 did not improve the condition of the Pakistani people. On the contrary, the neoliberal policies advocated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), chaired by French socialist Dominique Strauss-Kahn [30], aggravated the social crisis.

Fragmented power

Pakistan appears to be a country structured by an army occupying society and controlling the state. Yet behind this facade, the power remains largely fragmented.

Because of its ubiquity and its centralized policy, the army could have been a channel for integration and unification of the elites, beyond regional differences. But this has not been the case. The officer corps was and is dominated by Punjabis. The Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) at one time carried progressive aspirations to create solidarities across the country – but it has been “privatized” by the Bhutto clan (Sindhi, but with strong

points of support in the Punjab), becoming a party based on patronage like the others. Far from uniting the people, Islamism and fundamentalism have heightened sectarian strife. The specific interests of each power centre prevailed everywhere, and, even at the expense of the collective interest of the ruling classes and elites "a collective interest of the property-owning classes that no political force has been able to carry forward once the momentum of the foundation of Pakistan was exhausted.

The privatization of power led to its fragmentation among large families, military fractions community structures... Depending on the balance of power and "customs", laws apply differently in different places "and not at all when the local "lords" do not want it. Politics, which requires large investments in order to be elected, is seen as a business that must be profitable "thus in the eyes of the wealthy, corruption is the (legitimate) means of ensuring profitability. Alliances fluctuate like shifting sands in the interests of each clan or tribal council. They are all managing the interests of their clients.

Conflicts operate simultaneously on several levels: sectarian wars between Muslim denominations, sectarian violence (Muhajirs against Sindhis, Punjabis against Sindhis, Muslims against Christians...), killings between rival political clans, between tribes, army against citizens, property owners against the exploited, patriarchal power against women... A seemingly simple series of conflicts "political or religious" often hide others, deeper, more complex. For example, the Taliban claim to participate in a global jihad, but the Pashtun tribes of Northwest Pakistan amongst which they are based are engaged in very local power struggles, requiring shifting alliances between clans.

A conflict can be "structural", ensuring stable groupings of forces and the creation of sustainable political projects. This is not the case today in Pakistan. In fact, the whole Pakistani state may fall apart tomorrow. Let us remember it is a nuclear state.

A new geostrategy

Operation "Geronimo" caused a political storm in Pakistan and so far one fatal attack in retaliation "but so far little popular mobilization (the reaction is less intense than after the release of David Ramond, a CIA officer who shot two Pakistanis in Lahore in broad daylight). The government is accused at the same time of letting the United States violate the sovereignty of the country, having protected Bin Laden, and being unaware what its secret services were doing. The political crisis is deep, but it seems difficult to predict what will happen. More than ever, in fact, Pakistan is a key in a geopolitical game with multiple players.

The United States needs a political solution to the Afghan war "so an agreement with some Taliban which will be difficult to reach without the support of the Pakistani intelligence (which today protects Mullah Omar in relation to such negotiations). But the definition of a "good" Taliban is not necessarily the same for the US and Pakistan. In Islamabad, a "good" Taliban should only fight in Afghanistan and does not challenge the Pakistani state "but the most pressing problem for Washington is specifically the movements that target NATO forces...

In Islamabad, there is no question of accepting a government in Kabul which has good relations with New Delhi - but India has become more active in Afghanistan. This precipitated the current crisis; it may

well be that the Pakistani authorities felt that negotiations were being engaged in behind their back in Afghanistan, working for an agreement from which they would be excluded.

Finally, Beijing is playing its own cards, claiming to fully support Islamabad in the case of bin Laden. Some in Pakistan call for a change in alliances; in order to regain a capacity to blackmail Washington by threatening to rely more exclusively on China - the faithful friend whose weight continues to increase in Asia -, and by denouncing the imperial arrogance of the United States. The PPP government certainly will not break with Washington without whose help it will fall "and the United States government certainly does not want make things worse. But they are not the only masters of the game

The people are notably absent from this game of chess "or bluff" played around the Pakistan-Afghanistan theatre. Yet they struggle....

These struggles are waged by the workers in brick kilns, subjected to slave-like conditions in the countryside, or textile workers in the economic centre of Faisalabad. They are the work of farmers of Punjab and Sindhi fishermen fighting the military. They are women resisting daily longstanding patriarchal oppression or the recent rise of religious fundamentalism. They are progressives in all walks of trying to defend democratic freedoms and human rights...

These fights are rarely at the top of the international agenda. They are no less important. After dealing with Pakistan, "theatre of war" we should mark them with an article which could be titled "Pakistan, the scene of battles."

Social explosion, a question of months?

4 February 2012, by **Andreas Sartzekis , Tassos Anastassiadis**

Parallels between ancient Greece and current Greece are not lacking in recent times, and the "Greek tragedy" has been served up in all journalistic sauces. In the country which invented democracy to put an end to debt slavery, the European bourgeoisie imposes its reactionary approach: even if the institution of slavery is not (yet) re-established, the poverty into which the Greek people have been plunged at a growing speed greatly resembles a modern slavery. In the new situation where the government of the technocrat Loukas Papadimos has no legitimacy originating from the parliamentary elections of 2009, it is clear that the popular response, to be effective, should link economic programme and reappropriation and extension of democratic processes.

Every day, 2,400 new workers are thrown into unemployment, which has officially reached 17.7% (12.4% a year ago), with 21.5 % of women affected and 35.3% of youth. 50% of the unemployed have been out of work for more than one year. 30,000 civil servants were awaiting dismissal on December 31, and the haemorrhage will continue in 2012 with the aim of dismissing 150,000 civil servants by 2015 (in a country with just over 11 million inhabitants), education and the army being alone officially "preserved". Second tier pensions above 150 Euros should fall by 30% minimum and the wages in the public sector should continue to fall (an employee of the Agricultural Development Ministry with a seniority of between 5 and 7 years should see their wage cut from 1 600 to 1 225 Euros). All taxes have been increased (budget 2012).

Paul Tomsen "the best known personality of the troika (IMF, EU and ECB), today de facto in charge of the country's affairs" says on the one hand that the imposition over the last six months of the fiscal burden on a part of the population which can no longer pay is an error, and on the other demands two measures: the

suspension of collective agreements (to impose flexibility and the alignment of wages with productivity) and the closure of a certain number of public enterprises (which in his view have ceased to fulfil the function for which they were created). Obviously, no question of asking the people for a democratic opinion on the utility of these enterprises!

In the centre of Athens, the official figure for homelessness is 20,000. All the social indices are catastrophic and get worse at dizzying speed. For example, the suicide rate, traditionally quite low in Greece, around 2.8 per 100,000 inhabitants, more than doubled in 2011, climbing to 6! Six people out of 10 reduced their overall food intake in 2011, whereas 1 in 11 has been fed by the soup kitchens distributed by various networks (town halls, churches, NGOs and so on). According to Médecins du Monde, if the urgency of the "humanitarian crisis" was until now in Uganda, now it is in Greece. Not to forget the explosion of AIDS, above all among drug addicts: in one year a terrifying increase (around 1,500 % or a 16 fold increase), because of the destruction of all services of shelter and treatment for marginalised youth.

Thus the urgency of a democratic reappropriation of its choices by the Greek people depends of course to the state of the left forces and their proposals, which we deal with below. But it also depends on the recent developments and choices made by the parties who have formed a "national unity" government. It amounts in fact to one of the last cards of the Greek bourgeoisie facing a still growing rise of popular resistance. This is the reason for the haste with which the Socialist prime minister, Giorgos Papandreou, called in late October for the organisation of a referendum, taking (nearly) all his European partners by surprise. In fact, this question of a referendum on the measures to deal with the debt has

come up at three times since the establishment of the austerity measures.

In Spring 2010, it was the radical left Syriza which during the first workers' mobilisations (halted after the death of three bank employees during a fire due to Molotov cocktails launched by mysterious hooded figures, never identified), campaigned for a referendum for or against the measures. The response given then by the anti-capitalist left was that the referendum was taking place in the street and the objective was a rolling general strike.

This point then re-emerged in the spring of this year, when Papandreou did not miss an opportunity to publicly declare his wish for a referendum... once a maximum of austerity measures had been taken! Not one left or right force followed him on this terrain, and the workers' movement continued its mobilisations, forcing its national union leaderships, dominated by PASOK, to organise general strikes: in the Athens demonstration of October 19, involving at least 300,000 workers and youths, the feeling emerged, all the more admirable after a year of unprecedented attacks against living standards, that basically power was in the street and that it was possible and in any event necessary to go further than this immense demonstration. Even if the day after the mobilisations were less massive, this popular force inspires fear in high places, with dissent apparent among the cadres of PASOK, in particular at the trade union level (the resignation of the leader of the Public Federation ADEDY was understood as a rejection of the policies of his party).

In this context, the announcement of a referendum on the policy of the government, the day after the demonstrations of October 28, had a dual effect: surprise at the haste of the prime minister, but also indifference

before a reheated dish. Even Syriza did not applaud and continued to request, like the KKE (Communist Party), the holding of immediate parliamentary elections.

Even if the referendum was abandoned on the "diktat of Merkozy", this question merits some comments. First, the anger of Sarkozy is to be compared with the moderate reaction of Germany: according to some sources, Papandreou discussed this "coup" with the German finance minister, the final objective being to force the leader of the Greek right, Antonis Samaras, to accept the formation of a national government and to abandon his demagogic posture of condemnation of austerity measures to better win the elections tomorrow!

A question little posed on the Greek left: even in this context, would it be necessary to take up the challenge and demand the referendum? To pose the question is to answer it: the KKE like Syriza wants parliamentary elections above all and the anti-capitalist left has no desire to lose time in discussions on Papandreou's manoeuvre. We are not in the French situation of 2005, where a unitary framework for the left "no2 was possible. Such a framework is not unhappily in the traditions of the Greek left and to build on this opportunity would have taken a lot of time, whereas the referendum would have taken place in mid December.

What is more, the question imposed would not have been as simple as "for or against the austerity measures?" but would have concerned staying in the Euro zone and thus in the EU and one can count on the climate of fear that the Greek bourgeoisie would create through its parties, media and perhaps its provocations. The reappropriation of a democratic process does not then pass by the political coup of the referendum, but rests on a more favourable terrain, that of the resistance struggles.

An extremist government,

deprived of credibility

The "referendum" episode concluded then on what was sought by Papandreou, the EU and the IMF for several months: a national unity government. Let us be clear - while the propaganda presents it as a measure of good sense, stressing the technocratic character of the prime minister, it should be designated for what it is - a dangerous extremist government. First because it is made up of dangerous fanatics of the "only road possible", that of the markets, that the government has the prime if not the only task of "reassuring". What of the interests of the people? Not a word during the formation of this government of so called national unity! Its leader, Papadimos, has been quite correctly presented as a key element of the policy of massaging of the Greek accounts to enter into the euro. This fanaticism would be all the stronger in that the government has no popular legitimacy: the majority vote in autumn 2009, was for a PASOK government whose (minimum!) programme included social measures.

We now have in Greece the full political dictatorship of the markets. The introduction in this government, 37 years after the fall of the military dictatorship, of adorers of that junta, incarnated in the ministers and secretaries of state (three in total) of LAOS is repugnant. LAOS could be compared to the French Front national, its leader Karatzaféris trying like Marine Le Pen to play the card of respectability, then of credibility as final card for the bourgeoisie. The extremism of this government has already been shown in the draft budget. E. Venizelos, the PASOK minister of the economy, boasts that there are no new austerity measures, but the draft budget in fact envisages 3.6 billion Euros of various supplementary taxes.

The viability of this government poses a basic question: what form of regime comes after it, knowing that the bourgeoisie has exhausted nearly all its traditional forces of power. Papadimos responds saying that there are no limits of time to his

government, and says the future elections will not be held before April, which leaves time to get the murderous measures passed.

The leader of New Democracy (ND), Antonis Samaras, demanded elections on February 19 and explained without fear of ridicule that in any case this is not a national unity government (its party has six ministers and secretaries of state!). There is a crisis in the ranks of the ND, between the declared centrists and the populist line. Implosion is possible (a former "centrist" minister has been excluded). As for LAOS, to play the card of the "higher interest of the country" as its caudillo has done and thus participate directly in the austerity measures could deprive this party of the popular base it has won in the previous elections. That is verified already in an anonymous appeal from the cadres and activists of this party that it leave this government, which has already obliged the caudillo to insinuate that if the government is no longer effective, it will withdraw its ministers. The risk in case of visible disaffection for LAOS is that the recourse to the far right passes by the openly neo Nazi movements like the Golden Dawn (Chryssi Avgi), who have made a breakthrough in the Athens municipal elections.

As to PASOK, its survival could be at stake. It can be seen on several fronts: disputes in the leadership between Papandreou and his "internal troika", growing disillusionment among cadres and base. In the future elections the polls give PASOK only 15-20 %. The main thing is the condemnation by the PASOK rank and file of the anti-social policy of their party, accentuated by a manifest anger at the entry of the far right into the government (which was only rejected by two deputies out of 153!). A question which is now important is that of the perspectives to offer to these thousand of former supports and hundreds of activists and cadres of PASOK. In the end it will be the ability to develop victorious struggles which will be determinant in the coming months.

A workers' resistance to support at the European level

The workers' resistance as reflected in the national strike days called by the union leaderships linked to PASOK constitute an astonishing, not to say admirable, phenomenon. An example was the immense demonstration of October 19, which swept aside sectarianism (isolation of the KKE) and gave the massive feeling that it was possible to go further. The contradiction is all the more flagrant. On the one hand, this radicalism, and on the other the feeling that the international bourgeois coalition is stronger, and the integration of a feeling of defeat, more evident undoubtedly in the local struggles. That highlights the importance of a European strike day called by the European unions, which could have a stimulating effect on the mobilisations in Greece.

The mobilisations by sector or enterprise are numerous and sometimes allow partial victories over the employer or the state. Numerous strikes have taken place in transport, a strike has broken out against the neoliberal university reform, and the taxis are on strike against the "opening" (to the big companies) of the profession and so on. One of the most significant struggles currently concerns the audiovisual and press sector (press, television, radio, magazines, and internet). It is a model on the one hand by the cruelty of the employers' attack and on the other by the dynamic of resistance. Massive layoffs, brutal pay cuts have affected every company in the sector. Tens of thousands of workers are no longer paid or in any case not paid on time with most companies paying wages months late. The television channel "Alter" has not paid its 700 employees for a year, and the big Athens newspaper "Eleftherotypia" stopped paying its 840 employees this summer. This "fashion" of not paying wages extends across all sectors.

However, there is resistance to this daily violence in the workplaces. After

months of working for free, the workers at "Alter" decided to occupy the head office of the television and turn it into a centre of solidarity (collecting food to organise their own survival) and being to broadcast programmes (rudimentary for the moment) which have become a centre of popularisation of the struggle of several sectors and factors. Similar projects are now being discussed by the workers at "Eleftherotypia".

The most emblematic struggle currently is at the steel factory of Halivourgia in Aspropyrgos, in the Athenian suburbs, against redundancies and wage cuts. This struggle is led by workers linked to the pro-KKE union current PAME and is characterised not only by its combativity, but also by the very broad support it has from the near and distant population, demonstrations, broad union and political support. For example, the intervention of our comrade Yannis Felekis, historic leader of the Greek section of the Fourth International, OKDE-Spartakos, was warmly received by the strikers!

On the left: internationalist solutions

Obviously the developments inside a mass party like PASOK should be observed by the left. The latter should be able to offer them a framework, but without concession. It isn't about offering former bureaucrats a chance to "redde" a little and reforge their careers, but to open as much as possible perspectives which can only be 100% left, taking account of the urgency resulting from the political impasses of the bourgeoisie. Indeed, from this viewpoint, the Greek left (to the left of PASOK), marked by its profound history, is lagging in relation to the blows borne by the workers, and in its responses in terms of alternative power. Whereas the intense mobilisations of all these months should have led to a permanent coordination of the sectors in struggle and on the road of self organisation, the rank and file unions, linked to the radical and anti-capitalist

left, are still not in a position to offer an immediate extension to the general strikes of 24 or 48 hours. It is not enough to demand the rolling general strike for it to be credible. This goes back of course to the division on the ground, with the trade union structure of the KKE (PAME). But in the last instance that relates to the reformist character of the KKE and Synaspismos, the central party of the radical coalition Syriza.

As for the KKE, the mystery remains: how has this party, which was drained of its youth in the 1990s, and adopted a caricatured and openly Stalinist "Marxist" discourse, continued to organise combative workers and radicalised youth? In fact, more than a theoretical response, the true objective is to know how to offer unitary perspectives of struggle to these activists. Indeed it is not always thus in the daily practices of the radical or anti-capitalist left: the extra-parliamentary left has fallen into the trap of the KKE leadership in ignoring this party. Indeed, this is a crucial issue, not only in terms of activist forces but still more in terms of political perspectives. It is flagrant that on these two terrains, the KKE leadership has no working class response to the situation. Its trade union positioning, despite the leftist accents, reflects a sentiment of defeat, which excludes any great working class battle. Hence the importance of centralisation of the struggles and the perspective of a workers' Europe, faced with a slogan of exit from the EU which represents a nationalist reflex to the Stalinist history of this party, valuing a "good" national bourgeoisie against the monopolies! At the political level, the sole slogan advanced by the KKE is that of popular power... around the KKE. Which amounts to having as sole perspective its own electoral strengthening! Faced with this impasse common struggles at the base and the advancing of unitary slogans for victory are the sole instrument which would allow advance.

As for Syriza, the regroupment of Synaspismos with the forces of the revolutionary left, the internal relation of forces remains unchanged. To speak of Syriza is above all to speak of the reformist party Synaspismos and

its leader, Alexis Tsipras. The main force to its left, the KOE, has been absent in Syriza, even if it remains officially a member. The efforts of different currents or independent members – like the veteran anti-Nazi Manolis Glezos – do not change the situations. The debates inside Synaspismos dominate the orientation of Syriza. Advancing the idea of a left government, Syriza certainly provides a perspective for disoriented PASOK voters and the polls give around 30% for forces to the left of PASOK. But this political response is hardly credible today faced with the sectarianism of the KKE but also faced with divergences – Synaspismos is favourable to the renegotiation of a part of the debt. It is both too vague (what left forces?) and too precise (Synaspismos retains the perspective of a government of the parliamentary left!) to respond to current needs. At the rank and file level Syriza activists are involved in numerous resistance struggles and this common work allows discussions between all the forces of the anti-capitalist left.

Nonetheless things advance at the rhythms of the crisis and struggles and social mobilisations. For example convergences have begun on the revolutionary left, first through the process of construction of the Anti-capitalist left, Antarsya. Its congress attracted 900 delegates, representing 3,000 members. It examined notably a new question for most of the revolutionary left forces: that of real unitary fronts of struggle, which might seem obvious but is not always so in Greece! Rapprochements could thus take place with the revolutionary forces inside Syriza, thanks to a common work on the ground as in the committees against the closure of the electricity meters of those who can't pay their bills.

In the daily struggles links are made and political cleavages are approached from an open angle, to the point that strategic questions are now posed in a new fashion. For example, the idea of "poor Greece attacked by international capital and various

imperialisms " has gained in credibility, to the point that cleavages on the left take place inside the current around Synaspismos, traditionally tempted by the idea that the EU was "progressive" in itself! But at the same time, the fact that the crisis in Greece is only the vanguard of a crisis and a brutal capitalist policy which extends from one country to another, shows that the overall response can only come by attacking the social roots, namely capitalism, which has no frontiers. In terms of demands the possible implosion of the EU or the euro zone imply new discussions on "exit from the euro" as transitional demands or necessary implication of a situation where a single country, like Greece, tries to free itself from the yoke of capitalist finance. That requires the stressing of the necessary self-organisation of struggles, and the coordination of these struggles not only at the national level, but at the same time at the international level, with a political dynamic which can only be that which overthrows the logic of war and the poverty of capitalism.

What new wind is blowing in Burma?

4 February 2012, by **Danielle Sabai**

These changes illustrate a turn in the situation of the country, which between 1962 and March 2011 knew only military dictatorships. But considering that only a year ago Burma was governed by a predatory military junta and was one of the most closed countries in the world, it is difficult to imagine that the Burmese military has been converted to democracy. So what are the motives that are pushing them to begin reforms that they refused for decades? What are the real prospects for democratization and an improvement in the living conditions of the Burmese people?

Political change and relations with the opposition

The first significant political change took place with the elections on November 7, 2010, presented as the outcome of a "road map towards democracy" initiated by the military junta in 1993 and re-launched in 2003. Far from being a democratic process, the elections were closely controlled. The principal opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD) and several parties representing ethnic groups had been dissolved or prevented from standing candidates.

Following the elections, a semi-civilian

government was formed in March 2011. It is composed of a large number of former soldiers. The new President, Thein Sein, was himself a general and the last Prime Minister of the junta before occupying his new functions.

Breaking with the methods employed by the military junta when it was directly in power, the new government has sought to establish relations with the opposition and in particular with Aung San Suu Kyi. Official meetings have taken place at the highest level of the state. The first two meetings took place last summer between Aung San Suu Kyi and the minister Aung Mye Thaw. The discussions between the two parties have not been revealed in detail, but it seems that Aung San Suu

Kyi and Aung Kyi discussed the need to obtain additional humanitarian aid to improve the situation of this very impoverished nation. More conflictual questions, such as the situation of political prisoners or the constitution of 2008 would also have been discussed [31]. The second meeting was followed by a Joint Declaration stating the willingness of the two parties “to cooperate in seeking stability and national development”, “to avoid conflictual points of view and to cooperate on a reciprocal basis” [32]. A new threshold was crossed on August 19, 2011, when Aung San Suu Kyi was invited by President Thein Sein himself. The meeting had a highly symbolic character and the two participants were photographed under a portrait of Aung San, father of Suu Kyi and national hero of Burmese independence.

Following this meeting Suu Kyi declared that she believed that President Thein Sein sincerely wanted to democratize the country and that she was ready to take on a role in government after the by-election which will take place on April 1, 2012. Recently, the NLD was officially re-registered, after having been dissolved in 2010, and Aung San Suu Kyi announced that she would be a candidate in the next elections.

The revolts of 1988 and 2007 led to bloodbaths and very harsh repression. In a context where the Burmese opposition is much weakened, Suu Kyi seems to be taking a chance that real evolutions are possible by supporting the current changes, even though they still are very limited.

Parallel to the detente with the opposition, the government has evolved on the question of human rights and democratic liberties. Political parties and trade unions are now authorized, as is the right to strike, even though it does not really materialize in practice. The government has also set up a commission on human rights, thus recognizing that there are problems of this kind in Burma. This is a first.

The government has also lifted the ban on some Internet sites and opposition radios, such as *The*

Irrawaddy, the BBC, Democratic Voice of Burma and Radio Free Asia. They are now accessible in Burma, even though that remains episodic. After 23 years of censorship, Suu Kyi was authorized to publish an article in the newspaper *Pyithu Khit News* and the newspaper *The Messenger* carried a front page interview with the Nobel Peace Prize winner.

Lastly, the release of 651 prisoners attracted attention on the international level. It is one of the conditions imposed by the Western powers for the lifting of economic sanctions. Important figures of the opposition, such as the leader of Generation 88, Min Ko Naing, the ethnic leader Shan U Khun Tun Oo and the leader of the monks, U Gambira, benefited from it.

But according to the Association for Assistance to Burmese Political Prisoners (AAPPB), only 272 of the 651 released prisoners are prisoners of conscience. Their release was effected “under the terms of article 401 of the criminal procedure code, which implies that these releases are conditional. According to this article, the sentences of the prisoners are suspended but are not cancelled. So they can be rearrested at any time and forced to serve the remainder of their initial sentence” [33]. The political prisoners have not received any excuses from the new government for the injustices of which they were victims, some of them having been imprisoned for more than 20 years. Apparently there are still about 1,000 political prisoners in Burma, not recognized as such by the Burmese authorities.

Towards a settlement of the ethnic conflicts?

The Burmese political situation is, however, much more complex than a confrontation between the government and the army on one side and the Burmese democratic opposition on the other. Practically since independence in 1948, Burma has been afflicted by armed conflicts between ethnic minorities and the

state, governed by Burmese. The ethnic groups demanded the right to autonomy and were opposed to the Burmese nationalists, whose goal was the establishment of a centralized unitary state. Some conflicts between ethnic groups and the Tatmadaw (Burmese army) have gone on continuously for more than 60 years, causing immense losses in human lives and preventing the economic development of entire regions.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the military junta signed a series of ceasefires with 17 of the most important ethnic groups and with many factions. The situation improved in certain zones but the ceasefires were never followed by talks which would have led to a lasting peace. The demands of the ethnic minorities which were behind the conflicts were never discussed.

The situation with the armed ethnic groups again worsened considerably in 2009. As the junta prepared to transform itself into a civilian government, the army wanted to force the armed groups to become part of a new force of frontier guards, which would have placed them under the command of the regular army. The majority of the armed groups refused, and in reprisal the junta declared all previous ceasefires null and void.

In the following months, fighting broke out again, including in zones where a ceasefire had been respected for very many years. Since the installation of a civil government, the situation on the ground has not at all improved; the number of people displaced because of attacks or abuse in the zones of conflict has doubled, going from an annual average of 70,000 to almost 150,000.

In September 2011, the situation took a new turn. The President recognized the importance of the ethnic question and offered to open a dialogue with all of the armed groups. In particular, he abandoned absorption of the groups into the frontier forces as a prerequisite for any agreement [34]. Three of the main ethnic groups have since signed a ceasefire agreement and contacts have been established with the majority of the armed ethnic groups. On the ground, however, the

situation remains conflictual. The armed groups remain very being wary and sceptical as to the real intentions of the government. It is not the first time that there have been ceasefire agreements and none of them has ever led to a lasting peace.

No democratic state will come into being in Burma without taking into account the specific demands of the ethnic groups, which represent approximately a third of the population of the country. The minorities, ethnic or religious, but also populations of Indian or Chinese origin, suffer discriminations and are not treated as equal by the Burmese majority. A lasting peace cannot be established without taking into account their demands, which relate to equal rights, autonomy and economic development, and the question of a federal Burmese state.

Evolution of international relations

The reforms also had consequences on the relations of Burma with its neighbours and in the first place with China. The military junta always maintained very strong links with Beijing. China invested billions of dollars in the country, in infrastructures and in contracts for the purchase of raw materials, without the Burmese population benefiting from it. Among the big projects, Beijing had undertaken in 2009 was the construction of the gigantic Myitsone dam on the Irrawaddy river, in the Kachin state. Ninety per cent of the output of the dam was to be conveyed to Yunnan in the South of China. As of the signature of the contract in 2006, the project met with very strong opposition, in particular among the Kachin people. But with liberalization in progress, the

criticisms found an echo at the national level. Faced with the strength of the opposition, the President preferred to suspend *sine die* the construction of the dam, without even giving Beijing advance notice. This decision also seems to indicate a willingness of the government to broaden its support on the international level and not to remain too dependent on Beijing.

The relations of Burma within the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) are also evolving considerably. The government obtained the rotating presidency of ASEAN in 2014, two years before its turn. This international position should enable it to establish its legitimacy in Burma in advance of general elections, which must be held in 2015.

A coveted economic market

The amnesty of prisoners of conscience, the thaw in relations with political opponents and the evolution on the ground of democratic liberties have been greeted as “major advances” both by opponents in the country and by the international community. The reforms of the government, still unthinkable a year ago, are not however the result of a conversion to democracy. President Thein Sein is seeking as a priority the lifting of the economic sanctions which would allow the return of Western investment in the country. The changes undertaken by the new government are taking place in a very backward economic context. The junta in power had no other vision for the country than the personal enrichment of its members, plundering and diverting the wealth of this rich country, with its abundant natural resources. After 60 years of military dictatorships, the country has been

bled dry and is among “the least developed in the world” (United Nations source). Economic backwardness is such that it is doubtless now impossible to continue to grow rich without starting real economic reforms.

On their side, the big Western powers consider each new measure, however limited it is, as a step forward towards democracy, in order to justify their return to the country. The development of Burma is an immense potential market, which is sharpening the appetites of the multinationals. Burma is rich in natural resources (timber for construction, ores, precious stones, gas and oil, among others). It is located at a strategic crossroads between India and China, with access to the Indian Ocean. It is not difficult to understand why we are seeing a procession of representatives of the Western powers (the United States, Australia, the European Union, the United Kingdom, France, Norway...) who are acting as sales representatives for the big national and multinational companies.

The army seems to want to ensure a political transition that would keep them in charge of the economy and business, while presenting a face that is at last acceptable to the Western powers which are likely to invest in the country. But the passage from a military dictatorship to a democracy (a democratic facade) is not an easy matter. President Thein Sein has made an agreement with Suu Kyi in order to be able to carry out reforms without upheavals in the street. He is giving pledges to the Western powers, which are only waiting for the lifting of sanctions to invest in the country. But the social movement which developed around the Myitsone dam seem to indicate that things might not be so easy.

See also Danielle Sabai's blog [*Asia Left Observer*](#).

Bensaid's indignation

4 February 2012, by Josep María Antentas

For Bensaid, indignation was “exactly the opposite of resignation and acceptance. Even when one ignores what we could call the justice of what is just, there is still the dignity of indignation and unconditional rejection of injustice”. [35] His was an indignation for the long term; it lasted throughout a life of activism, which turned out to be “longer than we ever imagined during the youthful enthusiasm of the 1960’s, for it is not easy to be a revolutionary without revolution for such a long time”. [36] As he said in his autobiography. “we had many more nights of defeat than triumphant dawns. Yet we overcame the Final Judgement which had been dominant. And, through patience, we earned the precious right to begin again.”. [37]

It was an indignation which had its roots in an intellectual culture that mixed Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky or Che, with Walter Benjamin, Joan of Arc and Charles Peguy. It was an indignation full of moles – that “metaphor for those who burrow stubbornly past underground obstacles and suddenly burst to the surface” [38] – and of Marranos (the Spanish Jews who were forced to convert to Christianity in the fifteenth century but continued to practice Judaism in secret) whose challenge was to leave Judaism without denying themselves, to find, in their transition, a way out without returning to their

identical self, or adhering completely to the cause of the victors” [39] .. And it was an indignation full of lucid, revolutionary melancholy, since “political commitment is a reasoned bet on the future. Even at the risk of losing it all and losing oneself”. [40]

It was an indignation with a passion for strategy, given that “there is no victory without strategy” [41], and for revolution, understood “not as a prefabricated model, but as a strategic hypothesis and horizon” [42] of possible social change and as a break with an unbearable present. “Always anachronistic, out of step, untimely, revolution arrives between the ‘no longer’ and the ‘not yet’, never on the dot, never on time. Punctuality is not its strong point. It likes improvisation and surprises. It can only arrive, and this is one of its paradoxes, if it is no longer expected”, as he put it in his book *La Discordance des Temps*.

A conversation on the TV programme *Brouillon de Culture* in 1989, coinciding with the launch of his book *Moi, la révolution*, illustrates well Bensaid’s “commitment to revolution”, and his determination not to yield to obstinate reality. In the book, Bensaid presents this Revolution talking in the first person, furious and indignant before the rubble and ruins of its “indignant bicentenary”, as celebrated by the petrified institutions of the V

Republic. One of the journalists, a Mitterrand sympathiser, tries to challenge him: “what surprises me is that in your book you seem to suggest implicitly that the only real commemoration possible would be to (re)-make the revolution...”. “Of course”, answers Bensaid, amused. “You mean, of course, of course”...?, asks the journalist, incredulously.

In a world immersed in an incalculable social, economic and ecological crisis, subjected to the ever-present, tyrannical power of capital, the irruption of this wave of global indignation has brought hope and restored trust in our collective ability to “resist the irresistible”. [43] Even without any certainty of victory and acting “not on the basis of a guaranteed solution, but under the irreducible contingency of a hypothesis”, we have lived intensely and passionately many moments of this, now passed, 2011, knowing that we were writing an important page of our struggle to change the world.

It’s a struggle in which we will always remember Daniel Bensaid, in a very special way.

This article was written as a contribution to the seminar on Daniel Bensaid commemorating the second anniversary of his death, see our report in the January issue “A seminar on Daniel Bensaïd”.

The Next Banking Crisis

2 February 2012, by Hugo Radice

A bank draws its income from three main sources: shareholders, depositors and lenders. The shareholders provide the risk capital, as in any capitalist business. Depositors seeking a safe and convenient place to store their money

traditionally provide the bulk of the funds which the bank then lends to its clients, while holding a modest proportion in reserve to meet any possible withdrawals by depositors. And lenders provide additional funds by buying marketable securities

issued by the bank in the form of bonds.

Credit Boom

In the run-up to the 2007-08 banking crisis, banks expanded their activities very rapidly by increasing their income especially from the last of these three. The higher risk attached to equity means that it is an expensive source of funds, ruled out except when absolutely necessary or required by state regulators. Growth in deposits is broadly limited by the rate of growth of economic activity, since winning a higher share of total deposits from one's competitors involves costly investments in marketing or service quality. But in the conditions of feverish growth at the height of the boom, borrowing is easy and cheap, so banks like Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) and Lehman Brothers threw caution to the winds. Not only did they increase their debt levels massively in relation to their equity capital and reserves, but they also kept down the cost by borrowing for relatively short periods of 1 to 5 years. They believed that they would have no difficulty in "rolling over" these debts when they fell due - or even that they could redeem them with cash, either from the vast profits they expected to make, or from new equity issues.

But like all credit booms, this one ended in a massive crash. Beginning in the sub-prime household mortgage sector in the USA, rising default rates on loans opened up the fantasy world of no-risk finance. The widespread use of derivatives, developed on the basis of models that bore little or no relation to the actual functioning of financial markets, had meanwhile created chains of potential contagion that reached to the furthest corners of global finance. As investors began to appreciate the real risk to the market

value of their financial assets, there ensued a classic flight to cash; as a consequence the wholesale money markets, in which banks borrow from each other and from other investors, began to freeze up. Bank debts falling due could not, in this situation, be rolled over; the main source of discretionary funding for banks disappeared. As so often Britain led the way, with the collapse of Northern Rock in September 2007, and the slide into the global banking crisis began.

Now it is true that central banks and governments succeeded in stabilizing the banking systems in most countries through the provision of massive infusions of funds, whether in the form of equity (as in the UK government stakes in RBS and Lloyds), loans from central banks, or cash from central bank purchases of financial assets held by banks (notably through quantitative easing). It is also true that, as the world economy began an apparent recovery in 2009, there ensued also a certain growth in bank deposits, and a recovery in the market price of bank shares which even allowed some banks to raise new equity or loans.

Next Few Years?

But banks still have huge amounts of outstanding debt, issued during the boom years, which will contractually fall due in the next few years: for example, Lloyds Bank currently has £295-billion of wholesale funding, half of which matures within the next twelve months. [44] And according to Deutsche Bank analysts, "European financial institutions need to finance nearly a £2,000-billion over the next five-year horizon," while net issuance of bank debt has been negative for three consecutive months, and credit spreads [45] have returned to the

record levels of 2008. [46]

What is more, last month it was reported that the cost of Eurozone bank credit default swaps (CDS) now exceeds the level reached at the time of the Lehman Brothers collapse in 2008. And "... the CDS market is the canary in the coal mine, sending alarm signals elsewhere and potentially causing bigger sell-offs in shares and bonds than might have happened otherwise." Hence the efforts being made by Eurozone politicians to limit activity in the CDS markets by banning "naked trading ... the buying or selling of the instruments without owning the underlying bonds" - a move doomed to failure because London is the main centre for such trading, and the UK government refuses to agree to it, not wanting to hit a significant source of income for City traders. [47]

When rating agency Moody's "downgraded" twelve British lenders in early October, the only reason given by the agency was that the Vickers Report on the reform of British banking presaged a reduction in the degree of automatic government support for lending institutions in the event of a future crisis. [48]

But the problem of refinancing the debts of European - including British - banks in the next few years surely provides a much more valid reason for questioning their creditworthiness. It may also help to account for the failure of Project Merlin, and the feebleness of the Vickers Report's recommendations on the separation of retail and investment banking activities. ¶

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On green capitalism, the indignados and the social forums

1 February 2012, by **Esther Vivas**

The offensive of the system, via green capitalism, intensifies in its determination to privatize every aspect of life and nature. And in an economic crisis like the present, one of the strategies of capital to recover its falling rate of profit is based on commercializing the ecosystem. They present new technologies (nanotechnology, biofuels, geoengineering, genetically modified foods) as the alternative to the climate crisis when it will only make the social and ecological crises we face more acute.

All indications are that the Rio +20 Earth Summit will serve to clear the way for multinational to justify their practice of appropriation of natural resources. Hence the importance of the People's summit of Rio +20, to be held days before the official event, organized by a large range of social movements which will present alternative programme and road map.

In Europe and in the United States the resistance of the indignados focuses mobilisations against cuts to the welfare state, privatizations, banking and the payment of illegitimate debt. Paradoxically these are topics that were central to the movements in Latin America in the decades of the 80s, 90s and 2000s. Putting the question of the ecological crisis and the green economy on the agenda of these new social movements, the indignados and the occupy movements was another issue raised repeatedly at this thematic Social Forum. The need to link the fight for social justice with the fight for ecological justice was a major focus.

One final concern at this forum, which had been latent at previous events which is made more urgent by recent events which is to rethink the World Social Forum process in the context of opening of a new cycle of social protests. The social movements that have emerged in the Arab world and

North Africa, Europe and the United States put forward an agenda for action outside the social forum process which were an important instrument in the previous period.

Despite the success of the day of global actions on O-15 (15/10/2011), international co-ordination was rather weak. Ten years ago in contrast, the social forums (and particularly the World Social Forum and the European Social Forum) were one of the main benchmarks of the dynamic global justice and antiwar movements, and acted as the driving force to develop a programme and a series of actions to fight against neo-liberal globalization and war. This is now in the past. And now we need to see what new tools we can create to coordinate this new tide of outrage. What is certain though is that in this journey to develop this new framework and process, the experience of the World Social Forum, the global justice campaigns and the initiatives of the previous period not been in vain but the opposite.

Is another world still possible?

1 February 2012, by **Iain Bruce**

This is the core message coming out from the Thematic (World) Social Forum, which began in Porto Alegre, southern Brazil, on 23 January and has just finished. The Forum was devoted to preparing for the people's summit in June.

We need a massive international campaign

One of the most vocal proponents of this campaign against green capitalism has been Pablo Solón. He

was Bolivia's ambassador to the UN until the middle of last year and his country's lead negotiator at the COP climate talks in Copenhagen and Cancún. As such he played a key part in the stand taken by the ALBA countries (mainly Bolivia, Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua) to block the attempt by Obama, along with Brazil, China, India, South Africa and the EU, to impose the stitched-up Copenhagen Accord on the rest of the world in December 2009. When Venezuela and Cuba backed off from this stance at Cancún a year later, Bolivia, represented by Solón, was left as a lone voice standing out against the refusal of the rich countries to make

clear and binding commitments to reduce their emissions. This week he again stood up against the growth agenda of the Brazilian government.

During a session of so-called "dialogue with civil society", he told President Dilma Rousseff, plainly but politely, that capitalism could not solve the climate crisis and that all the market mechanisms beloved of Brazil, like REDD that turns forest protection into a source of speculation, had to be defeated by a massive campaign. It seems, however, that Solón and the rest of the movement present in Porto Alegre can no longer count on clear support from even the Bolivian

government. Although the ALBA countries returned to a more critical stance at the Durban COP summit last December, Solón told IVP that there is no possibility of Evo Morales' administration, in the near future, calling another Peoples Summit on Climate Change like the one it hosted in Cochabamba in April 2010.

Last year's dramatic conflict with Amazonian indigenous communities over the TIPNIS road project, showed clearly the contradictions between ecosocialist aspirations and a developmentalist, extractivist, economic logic, that in different degrees and forms cut through the middle of the political processes in all the ALBA countries. It is clear that any mass campaign now against the green capitalist project will have to be built and sustained by the social movements themselves. Solón draws a parallel with the campaign a decade ago against Washington's plans for a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). Launched by varying coalitions of social movements around the region, this campaign eventually drew in support from Venezuela and some other governments, contributing to the final defeat of the FTAA project at the Mar del Plata summit in 2005. Defeating green capitalism will require a similar, but much greater, effort.

At Rio+20, capitalism is coming back for the rest

One of the Forum's central plenaries heard eloquent accounts of the extraordinary imperial hubris that underpins this project to turn nature into finance capital's substitute for sub-primes. It heard how the original Rio Earth Summit in 1992 opened the door to privatization of 23.8% of the periodic table, through the patenting of a range of natural products. Rio+20 is coming back for the remaining 76.2%. But the focus is no longer on turning natural products into commodities ("the wood"), but rather the underlying natural processes ("the forests"), re-branded as

'environmental services'. There were chilling accounts of the shift underway from bio-piracy to geo-piracy: discussions already happening in the US Congress, the Bundestag and British parliamentary committees on how to refashion the world's ocean surface to absorb more CO₂, or to change the stratosphere by building artificial volcanoes, a hundred pipes 25 kms high blowing sulphate into the stratosphere in an attempt to 'block' the sun's rays. The British government, it was reported, is to make a second attempt to build a pilot 'volcano' this April, regardless of the likely side-effects of such a project, like displacing the Asian monsoon and aggravating drought across South Asia.

It was again Pablo Solón, echoing many at the Forum, who told President Dilma Rousseff that what was needed was not to submit nature to the laws of the market, to try to force it into the circuits of financial capital; rather we need to understand and respect nature's own laws, of which we are a part.

Challenges for the World Social Forums

The make-up of this Thematic Social Forum reflects the contradictory state of the World Social Forum process on an international level, eleven years after its first edition here in Porto Alegre. It also reflects the peculiar situation of the social movements in Brazil. To begin with it was much smaller. The number taking part in the opening march on the Tuesday was in the thousands, rather than the tens of thousands. Partly this was because it was not a full-blown 'world' social forum. But it also reflects a certain loss of credibility of the WSFs internationally, and the considerable demobilization of Brazil's powerful social movements, which has been one of the most significant and damaging consequences of three consecutive Workers' Party (PT)-led coalition governments.

Nonetheless, the importance and intensity of the debates does not seem

to have diminished. This in turn reflects the urgency of the moment, with the intersection of multiple crises - economic, environmental, etc. - and 2011's extraordinary explosion of struggles from the Arab Spring and Syntagma Square to the Indignad@s and the Occupy movements. Although few in number, the presence in Porto Alegre of voices from all of these struggles contributed greatly to the Forum's radical edge. Whether or not the WSF process can succeed in becoming a forum for convergence, discussion and shared propositions among this new cycle of struggles is perhaps the most important, but unanswered, question facing it.

The presence of radical Brazilian youth in Porto Alegre suggests it might.. Again the numbers were not huge, but the level of discussion and engagement was impressive. This in turn reflects the fact that in spite of the demobilization and political disorientation, Brazil remains one of the countries with the densest networks of social movement organization and awareness in the world. This enduring fabric can be felt in student organizations, the women's movement, environmental campaigns, black and indigenous movements, as well as in tens of thousands of poor communities in urban and rural areas across the country, and even in the divided and debilitated trade unions. In all of these areas there continue to be sharp, sometimes violent struggles, for example those of shanty-town or squatter communities against evictions motivated by land speculation or coming mega-events like the World Cup and the 2016 Olympics. But these tend to be isolated struggles, single issue campaigns, or purely economic, industrial action. Whether it is possible to turn all this into the driving force of a mass, international campaign against green capitalism in the four months leading up to Rio+20, and then beyond, is far from clear.

The extremely weak and unfocussed declaration coming out of the final Assembly of Social Movements on Saturday does not augur well. Its abstract denunciations of imperialism and ambiguous or factually inaccurate formulations on the Arab revolutions, indicate that at least a part of the

social movement leaderships in Latin America do not grasp the centrality of the environmental struggle, and are unwilling to confront the developmentalist, extractivist (and indeed, campist) priorities that characterize much of government policy not only in Brazil, but also in Bolivia, Venezuela, and so on. Curiously, in this respect, the NGOs that dominate in the planning of the Rio+20 People's Summit, are well to the left of some of the big social movements. Nonetheless, building the campaign against green capitalism is a challenge many of the Brazilian organizations seem willing to take on.

Revolutionary convergences in Porto Alegre

These five days have also been an important moment for developing exchanges and convergences – among revolutionaries and between these and many of the new movements that have arisen internationally over the last year. These processes too, for all their modest dimensions, could play a vital role in building and sustaining the kinds of campaign envisaged for Rio+20 and beyond.

Militants of Enlace, the current that organizes Fourth International supporters in Brazil's main radical left party, the Party of Socialism and Liberty (PSOL), were centrally involved in organising and coordinating the Forum, alongside the usual array of movements and institutions that work together in the WSF, many of them far from revolutionary, and some of them closely tied to Brazil's PT-led coalition

government.

Levante, the youth organization linked to Enlace, brought almost 200 young people to the Forum's youth camp, making it the largest single delegation in the camp. There they organised a series of debates, including one with guests from Tunisia, Greece's Syntagma Square, Indignados from Catalonia, Chilean students, Occupy Wall Street and Occupy London SX. One of the most enthusiastic sessions was a presentation of the Fourth International today, organised jointly by Levante and Barricadas, the youth organisation linked to CSOL. CSOL is another current in the PSOL, with its origins in the Morenoite tradition of trotskyism, which has recently taken up permanent observer status in the International Committee of the FI. The meeting heard moving appeals for a renewal of internationalism – an internationalism that is open to new movements and new debates, that puts eco-socialism, feminism and opposition to all forms of oppression at the centre of its struggle against capitalism in crisis – from Enlace leaders Renato Roseno and Tarzia Medeiros, as well as from FI militants from the Spanish state, France and the Philippines.

The Forum also saw another important convergence underway, between FI supporters and the biggest of the international currents coming from the Morenoist tradition. This has its centre of gravity in the Argentinean MST (Socialist Workers' Movement), and includes the MES, one of the two biggest currents in the Brazilian PSOL, as well as Marea Socialista in Venezuela. The MST put at the centre of its intervention in the Forum its aim to work for unification between its international current and that of the

FI (known to many other revolutionaries around the world as the United Secretariat or USEC).

This will not be a simple process. Enlace and the MES have had and still have profound differences over tactics in Brazil, and over their approaches to working in the PSOL. The small number of FI supporters in Argentina have had profound differences with the MST over its attitude to the Kirchner-Fernandez governments and over its electoral tactics. But both currents also have a history of working together in support of Marea Socialista in Venezuela. This Forum saw that in spite of the differences it was possible to organise a number of joint activities in an open and comradely spirit – two days of a joint seminar prior to the Forum on perspectives in Latin America and internationally, a series of sessions held throughout the Forum in the name of the PSOL's educational foundation, including a discussion organised by women from Enlace, other FI groups, the MST and MES, on women and the impact of mega-events.

The discussion on how this relationship can develop is now open and needs to be developed not only through frank debate, but also in the thick of the struggles to come, including those around Rio+20 and the offensive of green capitalism.

Iain Bruce was invited to show some of his films on participatory democracy and the impact of climate change in Latin America at the "Democracine" sessions of the Thematic Social Forum in Porto Alegre.

29th January 2012

Theses on the "Arab Spring"

1 February 2012, by **Gilbert Achcar**

The mass of people who entered into action across the Arab region is a

composite, encompassing a wide range of social layers and categories

that are affected to various degrees by this or that element of this complex

set of determining factors. Most share, however, a common aspiration to democracy: political freedoms, free and fair elections, a democratically elaborated constitution – these are the common denominators that unify the masses involved in the uprising in all the Arab countries where it took hold powerfully. (The fact that the single country where these same conditions are lacking to the highest degree – i.e. the Saudi kingdom – has not yet faced a massive upheaval is a testimony to the intensity of dominance and oppression in that country.)

2. Several impressive features of the ongoing upheaval are directly related to the global information revolution. The speed at which the uprising spread to the entire region has been rightly attributed above all to satellite TV, the new factor that gave the linguistic unity of the region much stronger effect, thus giving renewed and much stronger substance to the old concept of an “Arab Revolution.” Transcending states’ boundaries, ignoring state censorship, the new communication technology allowed the populations of the whole Arab-speaking region to follow the events in real time as they were unfolding – in Tunisia initially, and then, on a much larger scale and with much more breathtaking impact, in Egypt, and finally at the level of the whole region. The power of the Tunisian example was magnified by this new ability for millions of people to watch the uprising as it unfolded. The populations of the entire region took part “virtually” in the Egyptian uprising: they were all in Cairo’s Tahrir Square through the cameras and reporters of satellite TV channels, partaking in the joys and anxieties of the gigantic mass of people gathered at the epicenter of the Egyptian Revolution. In instances where repression prevented TV cameras from attending protests, like in Syria, they were supplanted by countless activists using their phone cameras and Youtube in order to project

images of struggle and repression on the global virtual sphere from where they were relayed by TV satellites and conveyed to their vast public.

3. Satellite TV and global communication through the Internet allowed the peoples of the Arab region to get much greater access and exposure to the global cultural melting-pot and global realities as well as fictions. For an entire new generation – the first one that grew up in this age of information revolution – this experience has been eye-opening in the extreme. The huge gap between, on the one hand, the aspirations and envies created by this virtual citizenship in the fiction-come-true “global village,” and, on the other hand, the bitter and repulsive real subordination to futureless societies ensconced in medieval cultural traits was a hugely powerful determinant in bringing into action a whole layer of young people belonging to a broad social spectrum ranging from the poor but educated to upper middle class. One more time in world history, young educated people (former and present students) stand at the forefront of social and political protest. This new layer made intensive use of the new communication technologies, especially the “social media.” Facebook in particular allowed them to network with an ease and at a speed that would not have been imaginable a mere decade earlier.

4. A most striking paradox characterizes the “Arab Spring”: whereas it has largely been determined by the above described cultural revolution, it is removing the lids that have been containing the expression and action of religious fundamentalist forces – forces that have been the overwhelmingly dominant organized currents of opposition and the major available vehicles for the expression of protest in the region for the last three decades. Hence the paradoxical result of a gigantic movement of

emancipation giving way to electoral victories won by forces of social and cultural – if not political (experience will tell us soon) – repression. This paradox is but the natural outcome of the fact that the lids imposed by the existing despotic and corrupt regimes in the Arab world had created an environment particularly suitable for the growth of this form of opposition and cultural retrenchment. Religion and religious forces have been extensively used by most regimes in the region to quell the remnants of the old nationalist and communist left and prevent the rise of new left forces in the post-1967 era. At a time when progressive political forces had gradually lost all their sources of state support and funding, religious fundamentalist forces had been funded and sustained over the whole region by three regional oil-rich states, which competed in pouring money to them: the Saudi kingdom, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the emirate of Qatar.

5. For this paradoxical state of things to change, it will require that the Arab world go through a new historical experience, during which two simultaneous processes must unfold: on the one hand, regional populations will have to give the religious forces a chance in power and witness their obvious limitations, especially the fact that they lack any programmatic response to the deep social and economic problems that lie beneath the Arab uprising; on the other hand, the new forces of social, political and cultural emancipation that rose powerfully during the upheaval, after taking the lead in igniting and conducting it, will need to build actual organizational networks of political struggle capable of constituting a credible alternative to the religious backlash. For this, they will need to be bold enough to fight the cultural obscurantism of the religious fundamentalist forces instead of accommodating it in the futile belief that they could thus gain access to their constituencies.

The urgency of an independent women's movement against debt and austerity measures

1 February 2012, by **Sonia Mitralia**

...

But why do the debt crisis and the austerity measures affect women more especially?

Because neo-liberal austerity during the debt crisis is aimed particularly at what is left of the welfare State and public services. By dismantling or privatising public services, the State disclaims the social responsibilities it had towards its citizens and shifts them - once again - onto the family. So that the care of children, sick people, old people and handicapped people, even young people in great difficulty and out of work, is no longer the State's responsibility, but the family's, provided free of charge into the bargain!

But the notion of family is very general and abstract. In reality, as everyone knows, in a family it's the women who take on - practically all alone and without any remuneration whatever - all these basic social duties of the State. So the neo-liberal State kills two birds with one stone: it rids itself entirely of the social obligations that "widen the deficit and therefore, the public debt" and forces us women to shoulder them ourselves by working for absolutely nothing!

In other words, women are forced to do the job of, or rather replace the welfare State ...

Yes, but there's more to it than that. There's the other side of the coin, another reason that all these Memorandums are aimed at us: we are the first to be affected by the massive lay-offs that go with the dismantling or privatisation of public social services of every kind, because women make up the great majority of

the workforce in these departments.

The conclusion is simple and concerns thousands of female wage-earners in our country: not only are we the first to be laid off with absolutely no hope of being re-hired, especially if we are already mothers or of child-bearing age. Not only are there masses of us left unemployed, especially young people with no professional future to look forward to. Not only are we condemned to poverty and precarity, but they also burden us with the tasks that were the job of the State, with all that it brings in terms of fatigue, stress, premature ageing, unpaid work and additional expenses!

Yes, but there are also those that say - the State first of all, but also the Church and so-called well-meaning people - that this way women can return to their real mission, which is to devote themselves to their home and family.

Of course they do! Not only do they say it, they shout it from the rooftops because the inhuman policy of the Memorandums has to come in an ideological wrapping! It's just cheap propaganda that uses the most sexist of reactionary clichés to mask the ferocity of their neo-liberal policies. In fact, what we are seeing is something apparently paradoxical: an alliance between the height of capitalist policy-making, as seen in the brutal austerity of the Memorandums, and the proponents of the most obscurantist theories of a bygone age who want to convince us that it is a woman's "nature" to be shut up in the home with no other "tasks" than those of a mother and/or spouse. It's the union between IMF Memorandums and the European Commission who

say they want to "modernise" us, and the bastions of the most anachronistic and misogynous patriarchy embodied by the Church or the right and extreme right.

Is it only propaganda or are there practical consequences for women ...

Yes, it's not just a question of theories and propaganda. The worst thing is the very tangible and disastrous effects on our daily lives. To put it bluntly, this return to a distant past is accompanied by measures designed to deprive women of the few rights and victories they've obtained through the struggles of the last few decades. The Holy Alliance of Capital and Patriarchy effectively abolishes our right to work, and with it, our right to economic independence. It forces us once again to a life of dependency, deprived of the right to free will. It treats us as slaves that have to shoulder the tasks and services formerly provided by the welfare State, because it is supposedly in the "nature" of women to do the work of a kindergarten, old people's home, hospital, restaurant, laundry, psychiatric ward, extra schooling and even job centre for unemployed family members. And all totally free, with no payment, no recognition, because supposedly it's in a woman's blood to "sacrifice herself" for others. With the result that she never has time to take a break, look after her own personality or take an active part in public affairs.

All this must take a high toll on women ...

Yes, it does. Not only because this daily stress means they age prematurely, that they get worn out, but also because all this sexism around the so-called "feminine nature"

leads to the treatment of woman as an inferior being, whose body is considered to be always available and which any man can vent his frustrations on. It's not just a coincidence that the cases of violence against women, which were already numerous, are increasing in this period of capitalism and

Memorandums.

It's for all these reasons, and for many others too, that the conclusion is simple: our resistance to this offensive against women by the Troika government and the Memorandums calls for us to organise ourselves and

develop an independent and autonomous women's movement against debt and austerity. Not only because no one can do it for us, but also because capitalism and patriarchy are so closely intertwined that any fight against one of these tyrants will be a shaky one if it is not also fought against the other ...