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The cradle of what kind of Europe?

29 June 2012, by **Charles-André Udry**

In other words, Greece is no longer just a collection of islands where the sun shines brilliantly, the water is blue (sic) and ouzo is better than French pastis...A place for holidays and tourism. Greece is at the "centre of the political crisis" of the EU. More accurately, of what can happen: either an example of political resistance to the policies of the IMF, the EU and the European Central Bank (ECB), as institutions of finance capital; or an example of the forcible imposition of austerity policies which are destructive for a society and of the resurgence of a far Right accompanying the establishment of a strong state. On this level, we are at the hub of a vast "rail network" where the command centre consists of the hard core of the EU: Germany, Austria, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, France, Northern Italy - with as associates Norway, Switzerland, Sweden, Finland - which will be the strongholds of capital. And this should be put in the context of its

plans for the spatial reorganization of the accumulation of capital in Europe, with its peripheries to the South and East.

All of this must be situated in the framework of a globalization of capital, in crisis and developing (the two go hand in hand), with poles that are in competition on the political, economic and military levels. This confrontation is not erased by the transnationalization of the productive chain of added value and its "spin-offs" (industrial, agribusiness, financial, insurance, logistical and land transnationals) which have made spectacular progress in the last 20 years.

Certainly, for the time being, Spain is more at the centre of the systemic banking crisis of the euro zone where the signs of a liquidity crisis (credit crunch) are appearing. But that is not the subject of this article.

A population condemned

Three days before the elections of June 17, a "landscape" is forgotten. Almost every day, there are reports of suicides in the Greek press - in Greek, as French "specialists", or even more, German "analysts" seem to forget - describing these individual tragedies. In fact, these tragedies reflect those of a traumatized society.

On June 12, 2012, a pensioner, a retired soldier, took his gun and left his house, located in the Kifisia upper middle-class neighbourhood, in the North of Athens. He walked a few hundred metres and killed himself in the middle of the street. This chemical engineer, 75 years old, who had joined the army in connection with his profession, left a message to his wife and his two children: he could not face up to his debts, to the economic crisis. He gave them instructions for the

management of the family savings. Greece has seen, in two years, some 2000 suicides, the bulk of them men. The reason is often made explicit: private debt, unemployment, the loss of all income. However, Greece was a country, before 2010, that was known for a particularly low suicide rate; less than a third of the European average, according to Eurostat.

Again on June 12, a young man, 36 years old, jumped off his balcony. He died. This happened in the neighbourhood of Sepolia, a suburb west of Athens. The Athenian conurbation contains about 40 per cent of the population of the country. He was a taxi driver, unemployed for two years. He lived with his parents. His father was also a taxi driver, unemployed. The family was besieged by "economic difficulties" - according to the formula used by the respectable press to anesthetize the information. Only the mother had a small income. He committed suicide while his parents were out. It was the third suicide in 24 hours. The other, a small artisan in debt and with no prospects, aged 61, hanged himself in a public park, in the suburb of Nikaia, on the outskirts of the capital. A peasant in Crete, on June 10, in Pyrgos, ended his days by swallowing pesticide.

So, some of them leave messages. The motives for these acts of desperation are similar. However it can be seen that the political options - in a general sense and when they are expressed - of these human beings who are in a state of devastation, as is the country, are very different. We have to understand this in order to really grasp a dimension, which is not sufficiently emphasized, of the situation in Greece. De facto, these are rings of a chain of "punishment" of the Greek economy, a chain that is strangling the population.

On Wednesday, April 4, 2012, at 8.45 in the morning, a 77-year old man put a bullet through his head, in the heart of Athens, in Syntagma Square, the central esplanade of the capital. This retired pharmacist, who was not in debt, Dimitris Christoulas, ended his days on the square opposite the Parliament. This symbol of the two dominant political clans - New Democracy (ND, right) of Antonis

Samaras and PASOK (Panhellenic Socialist Movement) of the Papandreou family, currently led by Evangelos Venizelos - which have led Greece, along with their allies of Capital, to the present disaster. Dimitris Christoulas left a letter which, according to the statement of his daughter, "reflected the voice and the political commitment of her father." He had been present at various events on Syntagma Square. He said in a note found in his pocket: "The occupying government [of Georges Papandreou and, before, of Samaras and Karamanlis] in the style of Tsolakoglou [government of collaboration with the Germans, installed during the Second World War] has really wiped out the possibility for me to survive thanks to a decent pension, for which I and I alone paid, for 35 years, without state support. Since I am now of an age which does not allow me to take dynamic individual action - without however ruling out, that if one Greek was to take up a Kalashnikov, I would be the second-, I find no other solution than a dignified end, before I am reduced to scavenging in the rubbish bins to feed myself. I think that young people without a future will one day take up arms and that on Syntagma Square, they will hang the traitors to the nation by their feet as the Italians did with Mussolini, in 1945, on Loret Square, in Milan". Rage and despair, resistance and despondency coexist, as in all crises of this magnitude, for a period at least. On the evening of Wednesday April 4, more than a thousand people gathered on Syntagma Square. They left messages and bouquets of flowers. A call for the gathering was launched via social networks around the slogan: "This was not a suicide. It was a murder. Let us not become used to murder".

At 10 in the evening, the special police - in which the far Right is well established - dispersed those present with special tear gas grenades, which they regularly use. They are delivered by Israel, which uses them against the Palestinians; the BMW motorcycles of the police, which are new, are delivered by the German authorities as a gesture of solidarity with the imposition of a certain order.

Ship-owners, the Church, tax exodus and arms

Before underlining some significant aspects of the situation of Greek capitalism and of the policies imposed by the "Troika" (EU, ECB and IMF), it is useful to illustrate five elements of the socio-political situation, which have important socio-economic repercussions and which are not very much analyzed, or else which are the object of an Orwellian discourse.

Greek ship-owners have their hands on the biggest merchant fleet in the world. As of May 24, 2012, the daily *Katimerini* confirms that they are still in first position in terms of capacity (in tons, or 2.83 cubic metres). They control 3,225 ships, of which 2,014 are under the Greek flag. This amounts to 39.5 per cent of the capacity of the European Union; and some 16 per cent of the world fleet (more than Japan). In 2010, the reported profits - I stress the word "reported" - amounted to 15.4 billion euros, or about 15 per cent of the country's GDP. In 2011, reported profits amounted to 14.1 billion. However, scarcely a penny of this finds its way into the coffers of the state. In fact, the owners have a legal system in terms of taxation which makes them unsinkable by tax collectors. And, since two precautions are better than one, they install the headquarters of their companies in Cyprus or in London. And their fortune in Switzerland or in tax havens governed by Anglo-Saxon law. The richest of them, Spiros Latsis - the son of John Latsis - has his bank in Geneva (Switzerland). He is also active in shipbuilding and in the oil industry, with Hellenic Petroleum. On the list of world billionaires (compiled by the American magazine *Fortune*), he hovers around 65th place.

He knew the Portuguese ex-Maoist José Manuel Durão Barroso, current President of the European Commission, during his studies in Geneva, at the University Institute of European Studies, and also apparently in London (at the London School of Economics). José Manuel, following in

the footsteps of Mao, does not neglect invitations from cultivated and wealthy (or the other way round) persons. It is true that Barroso also knows how to be a host. For the record, in March 2003, when he was Prime Minister of Portugal (from April 2002 till June 2004), he "received", in the Azores, George W. Bush, Blair and Aznar for a declaration of war against Saddam Hussein's Iraq, a few hours before the start of hostilities. His appointment to the Presidency of the European Commission, in 2004, seemed obvious after this feat. As for the invitation from Spiros Latsis, it was made on a luxury yacht. Indeed, Spiros Latsis also presides over a very exclusive yacht club: the PrivatSea, a name that speaks for itself. It seems that Barroso appreciated it. And, interestingly, some time later the European Commission approved a subsidy of 10.3 million euros - a trifling sum, in fact, for the Latsis family - for the Latsis shipyards. The development of Greece required this type of investment for structural convergence in the framework of the EU.

So it is not exactly a "totalitarian" measure - as the Greek Right calls it today - when SYRIZA, the coalition of the radical Left, says that part of the resources to finance its programme can come from taxing ship-owners. And if the Swiss (UBS, among others) bankers have provided the US tax services (IRS - Internal Revenue Service) with 4,000 names of U.S. citizens who have concealed a portion of their wealth in Swiss banks, it would be petty not to give 100 or so names to the tax services of Greece, if SYRIZA wins the elections on June 17, 2012. Which is not yet sure. A government deficit is not only due to expenditure. It is also - and often - linked to lack of revenue, or gifts made to Capital and to large fortunes.

The champions of charity are also the gold medals of the Olympic race for tax exemption. We are talking here about the Orthodox Church and its functionaries. Because priests are paid by the state. In 2001, religion was still mentioned on Greek passports. This reference has been removed after an intervention by the European Court of Justice. The Orthodox Church has very significant financial resources, and not

just so-called intangible values such as its churches and monasteries. It is the largest landowner in the country: 130,000 hectares of fields, woods, beaches, mountains. It has hotels, car parks (an important source of revenue in Athens), companies and more than 300 tourist centres. On this fortune and on the income that comes from it, it was not taxed. Faced with a decision in 2010 to tax these assets, the hierarchy put its feet against the sacred walls. The biggest church in Athens had to endure a demonstration of "outraged faithful" whose slogan was: "Jesus said we must share." Jesus does not always recognize his flock! Now it gives alms to the state that maintains it.

Of course, doctors, merchants, lawyers, notaries, etc. pay no or very low taxes. They consider that taxation "is not part of their culture" and that this comes from a long tradition of "opposition to Ottoman rule". The history of the country has its little bits of history which suit certain classes and social strata. But, when the "orthodox economists" talk about deficits, they do not put the emphasis on the ship-owners and the Church and on a crucial fact: wage-earners are taxed doubly, by direct taxation and by VAT (value added tax), the most socially unequal tax.

Furthermore, we need to bear in mind that the big historical Greek family fortunes and those that flourished in the 1960s (1967-1974: the dictatorship of the colonels) have expatriate status. In other words - a bit like a sector of the Latin American bourgeoisie which has apartments and bank accounts in Miami, as a "precaution" - their money is in Switzerland, London, Austria or in the United States (Delaware), Canada or Australia; not to mention the "Islands" of the English Channel (Guernsey) or the Cayman Islands.

In the German weekly *Die Zeit*, a publication of reference, dated July 5, 2011, in an article entitled "Wo ist das Geld der griechischen Reichen? (Where is the money of the rich Greeks?), the author, Khue Pham, estimated that the volume of the tax exodus amounted to 560 billion euros, roughly 2.5 times GDP.

We see there the other side of the coin of the impoverishment of an increasingly large layer of Greek workers and unemployed, who no longer have access to health care, who are hungry, who no longer have electricity because they have not been able to pay their bills, who send their children to school on an empty stomach... All things that we saw in 2001-2005 in Argentina and that we are still seeing. But this time, it is happening in "the cradle of European civilization" to sum up the worn-out discourse of certain media and of teachers who shuffle their way through their lessons.

Right in the middle of what is called the public debt crisis (in reality a crisis of private debt, in various forms, passed on to the government), which broke out in 2009, Greece's expenditure on arms was, as a percentage of GDP, the highest in Europe: 3.1 per cent, as against 2.4 per cent for Britain and 2.3 per cent for France.

In 2009, during the summer, the Greek government spent 2.5 billion euros for six French frigates and 400 million for Puma helicopter gunships, provided by EADS, the group that built Airbus. The German ThyssenKrupp enterprise sold it six submarines at a cost of 5 billion euros.

On May 10, 2011, the weekly *Der Spiegel*, in an article by Sebastian Fischer, stressed that the government of Angela Merkel had no objection to attempts to sell "Klasse 214" submarines, the most modern, or Leopard tanks.

In February 2010, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Guido Westerwelle, was trying to sell the Eurofighter to the Greek Government, while insisting, simultaneously, on the need to drastically reduce spending in the public sector and "social expenditure". Lines of credit for the sale of arms from German or French industry were opened by French and German banks, with export guarantees (so what is involved is a subsidy to the German and French arms industries). And the German or French creditor was going to exert pressure on the Greek debtor to pay up. That meant raising value-added tax and lowering the wages of

public sector workers. Or even "privatizing", i.e. by making it possible for Deutsche Telefon, for a very low price, to completely take over the Greek public telephone company, OTE.

If Greece plays an important role in NATO, this is related not only to its geographical location, but to the balancing act between Turkey and Greece set up by the major players in the Alliance. To this must be added the issue of control of the oil and gas resources in Cypriot waters, resources on which Israel also has its eye.

There is in a massive reduction of this military expenditure an element of reallocation of resources and, above all, a further argument in favour of emphasizing the illegitimacy of the debt, with the objective of not paying it. A first step, if it is part of this perspective, could be a unilateral declaration of an immediate moratorium on the payment of the debt.

A debt concerning which a French economist who is absolutely mainstream and therefore recognized in the French-speaking world and even beyond - Charles Wyplosz, Professor at the IHEID (Institute of High International Studies and Development) in Geneva - declared recently in a debate with a banker: "If you eliminate the debt, you reduce the budget deficit, since a large part of public expenditure is today used to pay the interest on the debt. Therefore, no more need for austerity. If it [Greece] had defaulted two years ago the problem would be solved and its economy would now be growing. The Gordian knot of Greece is not its competitiveness, but its public debt. Once this problem is eliminated, the Greeks will be quite happy in the eurozone". (*Le Temps*, June 1, 2012).

Concerning the other aspect of the disinformation - and therefore the need for revolutionary socialists to put the world the right way up again so as to engage in a large-scale battle for a change that goes to the root of the problem - we must mention the clichés of a xenophobic tone spread by the European media, among others the media in the countries of the "hard core" of Europe. This is no accident.

According to the OECD and Eurostat statistics, average annual working time for workers in industry, commercial services and agriculture, in 2008, was in Greece 2,120 hours, 470 more than in Britain. We are far from those clichés. In 2007, the average level of pensions was 617 euros. The minimum wage was 752 euros in 2009.

The slogan "Living beyond one's means" as an explanation of the "debt crisis" is just propaganda which fits in harmoniously with very brutal austerity and with the authoritarian government practices (European and national) that accompany the introduction of new social and moral norms (to use Marx's formula) of reproduction of labour power (wages, unemployment benefit, pension, education, etc.) and of a new norm of utilization of (duration of the working day, intensity of work, flexibilisation of monthly and annual duration) of the labour force. In other words, a sharp increase in the rate of exploitation and a slide towards the absolute impoverishment of a growing layer of workers and unemployed.

Some of them can only feed themselves with difficulty, can no longer have the health care that they did in the past and cannot ensure the education of their children with the hope that they might know better days. Not to mention the migrants thrown into the hell of a daily struggle to simply survive. All this has become visible in Athens or Thessaloniki. In two years, "the world has changed", for the worse.

Since 2009-2010, this Greece has become a laboratory for Capital, which is posing a question, a little "technical", and serving as a test for Europe: what is the level of "social acceptability" (a term that echoes that of employability in relation to unemployment) of a population that has suffered such a shock, and under what form will the regression inflicted on Greek society be expressed in political terms?

These are the two facets of the test concerning the confrontation between classes which has been underway for two years and which found a first politico-electoral expression on May 6

and will experience another one on June 17.

Memoranda for generalized expropriation

When the solvency crisis became obvious, in the first quarter of 2010, a quick and simple solution might have seemed at hand. It would have been sufficient to amend the Charter of the ECB and to allow it to buy Greek debt in the same way as the Fed (US Federal Reserve) does. To become a lender of last resort. It would, including from a general point of view of the ruling classes, have helped limit the sharpness, in its scale and in time, of the adjustment of Greek capitalism. But for decisive fractions of European - and not only German - capital, the dimensions and the unfolding of the crisis of the eurozone, with its specific characteristics depending on the country (from Spain to Ireland, via Italy) had not yet been grasped in all their ramifications.

Furthermore, an operation of the purchase of Greek debt by the ECB would have created an unacceptable situation for the powerful motor sector of German capitalism: the export industry. Why? This sector had been particularly spoilt by Gerhard Schröder, Chancellor of Germany from October 1998 to October 2005. A Social Democrat through ambition, a careerist aiming at the envied (by him) status of capitalist by conviction and a close collaborator of Putin (again) through financial interest.

Schröder, with the help of Peter Hartz, former Director of "human resources" of the Volkswagen car group, prepared a real deregulation of the labour market (the Hartz IV reforms). The goal: to reduce unit labour costs. They made their calculations by dividing so-called overall labour costs - including social security contributions and benefits - by actual production.

To achieve this goal, one of the most effective instruments lies in the use of the industrial reserve army. Neo-classical economists call this:

"activation of labour". Translate: reduce to the maximum the duration of unemployment benefits. After 12 months, the unemployed person is transferred to the social assistance scheme, subject to strict conditions of income and property. If the conditions are met (for example, no income of a partner, no property), a single unemployed person can receive an allowance of 395 euros per month, not enough to eat sausage every day! He must above all accept all job opportunities proposed by specialized agencies. It can be a job at 400 euros a month or a job "of public utility" at one euro an hour.

The goal was not to "solve" unemployment, especially not long-term unemployment. But to lower the wages pyramid, starting at the bottom, with those who get a job for the first time or "come back onto the labour market" after a period of unemployment. Combined with a capitalistic restructuring of enterprises, increased intensity and flexibility of work and a more than cooperative trade union apparatus, the result was clear: labour costs for German employers would be strongly compressed.

However, the export sector of German capitalism must be placed in a broader context in order to provide a realistic assessment of the overall unit costs, i.e. those including intermediate goods: for example, parts imported for the assembly of a car. For this purpose, German companies can use their investments in the immediate hinterland, ranging from Slovenia to the Czech Republic to Slovakia, via Poland, Hungary or Croatia, i.e. countries that have a cheaper and relatively highly qualified labour force. In addition, there is at the disposal of the big firms a dense "local" network of subcontractors (small and medium-sized enterprises), on which the pressure concerning delivery prices is great and which pass it on to their workers in terms of wages, intensity of work and short-term contracts. Thus, German exporters have a double advantage: they are competitive in terms of cost, while their exported products are most often in niches where the factor of competitiveness/quality comes into play.

It remained only to add a euro which does not rise too much against the dollar, the yen or the South Korean currency. A rapid resolution of the crisis of the eurozone, by debt redemption, would have driven the euro higher and thus weakened the position (in terms of exchange rates) for the export of the production that is sold outside the eurozone, which is a little less than 40 per cent of the total, but in expanding areas (Asia, for example).

Therefore, the task of the ECB would remain that of "guaranteeing" the stability of prices and refusing any change of the sort that would turn it into a European Fed. This would have involved other institutional and political changes.

First result: the compression of incomes in Germany led to curbing imports while stimulating exports, thus creating large trade surpluses, while the euro rose against other currencies, thanks to the uncertainties emerging from the South of the eurozone. This is a paradoxical situation, often misunderstood by those who have not mastered the language of Goethe and who make the psychology of Merkel a key element of the policy of the German government and of the German leaders of the ECB, of whom some are certainly tinged with a dogmatism still marked by the "lessons" of the crisis of the end of the 1920s and the 1930s.

â€¢ Another advantage in the 2009-2011 phase: apply super Hartz IV plans to countries such as Greece and Portugal and ensure that the big German banks have time to disengage, without too many losses and with guarantees, from the riskier positions taken towards shaky countries (bonds and other commercial loans) and firms to which they had extended credits.

It was thus that a Troika - that is, the Germanized ECB, with a Frenchman, Trichet at its head, the IMF and the European Commission - imposed, definitively, on May 5, 2010 a first memorandum. It would be followed by a second in June 2011.

1 Â° The first (Memorandum I) list of anti-social measures included: the abolition of various bonuses for civil

servants and pensioners of the public and private sectors; a 20 per cent wage cut for civil servants; a three-year wage freeze in the public and private sectors; the cancellation of solidarity benefits for the poor; an increase in VAT and excise duties on fuel (the price of unleaded petrol increased by 63 per cent) and cigarettes; payment of contributions for 40 years and no longer 37 years to obtain a full pension; reduction of the amount of the pension by 35 per cent, calculated on the basis of the last 10 wages and no longer on the best-paid five-year period; abolition of retirement before the age of 60 (mothers and those with three children had the possibility of taking early retirement); the minimum wage went from 750 to 500 euros (and 456 euros for the first year of employment); redundancies were facilitated and compensation for dismissal was reduced.

2 Â° The second list (Memorandum II) aimed to change, at the root, "labour relations": the legal establishment of priority for "agreements" at workplace level over those at national level; the possibility of not applying a collective agreement signed by the Union of Enterprises (whereas application of an agreement was obligatory if the Ministry of labour validated it); arbitration in collective labour agreements "must promote competitiveness on the basis of the cost of labour and job creation (sic)"; there are no longer any restrictions on the number of hours of part-time work and on temporary contracts; the trial period is one year for new jobs (previously it was two months), and during that period, employers can dismiss workers without notice or compensation; the minimum wage was again attacked through the new Bolkestein directive (displaced workers have the working conditions of the country of origin); premiums for overtime strongly reduced; unemployment benefits reduced by 500 million euros; the 3836/2010 law transformed the entire system of complementary pensions: so no longer will a single euro come out of the state budget for this purpose and spending will remain stable, even though the number of beneficiaries increases (some 2.8 million workers pay contributions to complementary

pension funds); freezing of pensions; the list of hard and exhausting job categories will now concern no more than 10 per cent of the labour force and the workers excluded from this list will see the age at which they have a right to a miserable pension increase from between 5 and 7 years; a sharp reduction in disability pensions; an increase in the price of health care and hospital examinations; an increase in VAT from 11 per cent to 23 per cent for very many goods and to 30 per cent for services; an increase in real estate tax that will hit workers to the tune of an additional 400 million euros; lump-sum taxation of the self-employed; the privatization of strategic sectors (railways, transportation, energy, airports, ports, etc.), with accompanying loss of jobs, all this under the pretext of "filling the coffers of the state" to "repay the debt". In fact, the aim was to offer low-priced sectors of the economy to capitalist firms with surpluses of capital who were seeking new profitable opportunities.

The overall objectives are clear: to thoroughly modify the national rate of exploitation, which was codified in labour and social legislation as well as in institutions structured by the results of class conflict in the post-1974 period.

The lever used was to ensure the service of the debt by arriving at a positive current account balance in the medium term. An exercise that can serve as an example for other countries, it was thought in "high places".

These plans were as such socially and politically inapplicable by a government. And partial implementation could only lead to a sharp contraction of the economy and therefore of the tax resources obtained by the state.

But this shock therapy was above all intended to lead to bypassing governmental and parliamentary bodies and creating a *de facto* government, represented by a "Troikian task force" and supervisors, French and German among others, to "reform the state administration". Because the expected failure of the concretization, even partial, of the

memoranda led to the resignation of Georges Papandreou (on November 10, 2011 - he took office in 2009) and the setting up, without an election, of a "technical" Government headed by Loukas Papademos. He studied at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (USA) and his career led him to the Central Bank of Greece - supervising Greece's entry into the euro zone - and to the European Central Bank, of which he was vice-president. A change of institutional paradigm that was repeated in Italy, with Mario Monti, on the same date.

This administration to be reformed by the "task force" is the legitimate offspring of a system of government that the bipartisan regime of New Democracy and PASOK had subjected to their clientelist practices. This clientelism has a name: *Rousfeti*. The system of bribes also has one: *Fakelakia*. Who has benefited? Let us take an example: Siemens, which sold, for the 2004 Athens Olympics, a system of electronic security that was useful for the army and the police, by buying off politicians, civil servants and military personnel, for the most part before the 2000 election. The Olympic Games are prepared in advance... and the 8 billion euro deficit is paid for later. The Mayor of Athens, Dora Bakoyannis, then a member of New Democracy, did not overlook the benefits of this manna. She has moreover rejoined the ranks of New Democracy, after having created her own political party (the Democratic Alliance) and had a disappointing electoral result on May 6, 2012. She is today a leading figure in the offensive against SYRIZA and in support of the European institutions, as an MEP. So there was played out a sort of *Rousfeti* and *Fakelakia* combined which was meant to compensate for the lack of political charisma of Antonis Samaras, an elected representative of the Peloponnese (the constituency of Messinia). We must all the same remember that everything is kept in the family: Doris Bakoyannis is the daughter of Konstantinos Mitsotakis, a historical godfather of the Right. The party-clan network works as well with ND as with PASOK.

Finally, to conclude this episode, we should not forget to recall the role of

Goldman Sachs and JP Morgan in the heavily massaged presentation, very professionally done, of Greece's accounts. The financial daily *La Tribune* (19 June, 2010) stated: "When Greece entered the eurozone in 2001, it was known that the statistics were fiddled." On February 13, 2010, the *New York Times* indicated that Greece's accounts had been rendered obscure by the two banks Goldman Sachs and JP Morgan. However, the name of the managing director and vice-president of the European branch of Goldman Sachs was Mario Draghi. He was not ignorant of the "Greek case". Merkel, Sarkozy, Juncker (the Luxembourg Prime Minister at the head of the Eurogroup) and others put him at the head of the ECB, also in early November 2011. Draghi was also educated at the MIT. He knows Monti. He has been the head of Italian public companies in the process of privatization such as ENI, IRI, the Banca Nazionale del Lavoro (BNL)... In a word, the man for the job.

The denunciations of collusion in Greece made by the Troika are like the pot calling the kettle black. The *Rousfeti* in the summits of the EU is dressed up in "good manners" proper to the European oligarchy.

Indebtedness and exclusion of Greece from "Greek national law"

A simple analysis of the growth of the net public debt shows the effects of the devastating austerity measures imposed by the Troika, even if they were only partially applied. Between 2000 and 2008 this public debt was around 115 per cent of GDP; in 2009 it rose to 133 per cent, and then to 150 per cent in 2010 and 165 per cent at the end of 2011.

Since 2010, Greece's "bail-out plan", "100 billion euros of aid", was used to repay the German banks - Deutsche Bank - and their European counterparts. It was also necessary to allocate time to liquidating bad debts

(Greek, but also Irish and Portuguese) and allowing them to be "exchanged" thanks to the ECB. In fact, the ECB purchases on the secondary (second-hand) market, "rotten" debts of these countries. It counts them at face value, not market value. Against these debts sold at a good price - not the market price - to the ECB, the big banks can buy, in part, healthy German or British, or even Swiss bonds, counting on the revaluation of the Swiss currency. On May 15, 2010, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), markedly on the right, recognized the interest of the operation for the banks, not for Greece and its population. All the banks, at different rhythms, have reduced fairly quickly their exposure to Greek bonds.

In this new situation a long negotiation began - under the direction of Charles Dallara, Managing Director of the IFI (International Finance Institute), an organization responsible for defending the interests of the banks, whose president, today in the process of leaving, is Josef Ackermann. He was then president of the Executive Board of Deutsche Bank. The IFI had to negotiate the discount (haircut) on Greek debt. In early March, 2012, the operation was completed, at least almost completed. Banks, investment funds and insurance companies were to receive in exchange for every 100 euros of Greek debt surrendered 31.50 euros of new Greek securities with longer maturities and lower coupons (interest rates) and 15 euros of European Financial Stability (EFSF) Fund securities, therefore a mutualized state subsidy... to "investors". And, above all, no denunciation of the debt.

In exchange, the European proconsuls strengthened their grip on the running of Greece - of its society and its economy, thus on the daily life of its inhabitants - in the name of the release of 130 billion euros from the IMF and the EU promised in February 2012. This money will only be attributed in thin tranches and under permanent conditions. Out of this 130 billion, 14.5 billion went directly to creditors, since this amount of debt fell due on 20 March 2012.

Those who resist the exchange of debt (haircut and restructuring) are holders of bonds under non-Greek law, on whom therefore the haircut agreement cannot be imposed. They are hedge funds - hedge funds that are part of the shadow banking system, absolutely deregulated - betting on the bankruptcy (default) of Greece, because they are holding CDS (Credit default swaps). The total of these bonds is estimated at 18 billion euros. The opportunities for gains come on the one hand from operations of purchasing bonds cheaply, and, on the other hand, from the legal battle they are conducting to try to force Greece to repay part of the debt at a rate higher than that at which they acquired these bonds. Finally, they can expect activation of CDS as long as these "insurers" have not disappeared, given that the exchanges of CDS, over-the-counter, are obscure.

Their analysis is not necessarily shared by everyone. The banks which received masses of liquidity from the ECB - through two longer-term refinancing operations (LTRO), with a maturity of 36 months, on December 21, 2011 and February 29, 2012 - are doing good business by borrowing at one per cent (and, in reality, at less) and lending at 3, 4 or 5 per cent. They are "recovering". Moreover, they believe that this injection of credit, paradoxically, makes them much less sensitive to a Greek default and exit from the euro. Two events that are becoming, for them, more likely. We will see about that, because to the Greek lightweight, we have to add a heavier middleweight: the Spanish banking system.

We have there an example of speculative operations outside of national law on bonds issued by the Greek state. This is another form of supervision. It is illustrated in an even more striking manner when we consider the establishment of the Hellenic Republic Asset Development Fund (HRADF) under the management of the former banker Costas Mitropoulos. He is not unacquainted with Spiros Latsis.

The HRADF, according to Costas Mitropoulos "was established following consultations between the Greek Government and the Troika,

consisting of experts from the European Commission, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Central Bank (ECB), responsible for two years for advocating economic reforms and overseeing their implementation by the Greek authorities. None of us comes from the administration. We were all in the private sector. For my part, before accepting this position, I was the head of the Investment bank Eurobank EFG Equities, property of the Latsis Group based in Geneva. I accepted this task as a second military service. Our mission consists of receiving from the state property deeds or shares of assets to be negotiated. We are preparing the dossiers, settling legal problems, making all that "saleable" (*Le Temps*, April 7, 2012). The external consultants of the HRADF are UBS and Credit Suisse, which must have some fortunes of Greek tax exiles in their coffers. Everything is for sale.

Two examples are given by Costa Mitropoulos, the banker-soldier: "The former Hellenikon airport, in the heart of the city of Athens, on the shores of the Aegean Sea, is the biggest landholding on sale in a European capital. As for the National Lottery, which was a division of the Ministry of Finance since 1865, two companies, one Italian and the other American, have already approached us."

When the journalist of *Le Temps* asked what was his preference, for the moment, for the sale of the concessions, he replied frankly: "The advantage of the concessions is that they limit the investment of the purchasers. They will only have to pay for the right to manage the infrastructure, long-term contracts that will ensure profitability."

Finally, facing political uncertainty - since the election of May 6, against the advice of Costas Mitropoulos, the other four administrators of the HRADF have decided to suspend operations until the elections of June 17, 2012 - our banker pulls two arguments out of his wallet. The first: "Our first message to get across is: we are not the Greek state. We are an independent fund responsible for privatizations, and we now own 3 per cent of the territory of Greece. We

have a mandate for three years. We are protected against political interference". The second is brandished, after Costas had touted his successes in operations of acquisitions and mergers in Greece: "I know the rules: an investor, to be interested in a Greek privatization today, must expect to triple or quadruple his investment. One euro invested must bring in three or four". There is the real golden rule that the European Commission shoves down our throat with the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance (TSCG).

It is with this harsh reality that the social movement, workers, students, popular layers and the radical left in Greece are confronted.

The planned collapse

The social and economic effects of all these economic measures do not require a lengthy explanation. The contraction of GDP is massive and durable. Thus, the evolution of real GDP (by volume, at constant prices), compared to the previous year, is as follows: 2008: 0.2 per cent; 2009: 3.3 per cent; 2010: -3.5 per cent; 2011: -6.9 per cent. The drop is estimated at 4.7 per cent for 2012 (Eurostat). The latest figures published by the statistical services of the Greek state (Elstat) indicate a decline of 6.5 per cent (after a first estimate of -6.25 per cent, on May 14, 2012) in the first quarter from the same quarter of 2011. So it is a recession-crisis of the 1930 kind.

Fiscal compression and the reduction of the different components of the social wage resulted logically in a collapse of the internal market, with effects on the sector of small shopkeepers (a cascade of bankruptcies). This is all the more so as the decrease in tourism adds its regressive effects. One in five jobs is related to tourism. According to the Central Bank, income related to this sector decreased by 15.1 per cent in the first quarter.

Carrefour, the number one in the hypermarket sector in Europe, present in Greece since 1999, saw its sales fall

by 16 per cent in the first quarter of 2012. With total sales of 2.2 billion euros in 2011, the loss registered was 40 million euros, according to analysts at Espirito Santo Bank. So Carrefour - which must consolidate its positions in France and in other European countries - ceded its share to its Greek partner Marinopoulos, which will operate under franchise. The revamped Carrefour will continue to operate in the region, from Cyprus to Bulgaria via Albania and other countries of the Balkans.

It is therefore misleading to present a trade balance that is improving: if imports are falling, it is enough for exports to shrink proportionally less for the balance to improve. But the drop in investment is there to reveal the cumulative collapse. And the share of wages in GDP is just over 37 per cent!

Officially, the unemployment rate reached 22.6 per cent in March 2012 (revised figures published on 14 June, 2012). It stood at 15.9 per cent in March 2011. The officially registered unemployed were 1.12 million in March, 2012; an increase of 57 per cent in a year. The number of people employed, according to the definition of Elstat, went from 4,548,611 in 2008 to 3,843,905 in 2012!

For the 15 to 24 age group, the unemployment rate jumped from 24 per cent in 2008 to 52.8 per cent in 2012. Emigration thus becomes an option for a fraction of this generation, educated and qualified, as we can also see in Spain and Portugal. According to German statistics, the number of Greeks seeking employment in that country increased by 90 per cent in 2011 (from 23,800 in 2010); but the selection in terms of qualification is strong. Priority to doctors, nurses, engineers, etc.

For the age group between 45 and 54, the evolution is as follows: 4.2 per cent in 2008 and 16.3 per cent in 2012, which amounts to a depressive trauma. This trauma materializes in the rise of hunger among children, the unemployed, pensioners and the elderly. And by increasingly problematic access to expensive drugs for cancer, multiple sclerosis or even diabetes. Indeed, the National Organization for Expenditure on

Health Care (EOPYY) has accumulated a debt of 250 million euros to pharmacists. It has committed itself to paying it before a deadline of June 17 (*Kathimerini*, 4 June 2012 and June 6, 2012)! Therefore the pharmacists refuse to sell drugs on credit if EOPYY has not settled its arrears. Otherwise, patients must find the few pharmacies that are controlled by EOPYY. Health centres and hospitals are seeing their budget compressed to the point of no longer having basic "equipment". This emergency is directly related to the fact that of the 5.2 billion euros that were to be paid in May 2012, the IMF and the European Commission held back one billion pending the outcome of the elections of 17 June (*Wall Street Journal*, June 6, 2012). A slight bit of blackmail! A similar situation is looming in the sector of energy and its distribution (DEH, DEPA, LAGHE) where the need for loans is very pressing for the end of June 2012, with the risk of power cuts. Which should make the task of the privatizing vultures easier.

Suffocated by the austerity policies dictated by the Troika and caught in a European turmoil which is far from over - to be more exact, which is for the moment gathering speed - Greek capitalism offers no prospect to majority sectors of the population of respecting their basic social needs, needs which should be concretized in terms of rights, of social security in the broad sense of the term. Which they are denied in the name of payment of the debt and of a "return to competitiveness".

This is a deliberate policy for a fraction of European capital. Even though this option might resemble, to use an analogy, going back, in the Twenty-first century, to the practice of bleeding by surgeons. That is why some economists call it "stupid", without understanding the class objectives that can, admittedly, lead to uncontrolled derailments in the eurozone.

From May 6 to June 17, 2012: a

political system gone topsy-turvy

In this context there occurred the earthquake of the May 6, 2012 elections. On the Richter scale what will be the magnitude of the shock of the elections which will take place in two days time, on Sunday June 17, 2012? Impossible to predict.

In any case, these are not, therefore, normal elections. They will be the expression of both an "epochal" crisis on the political level and the crisis of an economic and political construction put in place by European finance capital.

This finance capital wanted to have a currency, the euro, in order to intervene, with profits, on the world stage of market finance, initially against the dollar and the yen. A single currency in a heterogeneous overall context which therefore made competitive wage devaluation the substitute for competitive devaluations of national currencies (the French franc, the lira, the drachma). These devaluations were the fairly common response to loss of market share, among other things.

In addition, in this EU, there existed neither a large federal budget nor a bank which could act to reallocate resources and as a lender of last resort (therefore an ECB which would have a profile similar to that of the Fed).

Faced with a crisis of over-production and over-accumulation of capital - in a really globalized configuration of capitalism, with the new economic blockages that result - the shock to the economies of the countries of the periphery could only worsen after the crisis began in 2007 in the United States. And there is no reason why, in the course of the 2010 decade, the heterogeneity within the eurozone will not become exacerbated. Unless we imagine a large-scale politico-economic turn - including within a capitalist framework. Which would require a massive upsurge of social struggles and a certain expression of that upsurge on the political level. This makes the Greek elections, and

their sequels, such an important moment in Europe today.

On May 6, 2012, the political system established at the end of the dictatorship of the colonels (1967-1974) exploded. The TNT charges are easy to identify.

First, a large number of struggles - multiple and diverse - from different sectors of society, almost all of whom were being attacked. In the course of two years, there were 19 one-day strikes; not exactly general strikes in the sense that they were the expression of an uprising of a major part of society, which would tend to raise the question of power. But these strike days were combined with multiple massive demonstrations in front of the Parliament, which was defended by specialized police forces of great brutality. This gave them a marked character of confrontation politics. They reflected the rejection of the dictates of the Troika and of the servile collaboration of the two historical parties, New Democracy (ND) and PASOK. Therefore, these two parties have collapsed.

ND had 41.84 per cent of the vote in September 2007 and 33.48 per cent in October 2009. It found itself on May 6, 2012, with 18.88 per cent. PASOK won 38.10 per cent of the vote in September 2007, 43.92 in October 2009 and 13.2 per cent in May 2012.

On the other hand, SYRIZA, the Coalition of the Radical Left, formed in 2004, got 5.04 per cent of the vote in September 2007, 4.60 per cent in October 2009 - which led to a rightward split and the formation of the Democratic Left of Kouvelis, which won 6.1 per cent of the vote in May 2012 - and 16.76 per cent on May 6, 2012. SYRIZA became the second party on the Greek political scene.

As for the Greek Communist Party, the KKE, a Stalinist organization compared to which the Portuguese Communist Party cuts a postmodernist figure, it went from 8.15 per cent of the vote in October 2009 to 8.47 per cent in May 2012, after two years of social mobilization. Its sectarianism and its line consist of a simple rejection-denunciation of the EU and the euro, without any concrete "exit"

strategy. This seems to be "compensated" by a partisan self-assertion that builds on a strong organizational structure and can be reassuring for some militants in a social crisis of such magnitude.

However to be so evidently outflanked by SYRIZA has provoked questioning in the ranks of the KKE, at a time when its members and sympathizers are waiting for "concrete solutions" to a socio-existential crisis.

Antarsya (Together, a regroupment of four organizations) got 1.19 per cent of the vote in May 2012. It refused to participate in the SYRIZA coalition, despite clear overtures, for the elections of 17 June.

On the other side of the political spectrum, LAOS (Orthodox Popular Alert) got 2.9 per cent of the votes and is therefore not in Parliament, the bar being placed at 3 per cent. However, Golden Dawn (Chrysi Avgghi), a self-proclaimed neo-Nazi organization, Holocaust deniers, made a breakthrough with 6.97 per cent of the vote. Golden Dawn combines a nationalist orientation and a campaign against immigrants, with repeated and very violent physical attacks against Afghan, Pakistani and Bangladeshi migrants. In a tradition that is proper to this type of organization, Golden Dawn seeks to physically occupy the terrain. In various "specialized" police barracks, this party won some 50 per cent of the vote on May 6, which expressed a process of implantation in this milieu. This kind of neo-Nazi political formation should not be underestimated in the context of a deeply wounded society. Its entry into Parliament gives it resources and a springboard to occupy the public space. It can exploit this opening badly. However, it can also learn how to have a media presence that is a little more controlled (for example, no longer, during a TV show, hitting an MP linked to the KKE and assaulting a representative of SYRIZA). Its influence in small towns is real.

In the weeks prior to June 17, ND adopted an anti-immigrant discourse. The institutions of the EU, such as Frontex, make xenophobic and racist discourse respectable and make it possible to draw political advantage

from the fraudulent orientation of the governments of the EU concerning the "control of migration flows".

After May 6, 2012, the parliamentary deadlock was total, because it was impossible to constitute a majority of 151 seats in the Parliament of 300. The KKE has 26 seats, Syriza 52, the Democratic Left 19, PASOK 41; ND has 108 seats (including the attribution of 50 extra seats for the party that gets the most votes), the independent Greeks 33, Golden Dawn 21. After various attempts conducted under the direction of President Karolos Papoulias (from PASOK), and taking note of their failure - including the new European magic solution of a government of "technicians" - an interim government was elected in the only session of the Parliament elected on May 6.

On May 16, 2012, the jurist Panagiotis Pikramenos, who did part of his studies at the faculty of Paris II Panthéon-Assas, took over as head of a transition government formed, this time, by "technocrats". Everything seems to be suspended until June 17.

Everything except the formidable multiform campaign of pressure and blackmail by the European institutions, by the central banks of various European countries, by party leaders ranging from Holland to Cameron to Merkel. And by the IMF. With the delicate flexibility of the former champion of synchronized swimming that she is, the boss of the IMF, Christine Lagarde, did not forget to ask the Greeks, in an interview given to the British daily *The Guardian* (May 25, 2012), "to help each other collectively by paying their taxes"; while stressing that "schoolchildren in Niger" deserved more sympathy. So let us bet that she went hunting in London and Zurich for the Greek fortunes that are stashed away. And let us hope that she will one day be reminded, by schoolchildren who have become students and citizens, of the effects of the adjustment plans of the IMF that were applied in Niger.

All these forms of intimidation had a single goal: to secure the victory of a coalition led by Antonis Samaras of ND and to indicate that any rejection of the memoranda (I and II) would

lead to chaos, to the strangulation of Greece and its population. Of course, the Troika suggests that a renegotiation of the conditions imposed to ensure the "bailout" is possible. How can it do otherwise when Samaras himself is forced to assert to his own party and to his electoral base his determination to renegotiate? All the more so as the mediatisation of the political debate has imposed as the central theme, artificial but far from neutral: "either the euro or the drachma, and therefore chaos."

The bipolarization ND-SYRIZA, or pro- and anti-memorandum

Since May 6, 2012, political life in Greece is bipolarized: on the one hand, ND (with Samaras and Dora Bakoyannis), on the other SYRIZA with Alexis Tsipras, who cut his teeth in the youth organization of the KKE and the student movement. He is 38 years old. Evangelos Venizelos, the new boss of PASOK, tries to exist by making himself the high priest of a "real organic government of national unity". At its lowest level, PASOK is seeking a space that may not be similar to the size of its leader.

The opinion polls - the expression of a kind of Americanization of "political life" in Europe - have come to occupy an important place in recent weeks. They confirm the upheaval of May 6, 2012. Here is a sample for the period from 19 May to 29 May. These polls indicate the voting intentions at the time the survey was made. Their methodology is not always explicit or explained. But the trend is clear enough. Legal polls were forbidden from June 1, 2012.

INSERT TABLE HERE

The so-called secret polls published in the press since the beginning of June are subject to many interpretations, more or less clearly tainted with propaganda. They do however indicate the following trends: ND between 26 and

29.5 per cent; SYRIZA: 23 to 26 per cent. PASOK: 9 to 12 per cent; Independent Greeks: 6 to 7 per cent; Democratic Left: 4 to 5.5 per cent; Golden Dawn: 4.5 to 6 per cent; KKE: 3 to 4 per cent. The share of the vote obtained by the formations below the 3 per cent mark (21 political parties and independents are standing) has decreased from 18 per cent to 10 per cent. The duel is still close between ND and SYRIZA.

SYRIZA was formed, in 2004, as an electoral coalition consisting of 11 organizations. Synaspismos (Coalition) is its main component. It is currently called the "Coalition of the Left, Movements and Ecology". Alexis Tsipras is the leader of Synaspismos and spokesperson for SYRIZA. Synaspismos was formed in 1991. Within the SYRIZA coalition are to be found smaller formations of the far Left. Some come from Maoism, such as the Communist Organization of Greece (KOE), which has been marked by a "patriotic" orientation in recent months. Its weight in numbers is significant. There is also DEA (Internationalist Workers' Left) of Trotskyist origin. It has broken with the international current (IST) led by the British SWP. It is close to the International Socialist Organization (ISO) of the United States and the MPS (Movement for Socialism) in Switzerland works closely with it. The organization AKOA, Ecological and Renovator Communist Left, which comes from the former Greek Communist Party of the Interior, is also part of SYRIZA.

If we look at its trajectory Synaspismos has experienced a turn to the left, marked by the arrival as president of Alekos Alavanos, which the leaders of DEA understood. The right wing lost out in the internal debates and finally left to constitute the party Democratic Left (DIMAR), led by Fotis Kouvelis. Synaspismos came out in favour of the Maastricht Treaty signed in 1992. This position has been reviewed and criticized since then. It is one of the elements of its critique of the structuration of the European oligarchy and its institutions, a criticism which does not imply a nationalist retreat, but an orientation towards "another Europe".

The formation, in 2004, of SYRIZA consolidated the more left position of Synaspismos and opened up the coalition to debates in the course of which the numerically weaker formations have their say and influence the decisions taken. The description "Coalition of the Radical Left" expresses quite well its evolution up to now. And SYRIZA explicitly identifies itself with the best traditions of the Greek revolutionary movement.

With the constitution of SYRIZA, changes have occurred, interactively, in the most politically active organizations of this coalition. And a new coalition, this time between generations, has formed. Within it, the radicalized sectors of the student movement have been given a prominent place. They form part of the immediate entourage of Tsipras, as concerns Synaspismos. They identify themselves as Marxists, sometimes of the Althusserian school. The anti-racist movement has been strengthened by the arrival of youth, whose struggle, in 2008, was strongly supported by SYRIZA and its various components in the face of threats from PASOK and the Right.

SYRIZA's influence in the trade union movement has been consolidated in the 2000s. Its presence in the public sector is stronger than in the private sector. There is however an imbalance between its present electoral audience among workers (and in constituencies like the second division of Piraeus, a big working-class area) and its influence in the historic trade union confederations, GSEE (private sector) and ADEDY (public sector).

The break from collaboration with the leadership of PASOK in the second half of the 2000s encouraged the growing influence that was being established in a trade-union left, reinforced by militants coming from the KKE. But the central trade union apparatuses, which still have real weight as controlled structures - something which is sometimes not well understood by a part of the European "radical Left" - have close links with PASOK, and also, depending on the regions and sectors concerned, with ND.

To have an organized presence in the

trade unions is one of the major challenges for SYRIZA. It was able, after May 6, to multiply public meetings in the neighbourhoods so as to reach sectors of the population which are not considered as being made up of just voters, but of active and committed citizens. A wide-ranging discussion was conducted with these people, on all of the topics that are being discussed at this particular moment. This was a new experience, compared to traditional party rallies.

SYRIZA was capable of engaging in the electoral campaign of the month of May on the theme: "We can win; we can beat ND and PASOK; we can establish a left government". This approach was in accordance with the different and numerous struggles in the past two years, with the attacks launched in Parliament. It was not determined by a characterization of the situation as pre-revolutionary and still less revolutionary.

SYRIZA and its left, such as DEA - given the burning nature of the political conjuncture and the place occupied by socio-political confrontation in Greece, compared to several countries in Europe (and including the EU)-, insisted on the need to form a united political front capable of organizing a very broad social base, including that previously captured by PASOK.

In this perspective, a concrete objective was needed: the political and electoral overthrow of the right-wing government, the pro-memorandum government. This objective appeared as a tangible and understandable goal, giving to the analysis of the situation not only a form of narrative, but a projection that was both material and idealized.

After May 6, SYRIZA was immediately confronted with a second test: refusal of a government of national unity, including renegotiating the memorandums. SYRIZA resisted this pressure, which was however very strong and well organized, taken up by all the media and playing on the fear of the future.

The theme that was placed at the centre of the second campaign, which

began as early as mid-May, was: "We started our work on 6 May, we have to finish it", by imposing a left government which refuses the memoranda. This was done without falling either into the trap of nationalism (like the KKE), or into an analysis that led to isolating Greek capitalism from a much broader context: the crisis of European capitalism - so visible for a growing number of workers, the unemployed, students, young people - as well as of globalized capitalism. It is on this basis that it is possible to organize more widely and on an international level the working masses against the various "memoranda" that are put in place in Europe and their institutional expression, including the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance (TSCG).

Developing this approach, the question immediately arises of the denunciation of the debt, with possible transitional stages, provided that the overall aim determines each step: from the audit of the debt to a moratorium and to a denunciation of it. It depends on the relationship of forces, on the dynamic on a European level, including the situation in Spain, France and Portugal. This European dimension was understood at once by Venizelos, who went to see Monti and Hollande, and by Merkel with her threats. A European counter-strategy is beginning to be built by SYRIZA. Its concretization also depends on the readiness to act of the anti-capitalist forces in Europe.

Finally, SYRIZA escaped from the trap of the debate: to exit or not to exit the euro. It is one thing to analyze the EU, its structure, the projects of the "hard core" of the EU, the role of the euro. The way in which we address the specific situation at a given time and in a given country is quite another.

The first step of a left government should be to repeal the memorandum; this has been the subject of a debate in SYRIZA. This choice was adopted. It is a priority that the debate on this issue and its implications - that is, the very hard counter-attack of the Right and the eurocracy - is not confined to a circle of technocrats. But that it is taken up, in the most specific terms possible, by those who struggle to

meet their immediate needs.

To finance another policy requires not only a different tax system (concerning, for example, the revenues of the Church, together with the expropriation of its assets) - with the social battle that this implies - but also a reduction in expenditure (the army, for example) and challenging the payment of the debt.

A perspective of collaboration with the workers of Europe cannot justify sacrifices in the name of "staying in the euro". But it will be easier to mobilize against the difficulties, which are inevitable and which will be great, of being "expelled from the eurozone" by the eurocracy, if the double movement of refusal of the memorandum and renegotiation of the debt is rejected by the eurocrats of all kinds who decide to expel Greece from the eurozone. And not the contrary.

Together with these axes it has been proposed to repeal all the anti-union and anti-working class laws, whether they concern workers, pensioners or the unemployed.

Faced with the privatizations, SYRIZA has proposed a programme of nationalization, making it clear that it is not simply a question of changing ownership, but of changing the way enterprises are organized, with real participation by the workers in decision-making and broader social control. Following on from there, SYRIZA raises the question of the nationalization of the banks in order to establish a public pole of credit. Against the stream SYRIZA puts forward a series of proposals on the "difficult" subject, in this crisis, of immigration. The themes range from the right of family regroupment to the removal of all limitations on access to

public health and education, from the abolition of the reactionary corps of border guards to automatic citizenship after 7 years of residence, including the right to vote and be elected, etc.

In the present political configuration, the KKE - which has gone through two splits, one in 1968, with the KKE *esoterikou* (Communist Party of the Interior) an Italian-style eurocommunist party, the other in 1992, in the context of the implosion of the Soviet Union - has a hard Stalinist matrix. It organizes sections of workers and students, including with a "mass front", the PAME. The KKE is isolated from intellectual layers by its primitive dogmatism and its sectarianism. It characterizes SYRIZA and its components as traitors who are ready to capitulate to the EU.

The abolition here and now of capitalism is its immediate line, and that reinforces its isolation. The collapse of capitalism is imminent and therefore the KKE is there to take over leadership of society. That is its message. The decline of the KKE is obvious, in this period.

Nevertheless, SYRIZA and its left maintain a line of making proposals for united action which may have a certain audience, even among organized supporters of the KKE; part of its electorate has already chosen SYRIZA.

The results of June 17, which will be known from 9.30 p.m. onwards, will be important. The most difficult situation for SYRIZA will begin if there is electoral victory. But in any case the situation will be extremely difficult for the workers and the people.

On Thursday, June 14, the EU leaders announced that they would give some

room for manoeuvre to the Greek Government - one made up of Samaras and his allies, they hope - in reaching the objectives of the bailout plan. However, no substantive concessions will be made on the main objectives. As early as Sunday evening, June 17, in a videoconference, the finance ministers will discuss the results of the parliamentary elections. An exit from the eurozone is the threat that hangs over Greece, as is the closing down of the various lines of credit.

But the finance ministers will primarily discuss the measures to be taken to avoid a banking shock in Europe, on Monday, June 18. This concern is a priority for them, not the survival of the Greek population.

In case of a victory of SYRIZA, a vast operation of encirclement and co-optation of sectors paralyzed by the difficulty of the tasks will be undertaken. Not only is the road of a "negotiation" of the Memorandum likely to be taken by some people, but following on from that, "realism" could take over, with the idea that we can "deceive the adversary". The brakes on such a course of action will be applied by in priority, the popular mobilization, the influence in SYRIZA of those who want to maintain the orientation which has been the identity of this coalition, which has received the status of "party" from the Constitutional Court. This was in order to qualify, in case of victory over New Democracy, for the 50 seats that can ensure a parliamentary majority. To the mobilization in Greece can be added the internationalist solidarity of the various movements fighting for non-payment of the debt, in various forms.

June 16, 2012

A summary of an “ecofeminist worldview”

28 June 2012, by **Marijke Colle**

Here are some key elements of their analysis and views.

Western society values male and scientific knowledge above everything

else , it devalues the natural reproductive capacities of women and

of nature.

Experts and owners of capital have developed new biotechnologies (GMOs, genetically modified organisms, and IVF, in vitro fertilisation) to keep their grip and control over women and over nature.

Fertile earth and the fertility of women are transformed through male domination and the technological creativity of the male takes a central position in society.

Earth and women are the passive terrain for the intervention by male experts, medical doctors, agronomists, agribusiness men. [1]

Geneticists consider traditional selection as backward and chaotic – GMO varieties represent progress, order and money. Farmers are forced to use the seeds, the fertilizers and the pesticides sold as a package by multinational agribusiness companies. The farmers lose their traditional ownership of seeds and varieties and must pay patent rights for selected hybrid and GMO plants and seeds.

Women have a duty to produce healthy children and are the objects of an expanding *health industry* with genetic screening of (pre-implantation) embryos, scans and echo-graphies, and a growing number of caesareans. Women lose the possibility and the capacity to decide for themselves.

Colonialism despised the *primitive* and the *backward* cultures of indigenous, non-white and local traditional communities who were considered more to be part of the local fauna than of the human race. [2]

The genocides performed in colonial times were disguised as the introduction of progress for primitive societies and as the conquest of ‘empty’ land. The common property and the common use of the land were considered an obstacle to the progress of civilisation. The young Charles Darwin noted in his diary that the complete equality amongst the inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego would remain an obstacle for any progress of their civilisation until a leader would emerge who would have the strength to become the owner of all property. [3]

Vandana Shiva wrote in 1992 :

‘...improved’ seeds and fetuses are in reality imprisoned seeds and fetuses. The right to self determination of farmers and of women is degraded to backwardness and ignorance. The violent expropriation of the autonomous producers is a process to steal what belongs to nature and to women, in the name of progress. Violence and theft were not only the basis for the creation of wealth in our colonial past, they continue with neo-colonialism today which threatens life itself.’ [4]

Second wave feminism in the U.S.A. and Western Europe

In North America and in Western Europe, feminists in the 1970’s protested against the traditional dichotomy between men and women, against the different “gender” roles, whereby *men* embodied *culture* and *women* embodied *nature*. This dichotomy was used to justify male dominance. Modern humans (white males from the rich world) are the creators of culture whilst women are considered as a kind of second class variety of humans who have only a limited level of personnel qualities such as reason, courage, self control, freedom, capacities of autonomous ownership. This modern male gender role became the norm in society. It was developed during the period of the enlightenment – women remained in the shadow of nature, ‘knowing their place’.

Other typical images such as man the hunter, the – competitive and sexually active being were part of a dominant ideology justified by ‘scientific’ knowledge. Women were described as – passive, asexual beings who kept the wild instincts of the males under control. Proudhon (– a French 19th century socialist) spoke of women as an essential civilizing factor, thanks to their role in the family.

You can easily understand that later on, many second wave feminists were not convinced when eco-feminists spoke about the special link all women

have with nature!

But what is the precise nature of the domination of men over women and of the increasing destruction of the earth as an ecosystem? Is there a possible link between women’s oppression and the way nature is being destroyed? What is our vision of ‘human nature’ and what are the consequences of this vision for women’s liberation?

The industrial revolution and the capitalist mode of production.

By the end of the 18th Century, we see the development of a new mode of production, capitalism. The changes involved in this transformation had important consequences for the position of women in society. Large productive family units, involving several generations, of farmers and of artisans, were ultimately replaced by what is now called the (non-productive) ‘nuclear family’. At the centre of this family there was – the house wife, she is not productive because she is not employed as a worker in a factory, a company, a public service. employed as a worker in a factory, a company, a public service. The man is supposed to be the bread winner for his wife and children, he is the ‘head of the household’ and his wage is supposed to pay for the survival of all the members of his family. The household tasks done by the women are invisible, because they are not remunerated in the form of a wage. The woman is economically completely dependent upon her husband.

Of course, women (and children) have been working in the new factories from the very beginning of the factory system, – the struggles against child labour and for protective measures concerning health and safety, the fight for shorter working hours, etc., were combined with a new ideology on the natural role of men and women. The ideal household is that of the nuclear family in which the man can afford to have a wife who stays at home. At the

ideological level, the well known dichotomy between man (- reason, culture, public life, etc.) and women (- intuition, nature, private life, etc.) is reaffirmed. [5]

After the Second World War, the situation for women changed considerably with contraception, and the victorious fight of women for the right to choose abortion being an important part of this. New opportunities in education for women, the generalisation of paid work (outside the nuclear family) by women, also changed their position in relation to men. Look simply at rising divorce rates, they illustrate the increased autonomy of women who are not anymore completely dependant on their husband's wages.

But real economic equality was not achieved, women's traditional skills such as caring are valued less and women are paid less not only in those roles but even when they work alongside men, they are less paid and valued, they are pushed into part-time work - often because of the unavailability of child care, unemployment is more readily accepted in the case of women.

The fundamental reason for this state of affairs lays in the fact that women are the central caring figure in the family. In fact, women pay a high price for their increased economic freedom. They have to 'combine' their job with the domestic tasks (80% is done by women). Even when women can afford to buy more and more commodities like clothes, ready made food, etc, the central responsibility for the well being of all family members rests on their shoulders.

The feminists of the second wave criticized this state of affairs. Their demands for public services and for the collectivisation of the domestic tasks combined a critical view on the possibilities of women's liberation inside capitalism and a perspective of real liberation through the struggle for a democratic socialist society.

Women and the

peace movement, women and ecology

The end of the seventies saw massive mobilisations in the US and in Western Europe against the installation of US nuclear weapons carrying cruise missiles in Europe. Normal 'housewives', not feminist at all, were very much involved. Women in the peace movement took the lead at the Greenham Common peace camp surrounding an important British military base. Many of these women had not taken part in the abortion and contraception campaigns; neither did they question their traditional role as housewives .

But in the peace movement, women developed a specific criticism of the so called traditional "male" values of aggression, of rational thinking (the logic of nuclear weapons and war games!), of blind faith in technology and hard science and of all kinds of "macho" attitudes.

This new, softer feminism found its place in the growing green movements and parties. Women rediscovered their history: witch burning, the medicalisation of the female body. Women felt at ease in the new green thinking, small was beautiful, an alternative life style was developed (from baking your own bread to herbal medicine).

An ecofeminist worldview was growing which accused patriarchy (the expression of 'male' values and attitudes) and the industrial system for destroying nature and ultimately life itself.

The analysis of the parallelism between the medical treatment of women as objects of science and the way agribusiness transform peasants into industrial plant and meat producers is indeed very powerful. But I don't agree with those ecofeminists who point at patriarchy as the primary cause of these developments.

Can the simplistic and a-historical concept of patriarchy (in other words, the fundamental and eternal nature of all males) explain all that has

happened in human society over the last 200 years?

Looking at this recent history, we can see that the growth and development of the capitalist mode of production covering the whole world is at the centre of the changes described by both socialist feminists and eco-feminists.

The many activities performed by women in pre-capitalist societies (- in traditional medicine, in local food and clothes production, etc.) have been destroyed by the incorporation of these activities in the capitalist economy. The production of commodities for profit in the capitalist economy has taken over - the previously important production of use values for human needs.

Anticapitalist ecofeminist thinking

Second wave feminists stressed the potential of equality between genders through concrete demands like equal pay and opportunities, the right to choose, the fight against any discrimination on the basis of gender. They were convinced of the fundamental similarities between men and women. Their struggles linked the analysis of specific women's oppression with demands going against the capitalist logic such as more public services and the collectivisation of household tasks.

Many *ecofeminists* value "feminine" attitudes, ways of life that stand in contrast with masculine attitudes and behaviour. They sometimes became differentialists whereby the two genders are the expression of two deeply rooted (determined by biology) realities. Some ecofeminists developed identity politics against "man the cause of all evil".

On the other hand socialist feminists also pointed out that sexual stereotyping was restrictive to both genders - men are not allowed to be carers without their sexuality being questioned for example. And of course these issues were and are taken up strongly by the LGBTQ movement who

argued in favour of the dissolution of stereotypes and the valuing of qualities traditionally applied to each gender.

Other lines of thought in anticapitalist ecofeminist thinking are more interesting because they start from the basic contradiction of capitalism between the production of exchange value for profit and the production of use value in order to satisfy human needs.

If we look at society as an iceberg, with only one third of its volume floating above the surface and an invisible two thirds of the volume supporting the top, then we can describe society as follows.

The visible capitalist economy is characterised by wage labour, commodity production, exchange value, competition, growth, exploitation of the work force and of nature. This society can only continue to function if it is first of all supported by the invisible domestic work that

women perform for the well being of adults and children, for the fulfilment of basic human needs and secondly, if the regeneration of all natural systems is guaranteed.

To build societies based on the well being of the many rather than the few, we need to put the work of social reproduction, the satisfaction of individual and social needs, the production of use value and the conservation of the biophysical base of life at the centre of our concerns and practices.

Ecological economics, which analyses and criticises the destruction of nature and the depletion of resources under capitalist conditions, must be combined with *feminist economics* which puts the underestimated and largely invisible activities of women (necessary for sustaining day to day life and the well being of every individual), at the centre of its analysis, thus creating a new synergy between feminism and ecology.

The current crisis of civilisation is caused by multiple contradictions and tensions: between *capital* and *labour*, - between the *capitalist mode of production* as a whole and the preservation of *nature* (upon which every human depends), and finally the tension between the reproductive tasks, the fulfilment of human needs through use values on the one hand and the profit driven production of commodities on the other hand.

In this field full of tensions, there is a clear need for a strong link between the anticapitalist, the feminist as well as the ecological dimension of the struggles for an ecosocialist society.

The fight for women's liberation; the understanding of the strong affinities and similarities between the oppression of women and the oppression/exploitation of nature, can only strengthen the movement for human liberation in an ecosocialist society.

Marijke Colle

Ecology and Socialism

27 June 2012, by **Chris Williams**

Among the things that you discuss is the inherent nature of capitalism and its drive for profits, privileging profits over people. What would you suggest as an alternative? You've mentioned socialism. What do you mean by socialism? And hasn't socialism been tried in the Soviet Union and other places and shown to be a failure?

I think it's been tried once, and it did fail, ultimately. But capitalism has failed many times, and we keep trying that. It's worth giving socialism another chance. I haven't got time to go into all of the details, but the Soviet Union failed for very specific reasons. In my book I talk about some of the earliest time periods of the Soviet Union, in the 1920s, when it had a very different attitude towards

ecology. It was one of the first places that you could take a degree in ecology, in 1924. There were huge areas of the Soviet Union set aside as ecological areas, where you couldn't even do tourism or anything; it was purely for research, to see how they could rejuvenate damaged areas of the land. All that was reversed with the ultimate triumph of the bureaucracy, represented by Stalin. So that failed for very specific reasons. But I don't equate socialism with state control. If there's no democracy, if the people aren't making the economic and political decisions, then I don't see how you could call that socialism. So if you think about China or Cuba or North Korea or any of these other countries that call themselves socialist, I would argue that they aren't. You've just got one giant corporation called the state that runs

everything. Socialism is about real democracy of the people – in communities and workplaces; production for need, not profit, based on cooperation rather than competition.

In your book you talk about some of the attitudes toward nature. You quote Francis Bacon, for example. I think there is a theological aspect to the attack on nature, with people like Winthrop and his "city on the hill." And to achieve that "city on the hill," it was necessary to exploit nature, which was given to us as bounty by God. Otherwise it wouldn't have been given to humankind.

Senator Inhofe has a similar opinion to that.

The Oklahoma Republican.

He doesn't believe that climate change is real because God has already told him that it's not true. I think that there was a radical change. If you look at the way in which the Earth was viewed, some of the language of which we still retain in terms of the "veins of ore" and so on, the Earth was seen as a living thing in feudal times and before that, because people were much more connected to the land. Capitalism if it wants to make money, has to make machines. That means it has to understand nature. Therefore, you get Bacon and others completely changing the conception. Nature is now not something that we live with and on, but something that needs to be investigated and defiled in many ways. And generations before the emergence of capitalism, people would have seen that as a defilement. That actually was celebrated in very overtly sexually language, by Bacon in particular, as I mention in the book. And I think that rather than a conception of nature in which we need to dominate and control it for our own ends toward the profit motive, we need to see ourselves as co-evolving, as something equal.

The OECD recently came out with a very shocking report. The Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development, the major economies, came out and said that we may be heading toward a world that is three degrees to six degrees warmer than anything we've seen for hundreds of thousands, millions of years. Most scientists will tell you that two degrees is the maximum that we should be going up to. So they lay all this out "by 2050 we're going to be three to six degrees higher, which would mean the sea levels would be heading toward 300 feet higher" and at the end of it they just say, the effect on GDP will just be a 14 percent reduction. So there are going to be no icecaps "that's literally what they say" there are going to be no icecaps, there are going to be deserts across large areas of the world, but there's only going to be a 14 percent reduction in GDP worldwide. In other words, there's this idea from economists and apologists for the system that we are essentially independent of nature. We can survive without air or water or a planet, and

things can roll along as they always have. Clearly, we need to change that radically and think about not just where we're going tomorrow and making money from that, but a much longer-term, futuregenerational thing, which Marx talks about.

And the impact on the most vulnerable. A couple of years ago I was in Nepal. At a place called Kala Patthar, in the Himalayas, the Nepali cabinet met to dramatize the fact that the glaciers are melting. And around the same time in the Maldives, the cabinet met underwater to have a meeting to demonstrate their concern about rising levels of the oceans, which will inundate and wipe out the Maldives islands. Again, the vulnerability of people in the so-called developing world is acute. But some here may be insulated from that while we are busy driving fuel-efficient cars and recycling and doing the right thing, environmentally speaking.

Well, maybe, unless you look at Texas or the wildfires that were all over New Mexico last year, or the unprecedented floods in the Midwest. I think that on the one hand, we are certainly somewhat more insulated, but that doesn't mean to say "I mean, people are already in a desperate situation in many areas of the world and are feeling the effects of climate change already. There are already climate refugees, and there are wars because of the instability that climate change is bringing about in various areas of the world.

Part of this is also about the idea that we can save nature by setting aside little areas called national parks to protect it. Yet how is that going to work if the climate is completely different? How are the animals that feed on other animals or plants going to survive when those things are moving north or south or up mountains? Will the birds be able to migrate and change? Clearly, the whole idea that we can save nature in certain individual locations goes out the window with climate. So we have to rethink the whole climate in a sustainable and rational manner.

I would be depressed about all this stuff if it was the case that we don't have the answers. We actually do have

the answers. It's not a technical problem. It's much more about how do we take power from the people who currently have it and put it in our hands so that we can actually start implementing some of the answers that we know will work.

It was Eduardo Galeano who said, "We have to save pessimism for better times." A bit more about Marx—he's been dead for 150 years—and his relevance today. What is it about his analysis that you find urgent and vital and applicable to the problems that society is facing today?

I think what's important about going back to Marx is not just the specific things that he talks about, because obviously we can't backdate our concerns to him, and climate change was not on his horizon. But one of the things that he and his collaborator, Engels, were most concerned with was depletion of the soil. In Britain, the fertility of the soil was dropping and there was great concern over what to do. Artificial fertilizer hadn't been invented. They had already raided the Napoleonic battlefields, digging up the corpses of people who died in their wars to take back as natural fertilizer for the fields of England. They had to go further away to go and start wars in South America over guano "there were the Guano Wars of the 1800s that Marx wrote about" in order to get that fertilizer back to England. So Marx and Engels were very much involved with an ecological question. He was also a great admirer of Darwin.

But beyond that, I would say what's most compelling right now is their analysis of not just capitalism but the methodology which they used. Because so often we're taught in schools that history is not connected; it's a series of disconnected events. That's one of the things that makes history boring. You think that something caused the First World War, and it wasn't connected to the Second World War. You learn about famous people. There's no relationship to what's going on now or your life. In contrast, what Marx and Engels did, their methodology of historical materialism, was to say that everything is interconnected and

everything affects everything else. That's a deeply ecological viewpoint.

Furthermore, when he talked about the "metabolic rift," the word "metabolism" had only been recently invented, but it means an exchange of materials in and out of a single cell or an organism. What was revolutionary about the way he used it in the phrase "metabolic rift" is he applied it to the whole biosphere. That is an enormously powerful tool and way of thinking about energy in and energy out, waste, far ahead of his time, and I think is useful today.

Given the extraordinary depth of the economic collapse, with its attendant millions of homes being lost, millions of people thrown out of work, pensions lost, etc., do you see now a kind of Gramscian possibility for an opening for socialism? Do you think there's more space now to even talk about a word that has been viewed so pejoratively in recent decades in the United States? I THINK there's enormous potential. When Barack Obama was first running for election, he was accused of being a socialist.

That's the "Change you can believe in" president?

That's right, the change that didn't come. But when he was running, he was accused of being a socialist because the right wing thought that this would be a negative. It became the number one word Googled, because people were, like, "Well, I like Obama. They're calling him a socialist. I don't like them. Maybe I'm a socialist, too. Let me go find out about it." I think that is significant.

I also think that the economic crisis of 2008 coinciding with the ecological crisis is raising questions in young people's minds and others' that maybe there is a connection between those two things, maybe one caused the other, and so are open to the idea that there are new possibilities. I'm sure you saw the Pew poll that said young people in particular were more disposed to socialism than they were to capitalism because they know what capitalism is like, and who wants that in this day and age? So I think that is something that has woken people up.

I also think that there was a huge change last year with the revolutions in the Middle East. It has just completely changed people's reference point for what is possible. We've had thirty years of defeats. It's been a terrible time since Reagan and Thatcher and the birth of neoliberalism. I grew up in the 1980s, a terrible decade. Very bad fashion; pretty bad music, too, unfortunately, with a few exceptions. But now things are very hopeful again. And people said, "The Middle East, what's going to happen there? A bastion of reaction. Nobody is interested in democracy." Then millions of people on the streets fighting for democracy. Fantastically inspiring.

I went to Madison, Wisconsin, as part of my union to see what was going on there last spring during the uprising and the occupation. It was amazing. Another area of the world, the Midwest, where we are told people are conservative, and that they don't follow politics. People in the Midwest, there in Madison, were learning Arabic so that they could write their signs in Arabic and show their solidarity with the people in Egypt and Tunisia. It was amazing to be in a town so full of pro-union sentiment.

And then, of course, more recently, something I've been involved in, Occupy Wall Street. Phenomenal. It completely changed the narrative in this country. We haven't won any practical victories yet, but we've won an enormous ideological victory. We're not talking about the debt ceiling debate or any other nonsense. We're talking about the rich, the 1%, and the 99%, everybody else, and why we need to get rid of them so that we can run things. That's fantastically exciting.

Indeed, the lexicon has changed. You mentioned the Middle East, a focus first of British and French imperialism, and then their successor, the United States, ever since 1945, having to do with a certain product that is known to be there under its sands. It might be a three-letter word.

God works in mysterious ways.

It's actually a four-letter word in practice, but it's three in actual

spelling. Talk about US imperial policy dealing with energy issues and its relation to ecology.

It's an enormously overlooked piece of the puzzle. There are a lot of great writers who write stuff on environmental issues and ecological questions, and this question of imperialism is so often either overlooked entirely or barely given any kind of detailed analysis. I think that's a real mistake. Because part of the big reason why the international negotiations go nowhere is because not only is there competition between individual corporations for power and prestige and profit, but there's also, similarly, competition, economic and political, between countries.

That competition then leads and sparks warfare. Warfare is just as integral a part of capitalism as competition. So if you're not talking about the economic and political competition that goes on between states and their desire to control resources and the geopolitical "great game," as it used to be called, then you're not providing a full analysis for people.

That's one of the major reasons why they cannot get any kind of agreement on climate change. They have a hard time getting agreement on even things that they care about, like trade; but the things they don't care about, like climate change, that is not even part of their frame of reference, they have even more problems with. If I regulate my economy more than you, then I suffer an economic disadvantage. You now can go places and do things and produce cheaper and more profitably than I can, and I'm at an economic disadvantage. That kind of dynamic prevents them from coming up with a rational plan. They'd rather nuke each other over a disputed oil field than come up with an internationally coordinated plan to plant some trees.

What are your views on what is called sustainable capitalism?

Pretty low.

Why?

As Paul Hawken, who is actually an advocate of this, said, it's a

contradiction in terms. Actually, he said it about green capitalism, sorry. You cannot have a sustainable capitalism, because every year every capitalist entity has to grow larger for reasons that I mentioned earlier. There is this constant dynamic of growth that if they're not growing, then they die. We see the economy today. What's the conversation about? We need to go back to growth. Every nation on the planet needs to have 2 percent or 3 percent growth. Otherwise what happens? We fall into a tailspin of unemployment, layoffs, cuts to social spending—obviously not the military budget—but everything else. So without that growth the system starts falling apart. Capitalism is literally a system that is based on the maxim "grow or die." So the idea that in any way that could be sustainable or that they could somehow care about the resources that they put in or the waste that goes out is an impossibility, I would argue. They don't even see resources as anything but a free lunch: they take something free from the environment and then they put it back in as waste. They don't pay for that stuff.

I infer from that, then, that you are perhaps skeptical of tinkering around the edges, cosmetic changes such as recycling.

You could put me in the skeptics camp. I'm not against recycling, but I think it's important to recognize that it's the first thing that we're told to do. And there's a reason for that. Because it takes it away from the product itself and says the product is okay, it's fine. The problem is with you as a consumer and an individual. You are the problem because you don't put it in the right receptacle. This evades the whole question of why was that thing made in the first place and why was it made of plastic. There's nothing wrong with plastic. For example, people often talk about plastic water bottles, which is a \$100 billion-a-year industry. Plastic is an amazing material. It lasts virtually forever. So why would you make disposable things out of plastic? It should be illegal. Really, it should be illegal.

Yes but these are panaceas that are being served up. If you do these things, if you drive the right

car, things will be hunky-dory.

Absolutely. I think the idea is very much ideological—that we feel good about recycling, that we take the spotlight away from the production and we focus on consumption, and if we do that, then everything will be okay. However, if you look at waste, only 2.5 percent of all waste is domestic, that is, what all of us produce. So even if we could magically get rid of all of that, that would still leave the 97.5 percent of industrial and agricultural waste. It would be irrelevant, in other words. Apart from the fact that plastic cannot be really effectively recycled in the first place, which is why even if you put it in the recycle bin, 95 percent of it never is. So that would be the last thing that you should do, not the first thing. The first thing should be to look at the production process, and then match things to their function. Then we can go from there and talk about, at the end, if we really can't do anything, if we can't reuse it again, or maybe we should never have made it in the first place—that's a radical idea—we should then think about how could we best recycle it.

You can expand that to any kind of argument about this tinkering around the edges and the focus on that. Every time capitalism messes something up, it doesn't try and correct that problem, it just tries to sell you something else. So the food system has become so toxic now that they invented another subset of the food system called organic food. What was wrong with the first stuff? What did you do to that to make it so bad that we have to go and pay more money, if we can afford it, to get organic food? You can replicate that on any number of levels. The food crises, the various food scandals. People may remember swine flu a couple of years ago, where they've concentrated the animals in such horrendous situations, totally unhealthy, that they're diseased, they're incubators for disease. So during the outbreak, what did they do? Did they think, "You know what, we really need to regulate these corporations so they treat these animals more humanely?" No. They just said, "No, we'll sell them sanitary masks, and then that will be fine." So they just are constantly figuring out

new ways. So if we accept that paradigm, that there's something else that we should buy, then we've already fallen into their trap.

During the Bush period, it was easy to kind of explain what was going on. These were people with close ties to the oil and gas industry. Yet, as you point out, Obama has followed basically the same template and has expanded and increased drilling permits, and has opened up the Arctic.

It was very easy to blame George W. Bush. In some ways Obama has got away with more than Bush could have got away with in his wildest dreams. Certainly on civil liberties, I think you could say that Obama has been worse than George W. Bush. And I think there's an argument to be made on ecological issues that the same is true. If you think about the worst environmental disaster in US history, in 2010, the Gulf oil spill. Obama had supermajorities in both houses of Congress and a massive amount of public support at that time. He could have done anything, but he didn't. In fact, he left the clean-up to the criminal who carried it out in the first place, BP. So this is clearly not about changing Democrats for Republicans.

I also think it's important to remember, all of the best environmental laws that we've got on the books—the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, etc.—came about under the presidency of a right-wing Republican egomaniac called Richard Nixon, who had already caused colossal environmental devastation, not to mention mass murder, in Southeast Asia. Why did he decide that now was the time to protect the water and the air? Because there was a massive movement on the streets that demanded it. So that's really the answer. I don't think it's about the politicians; it's about what we do on the streets and how organized we get.

The gravity of the multiple ecological crises demands collective and global action—not one-off, one country doing this or that. How do we get there, to collective action?

That's the all-important question. We've had some examples I mentioned

in the Middle East. Also, recently the massive protests in Germany against nuclear power completely changed another right-wing government, Angela Merkel's, who is the premier and who is pro-nuclear. Yet now Germany has already shut nine of their nuclear reactors, they're shutting down the rest within ten years, and there is a plan in place to reduce their carbon emissions by 30 percent by 2020, and then by 80 percent by 2050. That's not because they suddenly became a green government. It's because they were forced to become a green government. I think those kinds of things resonate around the world. The same is true in Italy, in Switzerland, which are also shutting down their nuclear power stations, and hopefully Japan will be the next country.

But I think it's also significant that the countries that are resisting the most in terms of that kind of change are also the countries that have nuclear weapons. Germany, Switzerland, Italy, and Japan don't have nuclear weapons. So the movements there have more latitude. I think it would be extremely difficult in this country for the government ideologically to justify keeping nuclear weapons, which they want, but abandoning nuclear power. I think that the campaign here has to be much more powerful.

How do we get to that? I think it's the same as any other movement. I think of Occupy Wall Street; we haven't been fighting for a long time and finally we are. That's exciting. It's finally become a two-sided battle. And we need to catch up with our organization. That is the next challenge as we move forward. Where do we go from here? Because we really are in the belly of the imperial beast. I think it's a question of organization more than anything else.

A lot of people may think or have the idea that they don't need to get involved with politics or political organization. I joined my first political

organization when I was fifteen, which was the ANC, the African National Congress, in Britain. That's where the government in exile was. As a fifteen-year-old, I couldn't understand why Black people couldn't have a vote in their own country. It just didn't make sense. So I started finding out more about it. I got involved. Then I joined CND, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. All of these things eventually made me realize that they're coming from the same source, the economic system. So I became a socialist.

Around the time of resistance at Greenham Common, the big US military base in Britain.

Yes the movement in the early 1980s was started by about thirty-five women from South Wales who went to Greenham Common, where they had just started putting nuclear weapons in this US base. They could launch nuclear weapons from Britain without the consent of the British government. So people were, like, "What the hell is this?" So, just as the sit-down strikes in Greensboro, North Carolina, started with four people, the movement against the Greenham Common base started with thirty-five. One woman was killed during the occupation by a military truck that ran her over, Karen Davis. But it evolved within a few months into an occupation of 30,000, predominantly women, where they ringed the base and shut it down so that they couldn't get trucks in or out. This sparked an international movement, in Germany in particular, to do the same thing. That occupation went on for nineteen years, which is inspiring.

Interestingly enough, I was in Japan in December and January of this year. One of the meetings that I went to, that was run by predominantly women, showed the documentary of the occupation from Greenham Common. Women a generation away and on the other side of the world

were inspired by this message and taking heart from it as they went to campaign. So the working class, the people, have a long memory.

Do you have some concrete suggestions for people, some things they can do?

It's not about buying green stuff. It's about getting involved in politics. It's the only thing we have. They have all the money, they have all the guns, but there's not very many of them. We are always more—many, many more. What we need to do is get organized and show our power, because we're the people who make all the stuff. If we don't go to work, nothing happens. So if you're not involved in some political organization, you should think about joining one, whatever is your particular issue. I was first involved in an antiracist struggle, that led me to an antinuclear power and nuclear weapons struggle, that I kind of generalized from. So whatever is your issue, I would urge you to get involved and join an organization and think about how the issues are connected. I believe, as a socialist, it's the economic system that we need to get rid of, the whole thing. If you don't find an organization around here in Santa Fe that you like, start your own. Get some of your friends involved. I think that is the key thing. Because ultimately, as far as I'm concerned, if we don't get rid of this system—and we haven't got much time left—but fortunately, as I said, we've got some inspiration from 2011 that is very, very exciting and points a way forward. But if we don't get rid of the system and implement something else based on cooperation, real democracy, and a long-term perspective, then we face a very diminished future within many of our lifetimes. I've been an activist since I was fifteen, and I think it's the only life worth living.

As Shelley said, "Ye are many, they are few."

<http://www.isreview.org/index.shtml>

Prime Minister Gilani gone, problems remain intact

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Gilani's departure from power reflects the deep crisis of Pakistani capitalist state. The infighting of state institutions does not bring any relief for the masses, it complicates the matters further. The departure of Gilani will solve nothing but deepen the crisis further. The real issues of the masses are not addressed by any institutions of the state. The apparent efforts by Supreme Court of Pakistan to reform the capitalist system will not go very far. It will result in further infighting of the ruling elite in Pakistan.

Gilani's departure at a time of extreme unpopularity of PPP government meant the acceptance of the Supreme Court decision by majority of the people of Pakistan without questioning the real motives behind the move.

While noting the point that the Supreme Court has not bundled home the elected parliament as was the case in the past in several military take-overs, but removed the Prime Minister and asked President to proceed according to the constitution to nominate a new prime minister, attitude of the Supreme Court towards the other sections of the ruling elite, who are as corrupt as the section currently in power, needs nevertheless to be questioned.

The corruption of the army generals, bureaucrats and judges themselves has not been pursued by the Supreme

Court during the last few years. Although the cases of missing persons have been taken up, however, that task too has been left half-way without recovering most of the missing persons. The Supreme Court is quick to take up cases against the PPP leaders but are quite reluctant to take cases involving leaders of other parties of the rich.

Supreme Court is good at some social issues but the class exploitation by the majority of the ruling elite is left intact. Labour laws are violated in every corner of Pakistan by most of the factories and institutions established by elite actors. That aspect is totally ignored.

Labour Party Pakistan is worried that this move may be a step towards unconstitutional measures in the future. LPP will fight along with other forces against any undemocratic move. It is totally opposed to any possible unconstitutional transitional government to exploit the politico-economic crises that the Pakistani state is facing at present. No unelected government can solve the basic problems of the masses.

We have been very critical about the PPP government which is one of the most unpopular civilian governments in our history. That does not mean that LPP would welcome any unconstitutional step - even to remove an unpopular government. Only the

people of Pakistan, acting through their representatives in the elected assemblies, have the right to remove this government, not the praetorian Deep State.

LPP will mobilise masses in the streets to force the present government to call for an immediate general elections for a new constituent assembly, a constitution that should guarantee the basic minimum social and economical rights of the people and equal treatment of all the nationalities living within Pakistan.

Labour Party demands an immediate halt to all military operations - public and secret - in Baluchistan, Sindh and other parts of Pakistan. It demands nationalization of all the so-called independent power plants to effectively address the electricity crisis. It demands non-payment of foreign debts and a drastic cut in military expenditure.

LPP demands that at least 10 percent of the national budget be spent on education and at least five percent on health. LPP demands a minimum wage of Rs. 20,000 per month for a 40 hour work week and at least 10,000 Rupees as unemployment benefits for all unemployed adults. LPP will fight for the real issues of the masses and will not indulge in advising one or the other section of the ruling class in their internal fights.

The revolution stolen

25 June 2012, by **Romain Hingani**

On Monday June 18, hundreds of supporters of Mohamed Morsi celebrated the victory of the Muslim Brotherhood candidate at the emblematic Tahrir square. These demonstrations, expected to be massive, only lasted a few hours. A sign of prudence, as the official results were not to be announced until June 21? Although Morsi's advantage over Shafiq – the last Prime Minister under Mubarak and the candidate of the army – would be confirmed, eyes were already turned elsewhere.

On Wednesday June 13, the first turn of the SCAF's screw came: whereas the state of emergency had been lifted at the end of last month, the military police as well as the army were again authorised to arrest and detain civilians, re-establishing martial law on a de facto basis. The next day, the Higher Constitutional Court (HCC) examined the validity of the famous law of "political isolation", voted through in late April by the Muslim Brotherhood dominated Parliament, whose objective was to stop figures from the old regime from contesting the elections. It was predictable that the Court, an instrument in the hands of the SCAF, would invalidate this law and allow Shafiq to remain in the race. But it also decided to invalidate the electoral law, which led mechanically to the dissolution of Parliament as well as the Commission to write the

constitution, which had only just been elected. It is a veritable institutional coup d'état on the part of the SCAF, cancelling out the vote of Egyptians during the parliamentary elections last December/January, which gave a majority to the Muslim Brotherhood and their Salafist allies in Al-Nour.

On Friday, on the eve of the elections, the hundreds of thousands of voices who chanted slogans two weeks earlier, after the verdict delivered in the Mubarak trial, gave way to a deafening silence: dumbfounded, the revolutionaries did not mobilise, whereas the Brotherhood, faithful once more to its legalist orientation, had already announced that it "respected" the decision of the HCC.

The week-end elections took place in a climate of apathy. It might be supposed that the perspective of electing a president without Parliament was intended to discourage Morsi's electorate. Anticipating a possible defeat for Shafiq, which the official results seem to confirm, the SCAF, only a few hours before the closing of the voting stations, played a new card, announcing an "addendum" to the constitutional declaration of March 2011. In addition to the legislative power it had confiscated, the army stated that it would be responsible for nominating a new Commission for the writing of the Constitution, distorting

still more the process of democratic transition. In establishing its right of veto over constitutional provisions which contravened the "interests of the country", as well as on a possible declaration of war which could not be made without its backing (a provision which seems intended to reassure Israel, concerned at the prospect of a Muslim Brotherhood triumph), the SCAF has clearly marked its territory in opposition to a Morsi victory.

Without any power, but responsible before the people for the resolution of the problems posed in Egyptian society, starting with the economic crisis, the Brotherhood, if their victory is confirmed, are set to again lose their influence at the next parliamentary elections. Unless it chooses the path of confrontation with the SCAF, by mobilising its troops and calling on them to go onto the streets – at the risk of being overtaken by the revolutionary wing. For his part, the Nasserite former presidential candidate Hamdeen Sabbahi has already called for the constitution of a revolutionary bloc for the next elections. A perspective which appears quite insufficient at a time when the SCAF, having swept away already insufficient democratic gains in a few days, has shown that the only way to satisfy the objectives of the revolution is through a mass mobilisation and a challenge to the state structures.

Debunking the myths: The material roots of the Darfur conflict

25 June 2012, by **Younes Abouyoub**

This being said, no media outlet or mainstream narrative has ever subsumed the Irish conflict into one over flowers. However, in conflicts in "developing" countries, especially those in Africa, mainstream narratives are quick to label conflicts as tribal and ethnic. These recurring attempts at essentializing "peoples without history," [6] those to whom history has

been denied, evacuate all historical complexities, economic and political issues in favor of reductive a priori perceptions and simplistic causalities. To what extent are ethnic conflicts really about ethnicity? What causes ethnic conflicts? Isn't ethnicity a convenient veil that masks the real issues and a convenient rallying factor to organize belligerent groups in a

struggle over resources?

Anthropologists use the concept of culture to describe human behavior and speak of ethnic units that correspond to these different cultures. Yet mainstream media resorted to a rather simplistic and naïve assumption that each tribe in Darfur was a staunchly isolated unit, as if a

mythical geographic and social isolation had allowed it to maintain its distinct cultural traits throughout history. In anthropological literature, the term “ethnic group” refers to a population bearing certain traits: that it is to a large extent biologically self-perpetuating, that it shares fundamental cultural values that constitute a field of communication and interaction, and that it encompasses members who identify themselves and are identified by others as a distinct category of population. [7] Anthropological studies have shown that ethnic difference is not based on social isolation and absence of interaction; rather, it is the foundation of social systems. [8] In other words, cultural distinctiveness and ethnic interaction are not mutually exclusive. In the case of Darfur, ethnic boundaries are fluid, flexible and temporal. [9] Solidarity and intermarriages have been regular features of tribal interactions. So, what explains why the groups polarized along ethnic lines since the conflict erupted in 2003? Why did ethnic boundaries solidify and group interactions turn violent?

Ethnicity in the Darfur context

Since the independence of Sudan in 1956, Darfur’s social structure has gone through eventful transformations that have caused ethnic relations to transmute into gradual tensions and conflicts. [10] These overdetermined events resulted in an intensified ethnic emotionalism. Like most African states under the British system of indirect rule, Sudan inherited a bifurcated power system based on race and ethnicity as instruments of social control. [11] In its administration of Sudan, the colonial power relied on an influential class of business families located in the northern part of the country. These families amassed their wealth mostly through slave trading and money lending. [12] By administratively empowering this merchant class, the colonial power laid the ground for its members to be the ruling and business elite in Sudan postindependence. [13] Thus, the seat of power was located in Khartoum, and state resources were under the

control of this merchant class, which was not well disposed toward sharing political or economic power with marginalized provinces such as Darfur.

Anthropologists who studied cultural and economic production systems in Darfur identified livelihoods, cultural practices, and social behaviors associated with certain ethnic groups. [14] Accordingly, the internal constitution of ethnic groups was based on cultural content, economic practices, values, and symbols shared by their members. The exploitation of land resources by a group set the contours of its ethnic boundary, which in turn secured and defined the group vis-à-vis other groups. Still, interactions occurred, especially when groups found themselves in a situation of competition over the same resource. They were able to strike formal political agreements on the use of available resources. But during the last decades, competition has intensified dangerously due to demographic changes and for environmental reasons.

The ongoing conflict in Darfur erupted when armed groups from Darfur rebelled against the government of Sudan after a complex web of grievances built up to become, by the beginning of the present century, increasingly violent and ethnically oriented. Throughout the 1980s, life in northern Darfur was deeply impacted by a protracted period of severe drought. This resulted in a mass movement of populations fleeing the ensuing hardships and destitution. Nevertheless, most analysts and commentators in Western media have perceived the Darfur conflict only as a racial/ethnic one. The line was hastily drawn between “Arabs” and “Africans,” settlers and natives. International mainstream media turned Darfur into a place devoid of history and politics, one in which bad outsiders are identified as “Arabs” and native victims as “Africans.” The conflict was quickly framed as an essential clash between evil and innocence. In a remake of old colonial demarcations of tribal homelands in Sudan and elsewhere in Africa, it was assumed that Sudanese Arab tribes came from the Middle East and settled in Africa. The binary Arab and African

identities successfully erased historical facts, which testify to the fact that Arabs are as native to Sudan and Africa as the majority of its inhabitants. The conflict was thus looked at from a single simplistic angle. [15]

The international response to the conflict was threefold: supplying humanitarian assistance, providing security to the civilians, and trying to provide a safe environment to refugees and the internally displaced to allow for their safe return while attempting to reach a negotiated peace through an intense engagement with the United Nations and the African Union mediators. Yet not only was the international community unable to tackle the root causes of the conflict, it could not even agree on what exactly was going on in the western provinces of Sudan. The world was divided between those who saw another African genocide unfolding and others who described it as a low-intensity conflict or a budding civil war that in no way resembled what had happened a few years earlier in Rwanda.

Even though the ethnic dimension should not be ignored, it cannot be argued it was the triggering factor of the conflict; rather, it has gradually imposed itself more as a consequence of the prolonged conflict than its cause. Numerous factors contributed to the eruption of violence—namely, social and economic injustice both on the global and local scales; poverty, poor governance, and regional factors such as the unstable situation in neighboring Chad resulting from French interventions and the military expeditions of Colonel Qaddafi. Another factor that had been present before even the start of the hostilities is ecological degradation. The impact of climate change and environmental degradation on the inhabitants of the western provinces of Sudan is absent from most narratives about Darfur. The implications of the environmental phenomena have been relegated to the economic and social spheres, while the conflict has been construed in terms of its racial and ethnic manifestations.

In trying to trace and evaluate the impact of ecological changes in

northern Darfur and their role in fueling the conflict, one is struck by the fact that relations between farmers and nomads/cattle herders have always been characterized by solidarity and cooperation at times and tensions and conflicts at others. The relative harmony that existed in the state of North Darfur was substantially undermined during the 1980s due to the long period of severe drought, which has lasted from 1967 to this day, with a few periodic exceptions. This climate change has resulted in unprecedented large movements of populations within the region, coupled with severe poverty, which hit mostly the inhabitants of the arid and semi-arid lands of northern Darfur. Ecological borders between semi-arid plains, inhabited mostly by nomads identified as "Arabs," and a large fertile oasis in the region of Jebel Mara, mainly inhabited by sedentary farmers from the Fur tribes, are an important element in the ongoing conflict.

The fact is that Darfur has been the locus of intercommunal conflicts for generations. However, these low-intensity conflicts gradually escalated and transmuted into an openly vicious war with an ethnic dimension. [16] Numerous factors are responsible for this transformation: the severe drought that hit the region forced nomadic groups to change their lifestyle and seek permanent settlements on lands that were historically considered by other tribes as their Dar; subsequent migration of increasing numbers of nomads into Darfur in search of water and grass; the collapse of traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution; and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, which meant that violent confrontations, unlike the past, resulted in a large number of casualties. [17]

While the conflict in Darfur is overdetermined, and a complex web of triggering factors have contributed, we contend nevertheless that the conflict that has been going on intermittently since the early 1980s in the region of Jebel Marra (North Darfur) is in fact an ecological conflict par excellence, in which issues of race and ethnicity have been used by the warring parties, and unfortunately

also by the Western media, as mobilizing tools, but regrettably have ended up being ends in themselves. [18] The erosion of soil and the depleted productivity of lands in Darfur in general, and its northern part especially, due to a severe desertification process over many decades, triggered a massive ecological migration toward southern Darfur in search of better pasture and farming opportunities. The increasing demand, or rather competition, over scarce natural resources in the drought-stricken province increasingly threatened the peaceful coexistence of different communities and the social cohesion that existed before. Desertification, deforestation, and water scarcity, coupled with mismanagement of water resources, and inequality in power (social, economic, and political) and resource sharing are all contributing factors to the present conflict.

Africa and Darfur in the world system

Africa, like the rest of world's regions, was incorporated into a single socio-economic system, a capitalist world economy, whose fundamental dynamic exercised control over actors of this global system. Capitalist development, in its third phase—"that is, as an imperial economic system"—enabled the center to put in place the formal framework for economic activity and, to a large extent, determine the character of development on the global stage. After a nominal independence, ex-colonies became underdeveloped and specialized in monoproduction of unprocessed raw material to the center. This situation has contributed to the capital accumulation and development of the center at the expense of the decapitalization and underdevelopment of the periphery. The capitalist mode of production has come full circle by stretching out of its original European borders to encompass all parts of the globe. Africa has been no exception.

Africa peripheralized

By 1750, the European metropolis felt the need to expand the reach of capitalism. As industries were being established in the center, it became necessary to find new areas of primary production to guarantee profits through the exploitation of low-priced labor and land. This industrial expansion resulted in a shortage of labor within the world economy and justified the resort to slavery. Simultaneously, there was a growing demand on African land, together with the indigenous labor on it, for primary crop production. European powers eliminated any alternative indigenous source of employment and competitive agricultural produce. Africans were thus deprived of their main means of production: land. This introduced a total change in the mode of production and the social organization of indigenous society, forcing its members to participate in the development of a new mode of production that exclusively benefited the center.

By the late nineteenth century, a major crisis of accumulation hit the center and changed the game over which, to that point, Great Britain had a hegemonic control. Challenges from colonial competitors precipitated the political decline of the continent as the "scramble for Africa" began. The phase of "informal empire," which enabled the peripheral An unexploded missile—"detritus of the conflict in Darfur African areas to retain some of their sovereign political institutions, came to be replaced by a formal empire that annihilated all African sovereignty by the end of the nineteenth century. Africa had to produce enough cash crops and raw materials to meet the needs of the world market and to sustain the political administrative costs of the competing European powers. The British colonial power instituted an "indirect rule" policy based on the principle of Africans ruling Africans for the benefit of the metropolis, which implied the preservation and the strengthening of tribal power and traditional chieftaincy. Sudan in general, and Darfur in particular, are

a case in point.

Darfur: the periphery of the periphery

By 1916, Darfur was annexed to the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium. From the outset, the colonial power focused on the riverain provinces of Sudan and assigned a handful of British officials the task of governing Darfur through the indirect rule of the Native Administration, whose powers were codified under the Powers of Nomad Sheikhs Ordinance. The 1922 Closed Districts Order declared Darfur a closed area to anyone without a government permit. This system promoted conservatism and denied education and economic development to the province. Yet since the Native Administration needed indigenous clerks, meager education was granted exclusively to the co-opted tribal chiefs' offspring. As for development projects, riverain Sudan received the lion's share, while Darfur and the South were excluded. The telegraph system did not reach Darfur until after independence in 1956, roads were quasi-nonexistent, and the modest economic activity focused on poor-quality animal husbandry. Even by Sudanese standards, Darfur's income was low in the 1930s (less than £60,000 out of the national revenue of £6 million). Famine and disease were rampant, and the infection and mortality rates were staggering. Politically, the parliamentary system, modeled after Westminster, empowered the Khartoum elite and left little scope for the peripheral regions. The transfer of power after independence was a succession rather than a break up, and future Sudanese governments kept reproducing the same political and economic inequalities.

The colonial legacy left a power system that guaranteed domination through tribally organized local authorities. Decentralized despotism, the generic form of the colonial state in Africa, would breed recurring political and economic crisis in postindependence Sudan. In 1956, the first rebellion broke out in the South,

while the low-intensity and small-scale outbreaks in Darfur would turn into violent battles in 1980s and an open rebellion against the Sudanese state in 2003.

A Darfur fact sheet

Darfur lies in the extreme west of Sudan. [19] It is bordered by Libya to the northwest, Chad to the west, and the Central African Republic to the southwest. With its 160,000 square miles, it covers approximately one-fifth of the Sudanese national territory and is divided for administrative purposes into three states: North, South, and West Darfur, with the cities Al-Fasher, Nyala, and Al-Geneina as their respective capitals. [20] This western province of the republic of Sudan was an independent sultanate until the British colonial power conquered it and incorporated it into Sudan in 1917. The Darfur sultanate dates back as far as 1650, and had been traditionally associated with two main ethnic groups the Dajo and the Tunjur [21] since the twelfth century. Basing its power on a co-opted elite coming from different ethnic groups, the Fur ethnic group managed to dominate the state apparatus in Darfur since the mid-seventeenth century, with the Arabic language becoming the language of the state by the eighteenth century. [22] Even though the Fur are the main ethnic group in Darfur, a rich mosaic of populations has lived there for hundred of years. "Arabs," who are mainly but not exclusively pastoralists, and "non-Arab" groups, comprise numerous tribes.

Under the Darfur sultanate, the settled populations who were mainly non-Arab were successful in fending off the nomadic tribes through the coercive power of the state. The heavy cavalry dispatched by the sultan could easily push back the nomads, especially the camel herders (Abbala) of the north, while the cow herders (Baggara) from the south managed to escape the sultan's punitive expeditions by withdrawing far into the south toward Bahr al-Ghazal. The historian R.S. O'Fahey notes on several occasions the similarity that exists between this situation in the nineteenth century and the present

conflict, even though the intensity of the conflict and the resulting number of casualties are incomparable. [23] Eventually, Ali Dinar restored the sultanate, maintaining the old state policy of driving the nomads north and south, away from the farming areas. When the British colonial power took hold of Darfur after killing its last sultan, Ali Dinar, they not only kept the ruling elite intact but also maintained the unfriendly policy toward the northern and southern nomadic tribes. Yet contrary to the sultanate's traditional practice of granting land as freehold, the British introduced land ownership reforms that had not existed previously in Darfur. They assigned homelands (Dars) to certain ethnic groups with "imagined" boundaries and legislated communal or tribal land ownership systems. [24] Disputes over land continue to plague Darfur to this day, and when the Sudanese state tried by 1970 to enact a modern system of land tenure without managing to implement it effectively, contradictions appeared between the customary land tenure law (collective and tribal) and the statutory law.

During the colonial period, which lasted from 1916 until 1956, Darfur remained a marginalized region. The population of Darfur had to be chastised for having fiercely opposed the British conquest.

This colonial policy would eventually engender a situation of hyperdominance of national capital, including environmental resources, and its concentration in Khartoum and its environs "fueling instability and dissent that continues to this day. For historical reasons dating back to the colonial policies of indirect rule implemented by Great Britain, the center amassed great wealth and benefited from a concentration of skilled professionals, in stark contrast to the peripheral areas. In the case of Darfur, by 1944 there were only two primary schools in the whole of the province. Colonial rulers implemented an education policy that granted privileges to children of the elite, resulting in the constitution of an urban elite drawn from outside the region. [25] Providing access to modern education was an effective policy to create an insurmountable gap between different social classes;

the rulers from the tribal administration chosen and backed by the colonial power, and the ruled. Education was made into an exclusive privilege of the aristocratic class. "The educational policy in Darfur is not haphazard but has been carefully thought out with a view to the education of tribal chiefs." [26] Along with its exclusion from the cultural and symbolic capital, Darfur did not fare well in the field of national wealth sharing and infrastructure. [27] A core-periphery analysis of the situation at hand therefore appears suitable to better understand the causes of the conflict.



This situation did not change fundamentally after independence in 1956. With the exception of a railway connecting the capital of south Darfur, Nyala, built in 1959, and a modest economic development in the southwest, Darfur remained impoverished and excluded from national wealth and political power. [28] During the 1970s, the government of Jaafar Nimeri tried to put an end to the chiefly rule of tribal leaders and create a modern state. The measures put in place by the government were intended to uproot the traditional order and reform the thorny issue of land tenure, but they were never effectively implemented. This created a dangerous confusion and most of all a breakdown in the traditional conflict-settlement mechanism. What's more, the nation and state-building in independent Sudan pitted the requirements of a "modern state" against deep-rooted "traditional" institutions, since the two systems have two antagonistic and mutually exclusive social and political foundations. While the latter is built on community-based rights and obligations, the former is legitimized on the basis of individual rights and the power of the state. Along with the bifurcated system of power inherited from the colonial era, the poor economic and developmental situation, deeply worsened by the prolonged drought of the 1980s, and the intense desertification process in the northern and central areas of

Darfur, eventually set in motion the ongoing conflict. [29]

Dominant narratives of the Darfur conflict

The same neglect and marginalization that peripheral regions in the south and the east suffered was also the triggering factor of the rebellion in the western province of Darfur as early as 1991. [30] Daud Bolad, a defecting Islamist leader from the Fur tribe, tried to emulate John Garang's Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) by attempting to ignite a rebellion among the Fur. [31] He was soon captured and killed. A decade later, another rebellion appeared in Darfur, but this time it lasted longer. On February 26, 2003, under the leadership of a young Fur lawyer, Abdelwahid Muhammad Al-Nur, a group named the Darfur Liberation Front (DLF) took control of the town of Gulu in the Jebel Marra province in western Darfur. Following the advice of John Garang, the late leader of the SPLA, this budding Darfuran movement changed its name to Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/SLA) in order to reach out to all the marginalized people of Sudan and, most importantly, to garner support among other tribes in Darfur. [32] Having supported the Arab Gathering, the Zaghawa joined the rebellion, following the political schisms that split the Islamic Salvation Front in Khartoum. [33]

The conflict originated in a local civil war (1987-89) between different local militias, not organized on racial or ethnic lines at that time. Following the failed administrative reforms put in place by Khartoum in 1995, the government of Sudan got pulled into the conflict as the opposition interfered in the dispute in 2002. It can be reasonably argued that one dimension of the conflict is a civil war among Islamists, since the JEM is suspected of being the military wing of the Popular Congress Party, led by Hassan Turabi, the "éminence grise" of the Sudanese Islamist project and the main opposition leader today.

The international community, and

most importantly western corporate media, characterized the conflict from the outset as the worst humanitarian catastrophe after the genocide in Rwanda. The subsequent depiction of the conflict evolved around three main axes: a stereotyping campaign against Islam as an "evil religion," a racialization of the conflict by drawing the dividing line between "Black Africans" as victims and "Arabs" as aggressors, and a characterization of the conflict as a genocide perpetrated by Arabs against Africans. The last axis centered on the questions of numbers and identity. In the United States, Darfur started attracting media attention in early 2004. Among the many articles and press reports written between April and June 2004, a common yet simplistic depiction of the conflict emerged. Arabs, who were perceived as outsiders who dominated the Sudanese state, were conducting a genocidal campaign against Black Africans, causing thousands of deaths and many more refugees in Chad and internally displaced people inside Sudan.

The term "Janjaweed" became common parlance, as media reports accused the Sudanese government of arming local Arab militias to wage an all-out war against Darfuran civilians. In the context of the American war on terror, journalists quickly turned to familiar analogies (violent Arabs) with other bloody events in order to provide the moral justifications for an immediate intervention. [34] The Rwandan genocide, to which the international community stood as an onlooker, became the prism through which some US senior officials perceived the conflict of Darfur. [35] The official narrative spoke of people without history, divided along ethnic and racial lines, who were engaged in a genocidal war. Yet, this narrative obscured a recurring phenomenon in violent conflicts, which is that ethnicity is the cloak that hides their economic nature.

Climate change and ecological

degradation: An ecology of Darfur

Darfur's topography is mainly a mixture of sand and qoz soils, which cover three-quarters of northern Darfur and one-quarter of southern Darfur. Clay soils cover the western part and some pockets in the north. Mountains and hills are located in the center part with the outstanding topographic elements being the Jebel Marra plateau, the stronghold of SLA/Abdelwahid, and the Meidob hills in the north. The Jebel Marra plateau is a rugged volcanic range that covers 80,000 square kilometers and has an average altitude of 1,500 meters. [36] The elevated southern parts of the plateau have a wetter microclimate than the surrounding arid areas. Originally, the plateau had extensive woodlands, but they have been gradually destroyed to provide arable land for agricultural development.

Darfur can be divided into four main climatic zones: a rich savannah in the south with four to five months of rainy season (400 mm to 800 mm per year); a poor savannah in the middle with three to four months of long rainy season (200 mm to 400 mm per year); an arid zone located in the midst of north Darfur with a limited annual precipitation (100 mm to 300 mm); and a desert area with high temperatures during the summer and a shortage of rainfall. The rainfall in the fall season, floods, and shallow wells are all inherent and central elements in the provision of food and livelihood to Darfurians. Agriculture and pastoralism are the main economic activities, and both rely heavily on the availability of water and land. These two major resources have a potential to trigger competition and rivalries among social actors.

To understand the linkages between the ecological dimensions and the military conflict, we turn now to look at the intersection of elements and phenomena, both manmade and natural: deforestation resulting from drought, unsustainable economic activities, farming patterns, livestock and grazing habits, shortage of water supply, and increasing population.

Deforestation

The permanent reduction in the area covered by trees is an economic issue affecting the forestry sector in Sudan. Deforestation results in wide-ranging negative impacts, such as the intense degradation of land and water resources and the loss of livelihoods from forest ecosystem services. This in turn results in recurring conflict over exploitation of dwindling resources and dwindling economic opportunities. According to the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the sector of forests represents approximately 13 percent of the gross domestic product. Both in rural and urban Sudan, people depend on forests for their livelihood, since trees are a valuable and highly demanded source of energy, and wood is used for construction and roofing. In the rural areas, forests are used for hunting, grazing, shade, and tree bark for medicinal purposes, as well as the production of nonwood produce such as gum and honey.

This important yet vulnerable economic resource is gradually threatened by deforestation due to the effects of climate change, energy needs, and agricultural clearance. [37] Sudan lost an average of 589,000 hectares of forest per year between 1990 and 2000. This loss intensified between 2000 and 2005 (0.84 percent per annum). In sum, Sudan lost 11.6 percent of its forest cover between 1990 and 2005. According to the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and FAO surveys, closed forests have changed since the 1970s into open forestland and burned areas, pasture, or rain-fed agriculture in western and southern Darfur. This loss represents 29.4 to 30.3 percent in three decades. [38]

There are several cumulative causes of deforestation, and even if they vary according to the regions, they can be summarized in the following phenomena or activities: drought and climate change, mechanized agriculture, fuel wood and charcoal extraction, shifting agriculture, fires, the commercial lumber and export industry, and traditional construction and brick-making. As for climate change, several studies have

established that recurring drought periods in the 1970s and 1980s resulted in the irreversible extinction of a substantial number of trees in the Sahel region. There is wide agreement among climatologists that since the beginning of the nineteenth century, each fifty years have brought about a drier climate than the five decades before it. [39] Climate change, which has resulted in drier conditions and increased land pressure, has severely undermined the potential for seed distribution, germination, and new growth. In North Darfur, scarcity of rainfall has shifted the northern limit for several tree species fifty to two hundred kilometers to the south. In addition, scientific studies have shown that deforestation is a contributing factor to desertification because of soil depletion, erosion, and sand encroachment. [40]

Furthermore, wildfires and tree browsing performed by pastoralists as a technique to renew grass, and the use of foliage for camel fodder by migrant camel herders in North Darfur have negatively impacted the tree cover. Cutting trees for fuel wood and charcoal production is another activity found all over Sudan, but the more limited the resources are, the greater is the pressure, as it is the case in North Sudan and the periphery of urban centers. Brickmaking has become an income generating activity for many Darfurians, especially those in the Internally Displaced People camps. UNEP has reported that this activity contributes to severe deforestation, [41] as it consumes a large amount of firewood. [42] Finally, both Sudanese armed forces and armed nomadic groups have engaged in tree felling on a large scale to supply camel fodder and to deter farmers from returning to cultivated land. The displacement of large numbers of people due to the ongoing conflict has resulted in significant environmental impacts, since severe deforestation has taken place around the larger camps in most 4 arid parts of the country. [43]

Human activity has its share in the ecological degradation taking place in Darfur, as overexploitation of semi-arid environments through deforestation, overgrazing, and agricultural activity resulted in the

conversion of land types from semi-desert to desert, despite the fact that the precipitation average may still be sufficient to sustain semi-desert vegetation. It should be noted also that soil type in North and West Darfur is less resistant than other parts of the region. Its sandy nature makes it prone to water and wind erosion.

Drought and water shortages

Sudan as a whole suffers from a shortage of fresh water. Insufficient and extremely variable annual rainfall rates have become a defining characteristic of the climate in most Sudanese regions. This phenomenon has impacted agricultural productivity and food security and has played a role in displacement of populations and conflicts. Sudan has suffered numerous long and devastating droughts in the last century. A study conducted in Darfur analyzing the data provided by rainfall stations in this province during the 1980s concluded what local populations have been experiencing for decades: Darfur is getting drier and drier. [44] The deadliest and most severe drought experienced by Darfurians lasted four years (1980-1984) and resulted in displacement and famine. [45]



UNEP states with certainty that these recurrent droughts, which occurred during the last half of the twentieth century, “have had a major influence on the vegetation profile and soil conditions seen in 2006,” and that these major drought periods were most likely the result of ocean temperature rather than local human activity such as overgrazing. [46] In other words, with the continuous climate change affecting the globe, there is a high probability that these droughts will occur again. The table below shows the long-term decrease in average annual rainfall (AAR) that Darfur has been experiencing since 1946. [47]

This trend of decreasing precipitation in Darfur has resulted in a severe

trend of desertification. Millions of hectares of semi-arid grazing land have turned into desert. In its post-conflict assessment report of 2007, UNEP states unequivocally that “the impact of climate change is considered to be directly related to the conflict in the region (Darfur), as desertification has added significantly to the stress on the livelihoods of pastoralists societies, forcing them to move south to find pasture.” [48] A study conducted in 2003 in Kordofan, the neighboring region to the east of Darfur, concludes with alarming results: namely that crop models indicate a disastrous decline in crop production in the studied area and also area further south. [49]

There is largely agreement among scholars and international organizations working in Sudan that droughts and subsequent shortages of water imposed on numerous Darfurian tribes have caused changes in the traditional nomadic lifestyle. Recurring long periods of drought triggered a migratory phenomenon of more nomads into Darfur in search of water and grass. Finally, these pastoralists are gradually forced to seek permanent settlements on lands that traditionally are considered the exclusive property of other tribes (such as the Hakura and Dar).

Population

According to the Fifth Population and Housing Census, conducted in April-May 2008 and published in 2009, Darfur has an estimated population of 7.5 million persons. The fact that this census was conducted in the midst of an ongoing military conflict, which translates into incapacity for census agents to reach numerous parts of Darfur for obvious security reasons, means that the Darfurian population is probably undercounted. If we compare this figure with the size of the population in 1956, the year of Sudan’s independence, we notice a substantial seven-fold growth at the very least. The table below shows the demographic growth in Darfur since its independence. [50]

Year Population

1956.....1,080,000

1973.....1,340,000
1983.....3,500,000
1993.....5,600,000
2003.....6,480,000
2008.....7,500,000

Population density has increased dramatically. In 1956, the rate was three persons per square kilometer. By 1983, the figure was ten persons per square mile, and it was eighteen in 2003. This rate has most certainly continued to increase since the violence broke out in Darfur and as arid areas have been deserted in favor of more hospitable lands. It is not surprising then that the demographic element plays a major role in the conflict, since it compounds the pressures on the scarce natural resources available. Parallel to the demographic increase, the demand for agricultural products soared, and the average land holdings per household decreased. Due to declining precipitation, productivity of rain-fed agriculture declined both by quantitative and 2012 distributive measures. In reaction, farmers resorted to horizontal expansion, which encroached on pasturelands used both by nomads and farmers alike.

Nowadays in all of Darfur, millet farming takes places without the traditional corridors that used to be left for animals to graze along during the farming season. This phenomenon touches all types of cultivable soil: qoz soil, light clay, and gardud soils. Traditionally, clay soils and wadi beds were used as grazing areas during the dry season for feeding livestock, but due to the availability of new agricultural technologies, it has become much easier to cultivate these areas through the use of rainfall moisture during the winter season or irrigation techniques, such as diesel-operated water pumps that get water from shallow wells. Furthermore, cashflow crops such as groundnut and sesame witnessed a substantial increase to respond to the market demand.

In sum, the increase in population drove substantial changes in the expansion of farming during the last decades. Millet cultivation in North Darfur increased by 150 percent in five decades, while the use of clay

soils and wadi beds for agriculture increased by 300 percent. No wonder then that this situation drove fierce competition over land. The status in Darfur thus seems locked in a vicious circle. Unsustainable overuse of natural resources intensifies the ecological degradation already taking place due to other factors and fuels the competition over resources and access to land even further, feeding into more and more violence. The issue of land has proven to be a serious bone of contention in several attempts to resolve the conflict.

Conclusion

It can be reasonably argued that the present crisis in Darfur resulted in large part from the competition over continuously dwindling natural resources. It is, therefore, only logical that any serious attempt at resolving the conflict in a sustainable manner, both socially and politically, should take into consideration dimensions such as the scarcity of resources, and most of all the role of climate change and ecological degradation in pitting different social actors against each othersâ€”in addition to issues of inequality in terms of economic capital, good governance, deficit, social justice, and so on.

As stated earlier, a large body of literature, mainly from corporate

Western media, gave birth to a series of misconceptions that perceived the ecological degradation as a consequence of economic and social factors, while the bloody conflicts in Darfur, which are mostly but not exclusively a result of climate change, were in turn construed as mainly racial and political conflicts. Public debates, by focusing on politics, neglect major ecological effects of climate change in vulnerable areas, such as sub-Saharan Africa. The fact is that social and economic systems are globally more closely related to climate factors than we thought earlier, and the ecological effects of climate change on vulnerable societies and polities in many developing countriesâ€”already plagued with chronic economic, financial, and political fragilityâ€”could be incalculable. [51]

Numerous reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warn that many regions across the globe will become environmentally inhospitable and economically stressed. Like any historical or social transitions, there will be winners and losers, both globally in the world-system economy, and locally on the national level. In the former case, the gap between rich and poor, developed and developing countries, will widen even further. In the latter case, farmers in high-altitude farm regions will most certainly benefit from extended growing season thanks to warmer

temperatures, while other socioeconomic groups, such as Darfurian pastoralists, will have to relocate due to environmental pressures. Water will be a determinant variable in this relocation process. Therefore, “climate migration” and “climate refugees” are yet other dimensions of this phenomenon worthy of both serious scholarship and policy makers’ attention.

Differentiated and unequal distribution of social and symbolic capital will be exacerbated further, as vulnerable and disenfranchised groups, whether on a racial, ethnic, religious, or gender basis, suffer from increasing pressures and more intensive discrimination, which may lead to social upheavals and political instability.

As far as the African continent is concerned, numerous signs indicate that sub-humid and arid areas will suffer from even more droughts, worsening the food crisis for many of the continent’s most marginalized groups. The serious shortage in precipitation in the Sahel region over the last four decades, from both anthropogenic warming and aerosol pollutants, has been threatening food security, water supply, and will subsequently contribute to triggering conflicts such as the one in Darfur. [52]

Abortion ban: attempted femicide

25 June 2012, by **Ecehan Balta**

While we were thinking about who would pay the political cost of Uludere massacre we found ourselves in the dock for committing murder. Prime Minister Erdogan said “every abortion is another Uludere” in his closing speech at the 2012 International Parliamentarians Conference on the application of the Action Plan decided by the International Population and Development Fund. With his speech,

he equated killing Kurds by the hands of the State and the rights of women over their own bodies. Instead of rendering the account of massacre, he used it as a tool to realize the expected attack of neoliberal fundamentalist capitalism.

Malthus is dead, long live Erdogan!

This was not the first attack of the prime minister against women’s bodies. He made it tradition to tell us what to do with our pudendum. He celebrated the Women’s’ Day in 2008 by saying that he is urging woman to

give birth at least three children for the “wealth of the nation”.

The right of abortion up to ten weeks into pregnancy gained by women in 1983 will be an area of harsh struggle between women and State once again. In fact, in the following days it was announced in the newspapers that a bill is being prepared by the Ministry of Health which decreases the legal period of abortion from 10 to 4 weeks. It is even being discussed publicly that the exemptions like rape and other health reasons will not be included in the amendment. By the same token, the Minister of Health declared that if women do not want to look after children born as incidents of rape, the State can care for them.

What will happen now?

It is expected the bill will be discussed in Parliament until the end of June. Given the reality that the AKP is the majority of the Parliament, there is no reason for it not to become law except a strong mass movement. Women's organizations are organizing rallies

and demonstrations in cities from the beginning of this discussion and raise their voices against the attempt of the ban of abortion in the axis of the social rights of women and women's control over their own bodies. The demands of the movement are:

- Free, secure, easy and accessible abortion;
- Free, wide, secure contraception both for men and women.

Unfortunately, the latest rallies held on the 17th of June in the three biggest cities were below expectations. But enraged and steely participants show that the final round has not been played and the final words have not been said yet. The day the bill will be taken into agenda of the Parliament all women around Turkey will be in front of the Parliament to defend our abortion right.

On the axis of the struggle

As we all know, any kind of

fundamentalism, either Islamic or Buddhist is a spare key of neoliberalism in all world. AKP is one of the logical results of this changing concept. So the struggle against AKP should also be seen as a part of struggle against neoliberalism here in Turkey as in elsewhere without demoting to it.

This attack against women's bodies is another manifestation of the route of capitalism to the “holy family”. We are facing with one of the cruelest forms of tyranny on our bodies. Repositioning women's bodies as a tool for reproduction of cheap labor force and ejecting the female workforce from the market are two of the incorporated reasons of this attack.

Capitalism is internally linked with patriarchy as it is with racism and ecological destruction. Women have been struggling against patriarchy for hundreds of years. Sexual “freedom” was one of the successes of the second wave of feminism. We won't give it back by our own hands. “We don't have the luxury to go back since our gains are not even the half of our hopes”.

The International Indigenous Movement for Self-Determination

24 June 2012, by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, Andrew Curley

In Latin America, Indigenous efforts to combat colonialism have taken a different strategy. These peoples have organized into movements against racialized social hierarchies, and have agitated for increased rights. They have overtly challenged the state and contemporary capitalism, drawing upon an ethical reading of Marxism that calls for improved social rights and economic justice.

Within international discourse, new Indigenous alliances have found

resonance in Indigenous claims against the states that act as their colonizers. In response to Indigenous movements around the world, even the United Nations (UN) has been compelled to formally recognize Indigenous rights. The UN Declaration for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) has provided Indigenous peoples with legal grounds from which to argue for increased autonomy and recognition of their social, cultural, and political practices in places where they have been historically exploited

and marginalized.

As long as they are located on other continents, the North American Left is usually comfortable with Indigenous politics. However, when Indigenous movements are located closer to home, people on the Left tend to have more difficulty accepting the politics of self-determination. The function of tribal governments is considered to be problematic. Often, twin emphases on class struggle and environmentalism prevents appreciation of how tribal

state-making efforts are part of a larger struggle against US imperialism and militarism in the service of capitalism. In general, the Marxian lack of emphasis or interest in land and land-based peoples is a blindspot, a deficit in imagined futures.

For example, the work of environmental justice organizations in the Southwestern US, where the Navajo Nation is located, largely challenges tribal development policies for being exploitative of the natural environment. Sometimes they do this through characterizations of these governments as a form of neocolonialism. There is little to no recognition of progressive reforms won through struggle during the second half of the 20th century that have ensured greater degrees of control and self-determination for these tribal governments.

It is useful to analyze the differences and commonalities among Indigenous movements in order to gain a better understanding of the complex and contradictory processes of self-determination. In this way we can learn where Indigenous emancipatory projects conflict in approach but converge in meaning. Ultimately, we suggest that more attention should be given to the potentials of Indigenous socialisms of various kinds in global struggles against imperialism and capitalist accumulation.

Self-Determination in Latin America: A Long History of Struggle

Following the 2005 election of the first Indigenous president of any country in the Americas — Evo Morales in Bolivia — we commented on the fact that many were taken by surprise by this seemingly sudden occurrence out of nowhere. This is because they had not been paying attention to the development of the international Indigenous movement over the previous three decades. We called attention to the Indigenous mass movements in the Americas during the 1960s and 1970s that gave rise to the

international Indigenous movement. This movement, in turn, brought pressure to bear on the UN that led to the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Our story starts even further back, in the 1920s, with the work of Peruvian Marxist José Carlos Mariátegui. Mariátegui made the case that the Indigenous peoples of the Andes are nationalities that have the right to self-determination, including independence from the dominant state — although Mariátegui argued that a separate Andean state would not be feasible to achieve.

During that time, the Soviet Union-led Comintern promoted the right to self-determination — including independence — of all nationalities and proposed that an Andean Indian Republic be formed in South America, as well as Black Republics in the United States and in South Africa. However, Mariátegui believed that liberation and socialism — Indigenous socialism — would come not from state formation, but from struggles of the Indigenous nationalities, Mestizo peasants, and urban workers in unison. He was certain that a century of independent state formation in Latin America would not lend itself to separatist movements, nor would such movements lead to authentic liberation. In fact, since that time, even the most militant Andean leaders and organizations have not proposed separate Indigenous republics, but rather plurinational state formations.

However, the dream of self-determination was not to be achieved in Mariátegui's time. The Cold War affected peoples' movements in every corner of the world, no less the Indigenous peoples of the Americas. By the 1950s, Marxist-inspired movements were under heavy attack, ideologically, as well as physically. As mild a democratic reform government as that in Guatemala was overthrown in 1954 by the US Central Intelligence Agency, and following the Cuban Revolution, any social movement demanding land reform or workers' rights was labeled communist. Missionary intervention and assistance in Indigenous movements, particularly following Vatican II, largely replaced the weakened

socialist movements.

Following decades of defeats for Indigenous peoples in Latin America, our story jumps ahead to 1989, sixteen years before Evo Morales' election, in the Andean state of Ecuador. There, Indigenous peoples rose up and paralyzed the country for a week. The protesters blocked highways, halting all traffic in the country, and then massed in the streets of Quito, the capital, presenting sixteen demands focused on land, culture, and political rights.

The pan-Indigenous organization, CONAIE (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador), founded in 1986, provided both leadership and an ideological frame for the future of Indigenous movements in that country, including the extraordinary role of women's leadership and participation. From its founding, CONAIE had been actively participating in the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations, established in 1981. Since 1990, the Ecuadorian government has included Indigenous representatives in its delegations to the UN, although the Indigenous organizations remain active and wary of the national government.

Historian Marc Becker, who has documented the Andean Indigenous movements in books and articles, observes that, following the 1990 uprising: "In a manner rarely seen in Latin America, Indigenous activism in Ecuador spawned an academic 'Generation of 1990' with numerous articles, books, and doctoral dissertations on the subject of Indigenous politics. Anthropologists, political scientists, and sociologists analyzed the uprising and the ideological shifts engendered within the Indigenous world. Academics came to see the uprising, the organizational process leading to it, and the political negotiations following it as representing the birth of a new Indigenous ideology and organizational structure."

Now that socialism is back in the forefront of the Indigenous movement in Bolivia with Evo Morales's political party MAS (Movement Toward Socialism), it is time for the Left to

comprehend Indigenous struggles and aspirations.

When comparing American Indian communities in Anglo North America with indigenous communities in Latin America, it's immediately clear that the first order of difference is their legal-political status. In the United States and in Canada, settler societies have institutionalized formal boundaries, membership criteria, and even forms of government that are designed to give indigenous peoples a sense of social and cultural autonomy. These arrangements also benefit their settler societies in the sense that they partially pacify resentment toward colonialism.

In the United States the passage of the Indian Reorganization Act in 1934 (IRA) initiated a series of political reforms that led to the emergence of formalized territorial boundaries, institutions, and hierarchical authority. Both the US and Canada have followed similar paths in this regard. Eventually these powers were organized into Tribal Councils (in Canada, Band Councils) that served as a form of government for tribal peoples. Although the amount of power these governments were granted vis-à-vis settler societies was limited, these arrangements gave indigenous peoples in Anglo North America a sense of control over their lands, cultures, and governing institutions.

In this article, we argue that indigenous struggles for autonomy against capitalist exploitation have taken unique, sometimes contradictory trajectories. In order to practice a politics of decolonization, it's important to understand the nature of state formation, economic development and neoliberalism. We look at the Navajo Nation as a case study of the contradictions of capitalist development in indigenous North America.

Resource

extraction and the socially embedded nature of the Navajo welfare state

On many reservations, the drive toward large-scale economic development was derived from the natural mineral wealth of the community, and came with a high environmental cost. In the case of the Navajo Nation, tribal officials and some members celebrated the jobs and revenues these activities helped create. Although many questioned or outright opposed development's high cost on the environment, these mineral economies eventually became part of the social and political reality on the ground.

Mineral economies became embedded within the social and cultural landscape, especially near where extraction occurred. For example, coal mining on the western end of the Navajo Nation provided many jobs for people in the immediate vicinity.

But the mines also served as a source of revenue for tribal government as a whole. This activity ushered in a new sense of scale with respect to how Navajo thought about their family and community livelihoods, and development in general. It scaled up Navajo self-consciousness from the level of the community and family to the level of the nation. When community members transitioned from subsistence activities (such as sheep and cattle herding, small-scale farming, or arts and crafts activities) and into regimes of wage labour such as railroad work, mining, and other forms of construction, a new kind of social relation was embedded into the landscape—a social relation structured by alienation and hierarchy, and ideologically framed by Navajo nationalist discourse. The emergence of a new class consciousness has arguably led to a reframing of what Navajos consider to be legitimate forms of work. It also defines what the tribal government is expected to do in order to promote

and continue these types of work.

Development and modernization

At the height of US post-war development, massive amounts of federal aid were funnelled into reservations. The objective was to modernize and develop tribal communities. This strategy was not only applied within reservations, but also became a part of a larger global postwar development policy. Within the Navajo Nation, revenues from extractive industries (e.g., oil, natural gas, uranium, and coal) helped to expand the size and scale of the tribal government at this time.

The 1960s proved to be the development decade for the Navajo Nation. This is when a number of new and large-scale projects were initiated on the reservation with a sense that a burgeoning new phase in Navajo history was just around the corner. There was a sense of optimism in these projects at this time.

Between the 1960s and the 1980s, when neoliberalism turned its ugly head toward federal-Indian relations, these initiatives became entrenched within many Navajo communities. Returning to our example of coalmining in the western part of the Navajo reservation, it was during this period that two coal mines were opened in the 1960s, along with a regional power plant. Over their forty-year history, these industries have employed hundreds of Navajo and Hopi peoples from surrounding communities.

Starting in the 1980s, dependency on mining on the western end of the Navajo reservation and other natural resource development activities was exacerbated by federal austerity measures that led to reduced support for social programs. The tribal government was forced to rely more on revenue from industrial development to stay afloat and support needed programs.

Neoliberal turn and “alternative” development proposals

The increased reliance on natural resource development in turn led to greater unease and dissatisfaction among tribal members concerned about the physical transformations impacting their lands, forests, and sources of water. Within the Navajo Nation, a new brand of indigenous environmentalism emerged from tribal dependence on extractive industries. Newly established environmental justice organizations challenged a waste-incinerator project, continued logging within Navajo forests, and coalmining.

The environmental movement at this time was framed in opposition to the development approach that the tribal government had relied on for many years. Now these projects were understood as unsustainable. Members of this movement simply opposed destructive development projects and called for a return to traditional forms of living instead.

But after two decades of neoliberalism on the Navajo Nation, new and emergent environmental justice organizations challenged extractive industries here in a fundamentally new way. They started to offer alternative development schemes aiming to fit within the logic of neoliberalism, instead of simply opposing existing approaches. In a larger sense this is because neoliberalism had become hegemonic in policy circles by this time. But this strategy was primarily a response to the embedded nature of resource extraction economies on the reservation. When environmental justice organizations worked in opposition to resource extraction projects, they were met with vitriolic denunciations from people who worked within these industries.

Because members of environmental justice organizations were seen as directly challenging the livelihoods of people employed in these places, they

had to offer something more than a permanent end to their jobs—they had to offer development alternatives. In an effort to take these peoples’ concerns into consideration, environmental justice organizations tried to identify and propose types of work and activities that could replace environmentally damaging industries such as mining and coal-fired power generation.

Environmental justice groups have argued that the Navajo Nation should move away from coalmining and mineral extraction as sources of revenues and support small-scale businesses instead, drawing upon popular development rhetoric within this neoliberal milieu. They envision subsidies for small-scale business development such as solar installations or traditional forms of agriculture.

Although perhaps more sustainable in some ways than mining or logging, the neoliberal strategy fundamentally changes the intimate relationship Navajo people have with the items they produce and consume. In effect it extends capitalist processes further into reservation lands. Neoliberalism takes things that have been somewhat protected, made insular from capitalism, and brings them into capitalist processes. Capitalism erodes and upends subsistence practices, and subsumes them to its dehumanizing logic.

This presents us with a conundrum. Are indigenous nations faced with only the two choices that have been offered to us, either continuation of environmentally destructive industrial development or capitalist “sustainable” enterprises? Or is there a way we can move away from both forms of capitalism? Perhaps the answer points to a loose form of socialism—designed to protect the cultural autonomy of many Navajos in their subsistence practices, but also taking into account the reality of the Navajo Nation as a society produced out of many generations of self-government and large-scale economic development. In other words, does the socially embedded scale at which capitalist development has occurred so far across reservation lands lend itself to socialist alternatives?

Decolonization, self-determination, and “loose socialism”

Anthropologist Anna Tsing writes about the interactions between indigenous peoples and processes of global capitalism as a form of “friction,” producing movement, action, and effect. In the case of the Navajo Nation, the friction between the coal industry and environmental organizations exposes the contradictions of both within the space of global capitalism during this era of neoliberalism.

Today we have to understand how neoliberalism affects tribal communities, but also understand there is opportunity in it for articulating a socialist alternative. In a statement we circulated among Indigenous activists in the United States, arguing for a perspective and strategy of Indigenous socialism, we stated:

Indigenous peoples have well developed alternative ideas of social orders that can be incorporated into modern governments. Our historic forms of governance were tied to spiritual traditions and simpler subsistence practices but have broader applicability. To be responsive to the larger scale of political and economic activities, we take from western theoretical frameworks and models what we might find appropriate and applicable to our specific contexts and the cultural values Indigenous peoples hold. Given what we know of historic Indigenous social and political structures, we can preliminarily suggest that socialism is a better cultural fit for modern Indigenous political institutions.

What is more, the premises on which Marxism are built are consistent with Indigenous peoples’ historic experiences. Therefore, because we accept that we must adopt political and economic theories of governance from the west alongside our own, historic traditions; and because we realize on preliminary analysis that

socialism is more consistent with our values and past practices, we can conclude that we should develop texts and theories of governance and economic development that bridge Indigenous perspectives with ideological foundations of Marxism and socialism, or what some today are calling communism.

Although there is a lot of “friction” or contradiction between, the different economic orientations and scales of development of many tribal communities organized into governments, the seeds for a loose form of socialism are actually contained within the neoliberal

alternatives described above. By “loose,” we mean flexible, contingent, adjusted to circumstance, and non-dogmatic. Although there is an immediate contradiction in the existing approach of environmental justice organizations, these things could end up much differently than they began.

With a little critique, prodding, and self-awareness, indigenous programs crafted in the spirit of sustainability, but harnessing the productive systems that have been forged in the history of capitalist development, can also be shaped into a unique form of socialist relations within tribal peoples that prevents the worst impacts of

capitalism.

We are all well aware that global capitalism has brought us to the brink of planetary disaster. But indigenous forms of resistance provide for us an opportunity to think about new forms of socialism that emphasize existing relationships tribal people have with one another, and have historically had, in their subsistence ways of life. There are more specific ways we can describe the possibilities of socialism on the Navajo Nation. This requires that we think optimistically about the potential role that indigenous peoples can play in envisioning truly sustainable alternatives to capitalism.

A Pyrrhic victory

22 June 2012, by **Dimitris Hilaris**

How disappointed are you, Dimitris, with this victory for the right in the June 17 elections?

It is a Pyrrhic victory. During the electoral campaign, the media played on fear, on exit from the euro, the effects of not respecting the memorandums signed with the EY, of governmental instability. The right has thus succeeded in capturing the votes of the social layers terrorised by this instability. Whereas scooped up votes among workers and youth, the right won the votes of the middle classes and an older section of the population. But neither New Democracy, who won with 29.66%, nor Syriza with 26.89%, have succeeded in mobilising the 35% who abstained. Syriza gained 10% extra in relation to May 6th from the other left forces. The ND did the same on the right.

And now?

Now we will see that it is a Pyrrhic victory. A national unity government including the ND, PASOK and the Democratic Left will go through the same contradictions which traverse Greek society. Also, except for short periods, we have never had a national

unity government in Greece. And this government will be responsible for applying the potions of the on the street.

Exactly, the street mobilisations...

The result for Syriza has given confidence. Confidence in a social dynamic, that of the mobilisations over the last three years, but also confidence in the possibility of creating a radical left force, whatever the ambiguities of Syriza.

This situation favours a discussion on alternatives because a demand is made to go beyond protest and advance alternative solutions. That stimulates politicisation, and that isn't good for the government.

A social and political dynamic is underway. And it is currently more important than the temptation, which exists, of relying on a strong parliamentary representation of the radical left. It is necessary however to be wary of a division of labour between the movements, responsible for protesting, and the left parties which practice politics.

As an electoral expression of

struggles, Syriza appears as a model in Europe

As its leaders say, Syriza is “a party of democratic normality”. But if Syriza respects bourgeois legality, this latter in no way respects Syriza. And it is in this dynamic that things can happen. It is not enough to denounce the ambiguities of Syriza - its programme is much more moderate than its slogans - but we should stimulate the emergence of a debate on the left on a political alternative.

We, the forces of the anti-capitalist coalition, should draw the lessons of this experience. We need to be involved in a social and political dynamic which desires change. It should lead to a united front with Syriza and the KKE around the idea of a left government which is not a government of management but of rupture.

Which means?

Which means cancelling the memorandums, breaking with the euro and the European Union. Not to go back to the drachma, but to deprive the troika of the instrument of threat

and blackmail which is the euro. Indeed, how can we speak of the nationalisation of the banks –or of simple public control of the latter as Syriza advocates – if we don't control the creation of the currency? It is up to us to deal with the threat: if you continue with your diktats, we can leave the euro. And for that we must convince the masses that there is a life beyond the euro but not in nationalist terms.

And precisely, in relation to that, the far right has confirmed its

presence.

That is why it has to be combated in the street, displacing the conflict to the social rather than the national terrain.

Some estimates talk of 560 billion Euros of tax evasion for the year 2010 alone. What can be done in Europe in support of the Greek people?

International solidarity is precious for us. We would feel less isolated at a time when they wish to make us think

that we are alone in Europe. And then, if you can put pressure on the banks so that they reveal the breadth of the deposits they hold from rich Greeks...

The Federal Council has provided a list of 4,000 US citizens who hold accounts in Switzerland; can we expect them to make public the names of the Greek billionaires who hold their assets in Switzerland?

*First published in French in the Swiss journal **l'Anticapitaliste**.*

Land Grabs and Food Sovereignty:

21 June 2012, by Jack Whitman

It is generally agreed that the 'global land grab' began around 2007/8 when worldwide interest in the purchasing or leasing of land jumped to approximately 42 million hectares (ha), compared with an average of 2.7 million ha in previous years. [53] The dynamics of this recent trend of global capital reflect the growing strength of newly developed countries: 4 out of 5 of the 'BRICS' are in the top 20 of those investing in land – Brazil has acquired approximately 6.2 million ha; Russia hasn't made the top 20; India are on 4.5 million ha; China, 11.6 million ha; and South Africa approximately 5.1 million ha – alongside countries such as Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and South Korea.

The predominance of this investment has gone into African countries (Mozambique, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Sudan, DRC, etc.) – known for their weak governance structures and desire for foreign investment regardless of the social and environmental costs – but then a considerable amount has also made its way into South-East Asia, particularly the Philippines, Laos and Indonesia. [54]

Besides the fact that much of this interest is coming from both private and public/state-owned institutions, it

is important to note the specific areas of industry that have received the most investment. According to the World Bank, and as one would expect, agriculture is leading the way, taking up approximately 79% of targeted investment – significantly, biofuels, such as bioethanol and biodiesel, made from products like corn, sugar cane, palm oil and jathropa, constitute 21% of this 79%, thus demonstrating their monstrous rise over the past decade (just last year, 11,000 ha were purchased in Isabela, Philippines for purposes of bioethanol production); with the remainder of investment being taken up by forestry and livestock at around 21% of global land investment. [55] However, a large amount of the land purchased during the first wave of investment has remained uncultivated, and here we see a major characteristic of the land grab – that is, the creation of a monopoly on land regardless of whether capital intends to use it for production or not. But why and for what purpose?

Mainstream commentators tend to feed us the story that the surge in 'land acquisitions' (as they so mildly term it) is down to the rise in food prices and hence the rush by countries with the benevolent concern of feeding their populations to secure

land for food production – that is, the (at times, Malthusian) food crisis narrative. While this is partly true – there has indeed been a hike in food prices and thus a need to secure a stable supply of arable land for the future production of subsistence commodities (which, of course, has a bearing upon the price of labour) – it does in fact detract from the fundamental capital relations determining such behaviour (which I'll come to in a moment).

Some of the main proponents of the *Journal of Peasant Studies (JPS)*, on the other hand, recently placed the exponential rise in 'land deals' down to six main drivers: global anticipation of food insecurity; new forms of resource extraction for fuel security; new environmental imperatives and tools; extensive infrastructure corridors and Special Economic Zones; creation of new financial instruments; and, finally, rules, regulations and incentives provided by the international community. [56]

While these go a long way in explaining the empirical relations of the land grab phenomenon, I'd like to put forward a thesis based upon the fundamental capital-relations at work and how these are in fact the main

drivers behind the global land grab. My argument is that capital, seeing potential for a relatively stable and lucrative return on investment, has been ploughing money into land in order to create a monopoly on natural resources – particularly since the economic crisis hit in 2007/8 (it's not just a coincidence that food prices rose around the same time!) – this has the effect of both ensuring a return on investment in the form of rents and, fundamentally, the propagation of the capital-relation in the global South and hence the creation of a burgeoning reserve army of labour for large-scale agri-business. [57]

Where do I get my logic for this? Marx, in *Volume One of Capital*, tells us that the fundamental relationship of the capitalist mode of production is that where the capitalist enters the market with his money, purchases labour-power, puts this to work with means of production for a certain period of time and then kindly relieves the worker of the surplus-value the latter has created during the production process – that is, the labour theory of value and the relationship between the two socio-economic classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

This is not all, however: Marx also tells us that for this relationship to exist, the objective conditions need to be just so that the person is compelled to sell their labour in the first place – thus, there needs to be a separation of the worker from the means of production; in other words, the land and the natural resources that nature so graciously provides have to be wrenched away so that the worker has to sell their labour in order to subsist. As Marx himself states: ‘The capital relation presupposes a complete separation between the worker and the ownership of the conditions for the realisation of their labour [i.e. their reproduction]’; Marx goes on to suggest that capital must not only maintain this separation, but that it must also: ‘reproduce it on a constantly expanding scale’. [58]

There is thus a drive within the internal logic of capitalism that means it has to constantly expand the wage labour relation by separating the worker from the means of production.

As part of this process, however, the land itself, and the natural resources it carries, must also be commoditized and made into capital. In other words, land needs to be enclosed, taken into private ownership and this needs to happen on a ‘constantly expanding scale’.

This tendency within the system is what Marx refers to as ‘primitive accumulation’: ‘...a process which operates two transformations, whereby the social means of subsistence and production are turned into capital, and the immediate producers are turned into wage-labourers. So-called primitive accumulation, therefore, is nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producers from the means of production’. [59] Marx refers to it as a ‘primitive’ mode of accumulation as he was writing within the context of the historical transition of the British mode of production from a feudalist organisation to a capitalist one; he thus believed that it was part of the ‘pre-history’ of capital.

However, as Rosa Luxemburg has argued in her *Accumulation of Capital*: ‘...capitalism in its full maturity also depends in all respects on non-capitalist strata and social organisations existing side by side with it...Capital needs the means of production and the labour power of the whole globe for untrammelled accumulation; it cannot manage without the natural resources and labour power of all territories’ [60] Indeed, Luxemburg may have been discussing this within the context of colonialism, but there are many contemporary thinkers, notably David Harvey (*The New Imperialism*, 2003) and others, who argue that primitive accumulation is perpetuated today in the multiple forms of neocolonialism that we see, but particularly in that of the enclosure and privatisation of public land.

Fundamentally, the logic behind the drive for monopolisation of land, while acknowledging the fact that the more land is privatised the less it becomes available as a source for the means of subsistence of the worker (thus forcing them to sell their labour), follows the principle that without a monopoly the owner cannot claim

‘absolute rent’. The concept of absolute rent as developed by Marx in *Volume Three of Capital* (1894) basically posits that there must be a monopoly on land in order for proprietors to extract a rent from it – in other words, if there's land available to farm somewhere else which is in public ownership then people will just go and grow their food on there rather than paying someone for the use of their land.

Furthermore, the productivity of the land must also be taken into consideration – i.e. some land is more productive than others, either naturally or technologically, and so fetches a higher rent; this is what Marx refers to as the ‘differential rent’ that may be extracted from land. In other words, unless there's a monopoly on land, the required rents cannot be charged by the landowners, hence the need for a monopoly. We thus see how primitive accumulation and the extraction of rent both drive the monopolisation of land in order to create the conditions necessary for the operation of capital.

The way in which the state grants the rights of the land to capital is of the utmost importance in terms of our analysis of this issue and was in fact highlighted by Marx himself. Ultimately, it involves the state institutionalisation of theft. As Marx states in *Capital: Volume One*: ‘...it is a notorious fact that conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, in short force, play the greatest part...the methods of primitive accumulation are anything but idyllic’ [61]. The institutionalisation of this robbery, according to Marx, takes the form of a number of legislative mechanisms, but particularly ‘Bills of Inclosure of the Commons’; in other words, the use of the legal system to take public property into private ownership constitutes the main tool of primitive accumulation.

Indeed, it is these same mechanisms that are being applied today in the global South in order to perpetuate primitive accumulation and hence the capital-relation: as Basu, an Indian political economist, notes: ‘...in the present era, laws, regulations, and even principles of jurisprudence are being grossly altered with impunity to

facilitate imperialist plunder'; [62] in fact, Basu also notes how the three main International Financial Institutions (IFIs) involved in global development: the World Bank, World Trade Organisation (WTO) and International Monetary Fund (IMF), 'play a stellar and crucial role, but [that] it is only through state power, acting at the behest of global capital that the necessary changes can be implemented'. [Ibid]

In other words, the state puts into place the ideal legal structures that facilitate the plundering of land by global capital, and it does this at the advice of the IFIs - indeed, all one has to do is look at the role of the infamous Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) of the 1980s/90s and their 'shock therapy' in the establishment of the right 'business-friendly' conditions for capital, as proof of this!

Let me give two empirical examples to illustrate all of this theoretical mumbo-jumbo: first, let's take rural Orissa in India. Known for its already abject levels of poverty and conflicts over the issue of displacement, Orissa is experiencing the symptoms of a transition to a capitalist mode of production, with the creation of a wage labour force right at the top of the list. According to Deepak Mishra (2011), land acquisitions in Orissa have taken various forms: 'mining, industrial and military infrastructural projects;...conversion of forest lands into agro-industrial plantations; state-initiated enclosures...Along with the systematic undermining of livelihood resources (such as forests, grazing lands, water bodies); reorganisation of property rights over resources (such as forests, agricultural land, village commons...ponds, lakes and rivers) and [the] exclusion of a sector of the population' - all of which is aimed at the commoditization of natural resources and creation of a wage labour force. [63]

In Laos, we see much the same story: the granting of land concessions to foreign capital for the creation of large-scale plantations, much to the detriment of local populations, particularly the indigenous, and their access to natural resources. Many of these people have lost access to

agricultural and forest lands that provided the means of their subsistence, with the result that they have then gone on to sell their labour to the very companies that displaced them from the land in the first place - that is, we have the creation of a wage labour force due to a separation from the means of (re)production, as well as the putting of that labour-power to work on the newly founded plantations.

Indeed, this is a common scenario in the global South: a subsistence or semi-subsistence farming population, operating small-scale farmlands and surviving by way of a predominantly peasant-based economy, many of whom are indigenous, are wrenched away from the publicly owned lands by way of enclosures and privatisation. This has the effect of the full- or semi-proletarianisation of the people, whereby they are forced to sell their labour in order to subsist; I say semi-proletarianised because some are able to maintain small plots but are still compelled to sell their labour in order to get by. Indeed, according to Baird (2011): '...the policy of the government of Laos to 'turn land into capital' is crucially intertwined with another important respect, 'turning people into labour'. [64] We thus see the playing out of the fundamental relations of capital in two very characteristic cases of primitive accumulation.

So, what can food sovereignty offer in opposition to these trends of land grabbing and primitive accumulation? In my view, food sovereignty, the concept and the practice, stands in direct contradiction to the fundamental relation of capital whereby public land is usurped for private gain. How? As Esther Vivas explains: 'Food sovereignty is defined by the right of communities to decide on their own agricultural and food policies, to protect and to regulate the production and the internal agricultural trading with the aim of achieving a sustainable development and food security'. [65] This means that: 'Land, seeds, water...have to be returned to farmers so that they can feed themselves and sell their products to local communities...through diversification of crops, care of the land, the use of

water, the creation of local markets and community food systems' [66]

In other words, there needs to be a re-localisation of production! One which sits in direct contradiction to the globalised market of commodity production that exists under capitalism, as embodied by agribusiness, and which delivers autonomy and control over production back to the worker. As Basu argues: 'The project of constructing an alternative path of development must stop rent extraction by the global while respecting the local differences...Cooperative-based production must emerge from the initiative of the labouring people'. [67]

Indeed, for me and for a number of other Marxists, including the Peruvian revolutionary Hugo Blanco, [68] the fight against primitive accumulation is another front in the class war and we comrades need to be supporting those at the vanguard of the struggle, namely the indigenous and small-scale farmers of the global South, who, particularly through forums such as La Via Campesina, are becoming conscious of their common interests in the face of global capitalism. In fact, I believe that this mode of critique, and the strategies of resistance inherent to it, strengthen our ecosocialist position dramatically - it puts us in direct opposition to the predatory tendencies of globalised neoliberal capitalism and its drive to commodify the whole planet (not to mention the explicitly environmental aspects of this debate which I've steered away from in order to focus on the capital-labour relation, but which are just as important!).

Take the MST in Brazil, for example. The Landless Workers' Movement (or Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra - MST), following a mixture of Marxism, liberation theology and Friereian ideologies of education, and through a strategy of occupy and resist, have managed to build communities across Brazil that not only allow workers to recolonise the means of production and work outside of global agribusiness, but are also sustained by radically democratic and agro-ecological structures of production (in fact, academics such as Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz refer to such models as 'indigenous socialism').

What is more, they have been rather successful. I was at a World Development Movement (WDM) talk last year and a member of the MST, Delwek Mateus, was saying how they'd managed to permanently settle 400,000 families and temporarily settle 100,000. While remaining sceptical of the source, it is still quite clear that the MST have had a massive impact. Politically, however, they lack direction; following a misguided faith in Lula and the Workers' Party (PT) with their unfulfilled promises of land reform, they have returned to occupy and resist tactics and ultimately working within the system. It would be much more favourable for them if they

were to put their wait behind the Party of Socialism and Freedom (PSOL) - of which Enlace, our FI section in Brazil, is a member - and to build a party political movement that way.

But then, there's not just the MST: our comrades of the Revolutionary Workers' Party of Mindanao (RPM-M) in the Philippines are also practising food sovereignty on their farms, with democratically controlled agro-ecological production and even seed banks to counteract the monopolisation of these particularly important inputs, as enabled by GMO

technology and intellectual property law (what could be seen as yet another form of primitive accumulation whereby public resources are usurped for private gain).

Nevertheless, it is clear that primitive accumulation lives on in the phenomenon of land grabbing and that if we are to resist its particularly pernicious side-effects - food shortages, environmental crises, a lack of resources for millions - then we must mobilise in defence of our comrades in the Global South and recognise that this is a strategic front in the war against capital.

No to the repression of social demands in the name of resistance to Salafist violence!

21 June 2012, by LGO

As we have indicated on other occasions, we stress that these groups continue to terrorise and intimidate citizens because they have been given the green light by the government and have enjoyed its security and judicial protection for months. The coincidence of the last wave of terror with the radicalisation of protest movements throughout the country and the failure of governmental visits in most regions led us to question the use of these groups and the interest the government has in making the Ennahda movement thus appear as a moderate current. We pose also the question of the interest that the Ennahda government has in denigrating the popular struggles in the marginalised regions and exploited sectors who demand the right to employment, dignity and liberty, and setting up false battles between believers and non-believers - battles which have nothing to do with the decisive causes for the population, namely regional and social justice, local democracy, unconditional civil liberties, and which moreover threaten the right to protest and pursue the revolution by using the

emergency law to smother the revolutionary process.

This government has confirmed its absolute failure at all levels in a climate of successive scandals including the latest, the leaking of the baccalaureate examinations, in an attempt to damage the credibility of republican teaching and to prepare the ground for the return to medieval forms of education and the gradual elimination of progressive modernist improvements in Tunisian education. Before its failure, the government, as usual, wishes to blame the "far left", accused of extremism and of being responsible for these events, to shirk its responsibilities as a government and its duties in the area of protection of citizens and public enterprises and institutions. And also to mask its economic, social and political incapacity to manage this stage. It assimilates the terrorism of religious extremism, which terrifies citizens and ravages public enterprises, with the positions of the revolutionary left, which denounces the neoliberal policies of the government and the bourgeois opposition, supports

popular demands for employment, dignity and freedom and demands a just regional development, social justice and the liquidation of the "authoritarian heritage". But the government tries desperately to do political damage to the components of the revolutionary left, as a radical opponent to its neoliberal economic policy inherited from the previous era.

As we have said in the past, our unconditional support as the revolutionary left to freedom of artistic creation does not mean support for low grade "artistic" works of mediocre "aesthetic" taste aimed at provoking popular feelings, and we believe that these practices remind us of what happened with previous films destined for foreign distribution and Zionist ceremonies for which the revolutionary left is in no way responsible. However, that does not justify the attacks made on public and individual liberties and does not absolve the government of being implicated at several levels in providing a political, security and legal cover for the violence of the Salafist groups and encouraging them

to terrorise citizens with a view to strangling the margins of public and private liberties, and manoeuvring against youth, women and children.

This failed government should go, and the UGTT should take on its historic responsibilities to form a popular and

workers' government opposed to neoliberalism!

June 13, 2012

The January awakening

20 June 2012, by Baba Aye

Few in Nigeria would have the feeling that 2012 is barely a month old. The past few weeks have been filled with events of historic proportions. First, in response to the unpopular 120% hike in petrol price, the people spontaneously took to the streets across the country in stiff resistance and with an 8-day general strike and mass protests, won a stunted victory. After this, the fundamentalist sect known as Boko Haram, which has killed no less than 935 persons in barely two years according to Human Rights Watch carried out its most deadly attacks on state institutions killing over 200 persons in the northern city of Kano, as it freed 100 of its incarcerated members.

It is pertinent in reviewing this situation which Tell, a leading liberal weekly in the country, describes as "A Revolution Postponed", to put in perspective the contradictions and convergence of crisis which the Nigerian society is now embroiled in and make projections about the turbulent road that lies ahead. The main focus of this review is on the anti-fuel hike struggle, which is distinct from the Boko Haram mayhem. There are however inter-linkages which deepen with the announcement of the sect on January 24, that it would bomb the headquarters of the Nigeria Labour Congress because organised labour "accepted" just a partial reduction of petrol price instead of the full reversal demanded by Nigerians.

The myth of

deregulation and the petrol price hike

The President of the Federation, Dr Goodluck Jonathan started a campaign to hike fuel price, in August last year, well after his elections. According to him, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) could no longer afford to "subsidize" petrol prices if it were to carry out infrastructural development in the country. The outcry was loud. Petrol prices had been raised no less than 20 times since 1988. The reasons given were always the same, the primary one being that more money would be available for development. But the reverse has always been the case. Nigerians from all walks of life thus made it clear that any increase would be resisted. Several organisations started mobilizing against the January 1, 2012 date slated for the implementation of "full deregulation".

The state responded with what now can be seen as subterfuge. While maintaining its position that deregulation was inevitable, it expressed interest in consultation and a national dialogue. It equally assured the country that any deregulation whatsoever would not start before April 1. This was in line with the resolution of the National Assembly that the 2011 budget (which bore outlay for "subsidy") would run till March 31. Most groups and Nigerians as a whole who had started mobilisation against an impending fuel price hike, simmered their agitations. For example, barely 24 hours to the hike, a rally held in Lagos asserting

that the postponement of deregulation expressed a (minor) victory for the working people, who must however remain steadfast till April and similarly, there had been arguments for calling off the January 3 protest march organised by the Joint Action Front, also in Lagos, but it was believed that it would serve as a pre-emptive measure and not one to resist what would have been announced.

The FGN's attempt to catch the people off guard as it announced the increment on January 1 did not work. By January 2, the first spontaneous protests erupted in several cities. In a matter of days, the protests grew more organised and demands expanded to include: inquiry into "subsidy" management; cuts in the costs of state governance & even "Jonathan Must Go!"

Popular resistance and forms of struggle

The January awakening in Nigeria invoked diverse forms of struggle some being novel. The most potent of all these forms, and which led to the greatest disappointment with its eventual sheathing was the General Strike which lasted eight days. Mass protests in the forms of processions and rallies which have been features of popular dissent over the decades shook over fifty cities in the country, involving tens of millions of citizens. Never before has such spread and magnitude of mass protests been witnessed in Nigeria. The forms that could be considered novel and which have gained the awakening the epithet

of "Occupy Nigeria" Movement, included mass occupation of city centres and parks which became designated as "Liberation Square" (in Kano) and "Freedom Square" (in Lagos), for example. It also included the internationalisation of the spread of the protest movement by Nigerians in the diaspora who organised demonstrations in several cities across Africa, Europe and North America.

While the initial outbursts were spontaneous, efforts at having it organised in different forms started from the very onset. In Abuja, citizens had gathered close to the Eagle Square to sign a people's petition demanding price reversal on January 2. They were dispersed with teargas and over fifty persons were arrested, eight of whom were released the following day, only after the intervention of the National Human Rights Commission, now headed by Prof Chidi Odinkalu, himself a liberal activist.

The first major organised forms of action were on January 3, in the two largest cities of the country. These were the protest march led by the Joint Action Front in Lagos, and a rally in the Kano City Centre under the aegis of "Occupy Nigeria". The Joint Action Front which was established in 2004 by pro-labour civil society organisations, including most of the socialist left groups in the country is the civil society arm of the Labour Civil Society Coalition (LASCO) which along with it includes the two labour federations, NLC & TUC. Its protest march had been planned as a pre-emptive action that might have drawn at best a few thousands. It became a major platform for venting the rage sweeping through the land in the heat of popular and rising struggle which at the time was still largely spontaneous.

In Kano, "Occupy Nigeria" had been formed by a number of civil society organisations and activists in October last year, with a major aim of resisting any fuel price hike, and drawing inspiration from the Arab Spring and the Occupy (Wall Street) Movement globally, fight for a better Nigeria. By the next day, the rally in Kano became an occupation which lasted till about 1.30am the following morning when it

was dispersed by gun-totting anti-riot policemen. At least five persons were killed in that attack. (Police had earlier on January 3 killed the 23-year old Muyideen Mustafa at Ilorin in the heat of one of the spontaneous, peaceful protests then rocking the nation. He would be the first of no less than 20 citizens martyred in the course of the anti-fuel hike struggle). After the general strike was called off, the organisers of the "Occupy Nigeria" group in the state teamed up with other forces to establish the United Front for Good Governance which has faced attacks, including the beating up of one of its leader and the local university teachers union chair Dr Buppa, by State Security Services operatives who then tried to whisk him away, but were stopped by protesters.

There were several other attempts at occupying or protests that designated themselves as being or being part of an Occupy Nigeria movement. In Abuja, this could arguably be said to have started on January 6, with youths with some six young men and two ladies staying put overnight in the surroundings of Eagle Square. The size of this group increased to about 35 persons at the time it was dispersed in the early hours of Monday January 9 by policemen who beat them up. Several scores more joined this Occupy Nigeria/Abuja during the day or late at night, but did not sleep overnight as these determined youths did. The group, whose membership includes young activists around the new Coalition of Youths Against Fuel Price Hike, continued again despite several attempts at curbing it, in the course of the general strike at what was dubbed "Freedom Square", by the NLC, in the commercial nerve centre Wuse district of the city. But after the strike, the occupation now takes place only late in the evenings after working hours.

In cities such as Port Harcourt, Benin and Ibadan, several groups have also described themselves as part of Occupy Nigeria while protesting under the banner of several coalitions, such as the Coalition to Save Nigeria which organised a demonstration in Benin City before the strike commenced and the United Action for Democracy, which is an affiliate of JAF

in Port Harcourt, for example.

In Lagos, the "occupation" assumed a carnival-like atmosphere in the Save Nigeria Group-dominated Gani Fawehinmi Freedom Park, where no less than 500,000 people gathered everyday from dawn to dusk with speeches made and revolutionary music blaring through huge speakers, throughout the duration of the general strike. The Gani Fawehinmi Park at Ojota, the entrepÃ´t of the mega-city was where the December 31 protest march led by the National Conscience Party and the family of the late gadfly Chief Gani Fawehinmi who had been its founder had ended with a rally. The JAF march of January 3 established the park as the locus of mass activity in the state. In no time though, the Enough Is Enough/Save Nigeria Group, which had emerged as a liberal force of civil society in 2010 demanding a resolution of the constitutional crisis the country was then sliding into as the then President Yar'Adua seemed to be in a comatose state, took charge of that space.

With much more financial resources than JAF, it made food and water available for the hundreds of thousands of citizens that stayed at the Freedom Park all day. Celebrities and liberal activists graced its dais, wherefrom they demanded for radical reforms, stating clearly that corruption and not Nigerians should be killed by the state. JAF along with trade unionists under the aegis of LASCO, on their own part, organised daily processions through different parts of the city with tens of thousands in tow. Several smaller "Freedom Parks" where also established in different strongholds of the working people and youths, such as Alimosho, Ikorodu, Surulere and Ebutte Metta. JAF in the second half of January commenced establishing branches in these areas as part of its mobilisation towards the next phase of what could very well be an unfolding revolution.

It is pertinent at this juncture to analyse the general strike which was the heart of the popular resistance while it lasted (with the streets as its soul) and which with the way it ended, led to condemnation of the trade unions and provided a safety valve for

the state and the system it represents for the postponement of the hour of revolution.

NLC/TUC General Strike and its suspension

There were calls from several quarters for an immediate declaration of a general strike. But only the National Executive Council (NEC) of the trade union federations could summon such. On Wednesday January 4, NLC at Abuja and TUC at Lagos held NEC sessions where it was resolved that an indefinite general strike and series of mass protests commence on January 9 if petrol price was not reverted back to N65 from N141. A joint communiqué "In Defence of the Nigerian People on Fuel Price Increases!", was issued. Radical civil society organisations and activists were at both sessions and extracted a promise that the strike would not be called off without such all embracing meeting which would include civil society as well as the NEC members of both federations. This was based on fears from the trade unions suspension of earlier general strikes over the last twelve years.

The strike paralysed the country for the eight days it lasted. Across the length and breadth of the country, workers downed tools, in the public and private sectors as well as in the informal economy. Small scale employers and apprentices were not left out. It was only in the South Eastern state of Ebonyi that workers in the public sector dejectedly went to work even as private sector employees joined the strike. This was after the state governor declared that there would be no pay for public servants who joined the strike. In Nigeria the "no work, no pay" rule is always declared by employers during strikes (including this recent general strike) but the trade unions undermine this through insertion of a "no victimisation" clause in agreements reached when grievances are deemed resolved. The Ebonyi state governor had however enforced this anti-workers principle in the aftermath of a local strike there in September.

It was not just the strike that was a resounding success. The mass protests and demonstration of solidarity across ethno-regional and religious divides that went with it were such as the nation had never witnessed before. In more than 50 cities, tens of millions marched in one accord. Non-Muslim protesters surrounded Muslim protesters in defense when they held their prayers, and in several cities in the North such as Funtua in Katsina and Minna in Niger, Muslims organised themselves into bands that surrounded Churches in protection on Sunday, in response to the earlier proclamation of Boko Haram that it would unleash violence against Christians in the northern parts of the country.

In Lagos, the various rallies and processions centrally and in various local theatres of popular activity involved no less than a million citizens. In Abuja where no mass procession had ever had more than 5,000 citizens, the first day witnessed some 20,000. It doubled the next day and for the rest of the week, despite the fact that many had to trek from far distances as there were very few buses on the roads, no less than 50,000 citizens marched in resistance behind the banner of organised labour.

Why then were the mass protests called off on January 17 and less than 24 hours later the strike called "suspended? This is a question that many find difficult to find any answer to other than "treachery". The answer might not be that simple though; the trade unions primarily represent the working class but are trapped within the rubric of "collective bargaining" ideology with its penchant for middlegrounds & compromises, in a pluralist approach.

It is apt to look at the reasons organised labour gave for its action though. These were threefold. First, the security situation had degenerated, with increased tension in the land. Second, the state had accepted to probe the subsidy regime and the general state of corruption in the oil industry. And third, while labour still "rejects" the mere reduction of the hike instead of a reversal that still represented (partial)

victory.

The state and its friends; contradictions and "consistency"

The FGN was obviously thrown aback by the upheaval that greeted its hike in the price of fuel. Since the year 2000, barely a year after the restoration of the Republic, fuel prices had been increased no less than 7 times. Each time, there were general strikes and mass protests in response and after a few days; it would announce a "reduction" which actually amounted to significant increases over the status quo ante. While Nigerians always called for full reversals and organised labour would echo this as it commenced general strikes, the new price would be accepted as a compromise position, the trade union centres would call off the strikes and the masses would grumble that labour had once again "sold out" and then we would all continue to live, even if not happily, ever after, until another round of increases.

Many Nigerians had come to cynically believe that the FGN actually raises the price of fuel beyond its target with this scenario in mind to then negotiate downwards to its earlier goal!

This time around, the matter was not that simple. The world as a whole is in a tumultuous state of flux and Nigerians are living witnesses to how regimes have been overthrown and millions are in movement to realise the possibility of another world. This influenced the fight back of the masses and this resistance led to the deepening of the contradictions within the circles of the state. But it still maintains a coherence of its anti-people line, even if it through its legislative arm in particular, it seemingly genuflects to people's power and goes through the routine of a prologue for change.

We have seen the lies and subterfuge that preceded the fuel price hike. The extent of deceit and fraud on "subsidy" management would however

not be revealed until during the ongoing public session of the House of Representatives ad-hoc Committee constituted to look into the "subsidy" regime. Scandalous discrepancies emerged in the figures presented by; the ministry of finance; ministry of petroleum; central bank of Nigeria; petroleum products pricing agency & Nigerian Customs.

While the Minister for Petroleum claimed that only private operators import petrol, the Nigerian Customs showed that up till December, the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) was a major importer of the product. As if this was not bad enough, its records showed that the mother vessels with which NNPC imported this were more often than not berthed in the waters of Togo and Benin Republic. With this, the Comptroller General of Customs rightly pointed out that the problem was not so much one of "smuggling" of "subsidized" petrol meant for Nigeria to neighbouring West African countries, as it was a case of "diversion".

Interestingly, the FGN had always claimed that the quantum of petrol consumed daily in the country was 35million litres (this in itself is a big laugh! More objective analyses put the figure at between half and two third of this. Besides, this amount includes locally refined PMS which the PPPRA earlier said accounts for 20% of consumption). But the PPPRA Executive Secretary, one Reginald Stanley who had signed the New Year announcement of fuel hike further informed the House committee that what the FGN had been paying for was 59million litres pay day, leaving 24million litres unaccounted for, as the Farouk Lawan the committee chair made explicit.

Lies, fraud, deception, roguery & barefaced thievery in high places were clearly hallmarks of the subsidization of corruption in the oil sector, which the masses are now to pay for. But before this revelations which actually hardly strikes most Nigerians as suprising, the state as "the executive committee of the ruling class" showed itself not only in the form of coercion, but as well that of deception, in the heat of the strike,.

The National Assembly made what many consider an "historic" decision when the House of Representatives cut shut its recess to pass a resolution moved by Tajudeen "TeeJay" Yussuf, a seasoned activist from his student day at UniJos, that the FGN revert the price of petrol back to N65 per litre. This was on the eve of the General Strike. During the strike & protests, the Senate passed a similar resolution. The leadership of both chambers played mediatory roles between labour and the FGN which was now presented as being solely the state by being the executive arm of government, as if the state and its apparatus of governance do not include the legislature and judiciary as much as the executive arm! More importantly, when the FGN rather reduced the price to N97, there was not so much as a whimper from our honourable and distinguished legislators despite this being clear disregard of not just their resolutions to the contrary, but indeed their legislation that the 2012 budget year start only on April 1.

The FGN on its part tried its utmost to use "propaganda", blackmail and attempts at divide and rule, as much as it could. The labour unions were alleged to be in the pay of the so-called "cabal" which benefits from the "subsidy" to the detriment of the masses! Wrap around lines of trash in black and white espousing how pious and good intentioned the state is with its deregulation policy could be found on every single major daily newspaper and weekly magazine. Shadowy groups such as "Nigerian Youths Coalition for Fuel Subsidy Removal" comprising lumpen elements that were paid the pittance of a mere N1,000.00 in a nearby alley, after attacking Labour House on January 6 were constituted to support such avowed captains of industry like Agedo Peterson a member of the presidential economic team who is also CEO of both Stanbic Bank and Cadbury Nig. Plc, in singing nonsensical lullabies of the el-Dorado Nigerians would blissfully enter with the magic wand of fuel hike.

As if this were not enough, the embers of ethno-regional division were consciously stoked by the ruling class particularly by its cabal of "elders and

leaders" from the Niger Delta region which President Jonathan hails from. They claimed Jonathan as their son who must be protected against the country and sang to the high heavens about his sincere motives which the masses who feel the pinch were merely too dumb to see, without a word about the patronage they live on, which has not brought about any visible improvement in the lives of Niger delatans through industries and job opportunities that they never created of course, despite the millions if not billions of naira they are worth, without any entrepreneurship. Taking a cue from them, (ex-)Niger delta militants barricaded the same oil rigs they once used to blow up, to protect these against being shut down by the oil workers unions (this was a major reason why PENGASSAN could not shut down the flow of oil as it was made clear to them that any attempt to do such would be met with bullets from the "militants").

All these could not stop the genie of working people's power which like a fearsome spectre stalked the land for 8days. Even in Bayelsa state, the heartland of the Niger delta and Jonathan's state of origin, while mass protests on the streets were not possible due to threats by the elders and militants alike, the strike was still total with offices and businesses under lock and key.

The final card of the Presidency and indeed the ruling class as a whole, despite the mimicry of support for the popular rage by a number of its representatives was that of unveiling its ever present (more or less covert when it could be, brazenly overt when push gets to be shove) teeth of dictatorship; deploying troops to the streets. Residents of Lagos, Kano, Abuja and other major cities where the battles between incipient revolution and disgraced reaction had raged for two weeks woke up to find soldiers, anti-riot police men and even sailors and air force personnel totting mean looking rifles and with armoured tanks, on the streets. That same morning, by 7.00am, President Jonathan addressed the nation. He claimed very much like Hosni Mubarak had done, that, miscreants and hoodlums had "hijacked" the strike and mass protests. For good

measure, he also accused partisan forces of seeking to turn the mass anger against the fuel price hike to one for regime change. With jackboots and artillery to enforce "acceptance" of N97/litre, the state, in its war against the people had won reprieve for a while for the ruling class. Law and order had been restored and an end brought to the beginning of the seething revolutionary situation in Nigeria. There would still be a few skirmishes in Lagos, Abuja and Kano, with Octogenarians tear gassed and occupier youths dispersed, but this would be footnotes to that chapter which closed with the "suspension" of the mass strike. All signs though point at this chapter being more of a prologue.

The friends of President Jonathan and his cabal in government are not limited to other members of the ruling class in Nigeria. Madame Lagarde of the IMF was in Nigeria a few weeks before the price hike promoting the supposed veracity of a creed whose god is dead; neoliberalism which lies de-legitimized, shamed & shaken across the world even if the biceps of the old worn out but cunning man which capitalism is, still props this its most apt incarnation.

The chief priest of the shock doctrine, Jeffrey Sachs was more explicit in commending the FGN for daring to whip Nigerians with the scorpion of hike in fuel price. The views of citizens & the killings of no less than a score of human beings during protests against the shocking hike meant little to this supposed democrat who would alleviate poverty.

Some of the friends of the FGN came as wolves in sheep clothing to the masses of Nigeria. Probably the most visible of this was Barak Obama, President of the United States of (part of) North America. He loudly expressed the view that protesters had the right to demonstrate. But of course was silent on his position with regards to the price hike itself. Western imperialism learnt its lessons fast from the slow motion with which it almost got its foot in its mouth on the way down for Ben Ali & Hosni Mubarak. It had to seem to be on the protesters side from the onset in Nigeria, incase that would signal the

spread of revolutions in sub-Saharan Africa. While being one with its local quislings that rule Nigeria and other countries in the periphery of global capital, it has to seem to be our friend so that if -in its view, but when, in ours- we win, it could be relevant in giving direction as it now does in Libya (& this is no plus for Gaddafi either).

The United States has not stopped at its prankish support of our right to protest (but not our protest itself). Barak Obama also expressed its concern about the menace of Boko Haram. A few days later, the Nigeria-US Commission signed an agreement of cooperation the contents of which remain largely obscure. This poses grave danger for the masses of this country & must be exposed for what it is. Everywhere the yankees have gone supposedly to make the country better & more peaceful became worse & terribly blood soaked.

In pointing out the contradictions on the FGN's side & its friends of the same plummage, we can actually see a bizarre consistency. It is that consistency of placing profit over people, the greed of the few over the needs of the many & of the dictatorial disposition of a bunch of elite over we, the immense majority of the population, even within "democracy".

In lieu of a conclusion

The troops have been called off the streets as I write this piece. The Inspector General of Police has equally been replaced in the wake of the Boko Haram massacre in Kano. The Joint Action Front and other groups still maintain their stand on total reversal to N65/litre. Even the trade unions did not accept the mere reduction nor call off its strike, rather "suspending" it as they foresaw a stalemate. What possibilities could lie ahead, & what lessons could we draw from the first dash in what could well be much more than a sprint of resistance & revolution?

It is quite certain from the current situation that without system change, chaos will continue & indeed deepen

in Nigeria. The revelations from the House committee's public sessions are enough to justify full reversal of petrol price to N65/l, at the very least, & to earn not a few persons extensive stays in prison yards. But these exposes in themselves will not bring about these drastic steps. It will take mass mobilization & recapturing the moment of January 1, which might have been lost in its pristine form.

Here could probably lie a major problem of fixation in the perspectives of many who seek alternative pathways for society, in the country. The issue of fuel price is indeed quite critical in so many ways in our country. It is not impossible that the next round of eruption might still be around it. It is very likely that many battles still lie around it in the future. But I personally do not see the next chapter unfolding on its hinge. The inflationary trend it has already sparked up is more likely to set off a wild fire of strikes for wages increment.

But this fixation in perspective flows from a deeper problem, the near collapse of radical alternative politics on any significant scale before the popular dam of rage burst. However, while the best time to have planted a tree was 20 years ago, the next best time to plant it, if it has not been planted, as the Kanuri say, is now. It would equally entail a lot of joint work, as well as the transformation of how a organisations & united fronts work. Not a few of these on the sidelines have rather amusingly tried more to frame roles and actions in the past few weeks in appropriative ways than to deepen organising.

Deepening organising would entail the transcendence of fighting against power to fighting for power. Establishing organs of mass power from below is crucial for a genuine revolution as we saw a year ago in Egypt. It is however not enough to guarantee taking decisive steps towards system change. A new form of partisans politics would be required of the period we have entered, where the streets and workplaces take the main seat from electoralism as the road to power.

Meanwhile, the trade unions in Ghana

are poised for a general strike to protest a 20% hike in petrol prices on December 28. This is quite instructive as it is a major indicator of the spread of revolutionary pressures across sub-Saharan Africa as the whole world gets ready for a year of worsening economic realities, political disillusionment with the old order & the drawing of ever expanding

numbers into the arena of contestation of power on the way forward.

We would have to express our solidarity with our comrades in Ghana, just as working people and youths across the world expressed their solidarity with us during our recent struggle.

The January awakening in Nigeria is

part of the global movement of working people and youths against the system of capitalism which fosters our exploitation and oppression. It is in this light that it is equally the opening chapter of what would most likely be a long drawn class war between the ruling class of cabals in the country and the masses, the movement of the people.

Red Square, Everywhere: With Quebec Student Strikers, Against Repression

20 June 2012, by **Alan Sears, Xavier Lafrance**

After more than three months, over 170,000 CEGEP (collège d'enseignement général et professionnel) and university students are still on strike against tuition increases and for free education. At its height, the movement mobilized over 300,000 in strike action, some for a few days and others with an unlimited mandate. Over 200,000 joined the massive demonstration on March 22. The strike was triggered by the Charest government's plan to boost tuition fees by 75% over the next five years, which the government later changed to an 80% increase over 7 years in a so-called "offer" to students. The tuition hike is important as it normalizes the principle of user pay post-secondary education, and thus forms part of the "cultural revolution" promised by Quebec Finance Minister Raymond Bachand to destroy the idea of public services as a social right. The introduction of a flat tax of \$200,00 for health services is part of the same agenda.

The strike movement has shown remarkable tenacity despite attempts by the government to drive students back to class through repression, including brutal policing, threats of losing the school year and the heavy use of injunctions to limit the right to protest on campuses. The Charest government has tried to break up the common front of student

organizations, offering to negotiate with some groups while excluding others. But this has not worked.

Under pressure from a strike they could not break, the government did offer to spread the tuition increase over seven years, although at the same time bumping up the overall hike. They finally sat at a negotiating table with representatives from the student unions, along with trade union leaders and campus administrations. The resulting "offer" by the government basically committed to passing along some potential cost savings identified by a joint student-administration-government commission to students in the form of tuition reductions. The student unions asked members to vote on this, and it was overwhelmingly rejected. Education Minister Line Beauchamp then resigned, and the government shifted towards the brutal strikebreaking strategy of Bill 78.

The Quebec strike is part of a pattern of anti-austerity activism that has included the massive Chilean student mobilization and militant student movements in Britain and California, as well as uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East, the Occupy movement, and anti-austerity strikes in Wisconsin and Southern Europe. There will likely be more protests, as students have every reason to be

angry at tuition increases, the declining quality of education and grim job prospects upon graduation. Governments and employers are clear-cutting good jobs, slashing social programs and attacking migrant rights in the name of austerity, leaving post-secondary graduates facing debt and precariousness after an impersonal and often unsatisfactory education.

A poll published in the Globe and Mail on May 7 showed that 62% of students across Canada said they would strike against tuition increases, including over 69% in Ontario. The major obstacle to an upsurge in student activism elsewhere is not a lack of anger, but rather a lack of confidence in the idea that it is possible to fight the austerity agenda of tuition increases and major changes to education. The Quebec student movement has developed sophisticated political perspectives through a long history of mobilization that can contribute to rebuilding the confidence and capacity to fight elsewhere. There is much to learn from the model of democratic, activist student unionism that has played such an important role in galvanizing sustained militancy in Quebec.

Red Square

Active solidarity with the Quebec strike movement in the face of the Charest clampdown is crucial for student and workers struggles against austerity, as the Quebec government is targeting the right to organize collectively. This means spreading the red square everywhere. The red square is the pervasive symbol of the Quebec student movement, whether pinned to clothing or used as a graphic on signs, leaflets, culture jams or websites. It was first used during the 2005 student strike, and it cleverly plays on the idea of debt (“carrément dans la rouge” means “squarely in debt”) and militancy (red is associated with radical activism). It is not only the symbol itself that has been passed down from the last strike, but also important strategies for effective and democratic mobilization learned through the history of Quebec student activism since the 1960s. At the core of this strategic vision is the idea of democratic, activist student unionism.

The current strike is the ninth general strike in the history of Quebec’s student movement since the 1960s. They have varied in overall strength and effectiveness, and student activists have made conscious efforts to learn from these experiences of success and failure. The first of these general strikes was in 1968, and that mobilization demanded free tuition, the expansion of the francophone university system and democratic administration of educational institutions and policies. The demand for quality, accessible and democratic public education was connected to Quebecois struggles for national self-determination and French-language rights. The English-language education system in Quebec was at the time far more extensive and much better funded than the French-language system. The idea of quality, accessible French-language education was part of a broader agenda for liberation.

The student strike also drew strength from the rising wave of labour militancy sweeping Quebec in the later 1960s and early 1970s. Quebec students also consciously learned from the model of the French student

movement dating back to the Charte de Grenoble in 1946, which asserts the student are intellectual workers with distinct and common material interests (for example, for quality, accessible and democratic education), who have the collective power and responsibility to fight for social justice. The commitment to student unionism modelled on workplace trade unionism represents an orientation to collective strength through organization.

Militant activism, then, has played an important role in forming the Quebec student movement, so that general membership meetings and mobilization committees are written into the bylaws of many local student unions. The demand for free education also has a long history in Quebec. Tuition was basically frozen after the 1968 strike until 1990 through a series of campaigns that included general strikes. Though there was a significant fee hike in the early 1990s, Quebec students have continued to mobilize effectively, and as a result they pay considerably less tuition than in the rest of North America. The history of this movement also means that the idea that education is a public service with an important social role and not a product for sale on the market has considerable currency in Quebec society.

In 2001, the student activists who launched ASSÉ (l’Association pour une Solidarité Syndicale Étudiante) engaged with the history of the Quebec student movement to try to develop a strategic perspective for effective mobilization. Some had been active with MDE (Mouvement pour le droit À l’éducation), which had fallen apart after a failed strike mobilization in 1998. ASSÉ developed a democratic activist approach to student unionism that proved successful in the 2005 student strike and again in 2012, where ASSÉ formed a broader coalition called CLASSE.

Indeed, democratic activist unionism has had an important influence even on the more institutional and lobbyist student federations (Fédération Étudiante Universitaire du Québec (FEUQ) and Fédération Étudiante Collégiale du Québec (FECQ)). While in 2005 FEUQ and FECQ ultimately

broke ranks with ASSÉ to reach a deal with the government, in 2012 the student unions have stood together. The strength of the solidarity between the student unions this time is partly a response to criticism FEUQ and FECQ faced from their own members after agreeing to a separate deal in the last strike.

Democratic Activist Student Unionism

The core of democratic activist student unionism is the recognition that students, like workers, have collective interests (e.g. quality accessible public education) and a potential for collective power that needs to be organized to be effective in defending these interests. This kind of student unionism depends on finding ways of fighting collectively around immediate and local issues as well as challenging government policies. Solidarity is at the core of this collective power, both within the student movement and with other allies in social movements.

The potential collective power of students can only become a real force when students have developed capacities to analyze their situation, communicate with each other and act in concert, confident that others will also join the fight. Governments and university administrations will only really pay attention to student unions that have mobilized and knowledgeable memberships willing to take action to back up demands.

The General Membership Meeting (GMM) plays an important role in this process, as it puts transparent collective and democratic decision-making at the core of the student union. Here, students gather to debate and pass motions to establish the direction of their union. The GMM also elects and supervises delegates to Quebec-wide congresses that coordinate overall campaigns. The GMM is a rich and challenging venue, where activists must engage their fellow students, listen to counter-arguments and attempt to persuade others that mobilization is necessary

and possible.

The scale of these meetings varies on different campuses. In some places, student unionism is organized around specific departments, schools or faculties, while in others it is campus-wide. ASSÉ did not invent the GMM, which is written into the constitution of many student unions as a result of the long history of militancy in the Quebec student movement. Rather, ASSÉ developed mobilizing strategies that used the democratic decision-making of the GMM as a key component of campus activism.

The mobilizing strategies use longer-term campaigns to build up to general strike votes in GMMs. Before the 2005 strike, for example, there were petitions, local weeks of action, office occupations and Quebec-wide protest actions. These campaigns identify and mobilize activists, while also providing an escalating series of protests so that people can genuinely try out more moderate approaches to pressuring the government for changes to see if they work. If the government does not respond to petitions or protests, then an eventual step is to work towards strike action.

These campaigns rely on local executive committees as well as mobilization committees in each local student union. Mobilization committees gather together activists, who learn together through reaching out to persuade fellow students to join in various actions. The mobilization committees orient radical students towards building collective power by working to convince their fellow students that activism can make a difference, rather than simply going ahead and acting on their own. The mandates of mobilization committees are developed in GMMs, so that activist layers are always connected to the collective power of the student body as a whole.

The skills of these activists get enhanced at congresses, where union executives and other campus activists gather to discuss and debate Quebec-wide actions. ASSÉ also has regular activist camps (camps de formation) where people can learn the history of the student movement, debate key political questions and develop

concrete political skills.

This democratic activist student unionism has provided a firm basis for CLASSE (the broader coalition launched by ASSÉ for the 2012 strike) to work strategically with FECQ and FEUQ in the current struggle. Strong orientation towards solidarity has also led the Quebec student movement to make strong links with others fighting the austerity agenda. The slogan “make the student movement into a social movement” recognizes that the struggle for quality, accessible and democratic public education is integrally linked to struggles for worker rights, against poverty, for feminism and for quality public services. Students have marched in solidarity with locked-out Alcan Rio Tinto workers and made many important connections with others fighting the Charest government. In the period between the 2005 strike and the current one, a number of labour unions had passed motions to support the idea of free education. This solidarity-oriented perspective could be enhanced by a richer and more integrated anti-racist and anti-colonialist analysis that could guide both the activism and demands of the movement for transformation of the education system. It is a hopeful sign in this direction that CLASSE recently came out with a strong statement about the centrality of anti-racism and decolonization in the struggle.

Finally, it is important to combine immediate struggles around tuition hikes with broader efforts to defend education as a public service, in part by fighting to democratize and decolonize the post-secondary system. The Quebec student movement has raised important questions about democratic oversight of post-secondary institutions and opening up the process of establishing spending priorities. Students must be full participants in discussions about effective teaching, research priorities and institutional governance, though they must be very careful not to be trapped into co-administering cutbacks or being pitted against other campus workers, whether staff or faculty. The fight against tuition increases must ultimately be a battle to transform post-secondary education, and the radical wing of the

Quebec student movement has been working towards a broader agenda for change.

Spreading the Movement

It is impossible to conjure up the long history of the Quebec student movement elsewhere to create instant activism. It is possible, however, to apply the strategies of democratic activist student unionism in ways that fit local conditions and experiences. The spread of the democratic activist student unionism can make a real difference as students and education workers elsewhere organize to resist ongoing tuition increases and widespread restructuring that decreases the quality of education. Furthermore, the Quebec movement itself would benefit from the strength of solidarity, both within Quebec from a more active mobilization of workers and community activists, and elsewhere in Canada and around the world.

Indeed solidarity is crucial in the face of the Charest clampdown with Bill 78. Anyone interested in the right to organize, free political expression or challenging austerity, on campuses or off, must actively support the Quebec students in their resistance to repression and in their struggle against the fee hike. The Charest government and the media throw the fact that Quebec students pay lower tuition than elsewhere in Canada or North America in the face of this strike movement all the time. In reality, Quebec students pay less because of their long history of resisting tuition hikes and fighting for democratic, accessible and quality education. The Quebec government is clearly determined to push Quebec tuition upwards toward the higher levels elsewhere, and will try to do so until student movements in the rest of North America begin to roll back those outrageous increases and push towards free tuition.

As we mobilize effective solidarity in the face of the Charest crackdown, we need to spread the red square everywhere. This does not mean simply pinning the symbol of the

movement on our clothing, through that is great. Nor is it sufficient to pass resolutions condemning repression in Quebec, though that is absolutely necessary. Rather, we need

to work towards the democratic activist student unionism that can galvanize the collective power of students and connect it to the

struggles of workers and other fighting the austerity agenda.

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<http://www.newsocialist.org/index.p...>

The ANC transformed

19 June 2012, by **Mercia Andrews**

Celebrations, though, often have blind spots. One such blind spot is the tendency to overlook the fact that the struggle for liberation in South Africa had many impulses, different currents, divergent voices and positions which existed both inside and outside the ANC and which ultimately helped define the ANC. Another is to ask why socialist forces, mainly the South African Communist Party - which has devoted much of its existence to building and influencing the ANC - have been unable to ensure an anti-capitalist orientation to the movement. This is a critical question to pose for forces on the left. Joining in the celebration of 100 years of the ANC requires us to reflect on both of these questions.

Plurality of struggle for national liberation

At the beginning of the 20th century, the ANC started out as a moderate organisation of the black middle classes based on African Nationalism. It developed from a respectful lobbying group to a mass campaigning organisation, a revolutionary force and eventually a party of government. While it initially paid little heed to the needs of the rural poor and black working class, the emergence of trade union organisation and specifically the rise of the Industrial Commercial Workers Union helped to reorient the organisation towards the dispossessed masses.

It was predominantly in the 1950s, when, influenced by African independence struggles and the then-banned South African Communist Party which started to play a leading role inside the ANC, that the ANC began to embrace militant mass action

requiring the mobilisation of working-class constituencies, other organisations and movements. To broaden its support base amongst other oppressed layers of society, it began to build alliances with like-minded movements such as the Natal Indian Congress, Coloured People's Congress and the (white) Congress of Democrats. Very significantly, the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) joined the Congress Alliance and made up its trade union wing.

The adoption of the Freedom Charter brought these and other movements together and enabled the ANC to operate as a broad church in which nationalists, communists, and liberals, etc. united around the goal of overthrowing the apartheid state.

Other voices, influences and contributions

Despite the fact the socialist currents in South Africa were divided along international divisions associated with the split of the Comintern, forces aligned to Soviet socialism, Trotskyism and other independent Marxist currents influenced South African politics greatly. The history of the socialist movement in South Africa was greatly determined by the strategy and tactics of linking the struggle for socialism with the movement for national liberation. In the conditions of South Africa, where capitalism developed through land dispossession of the indigenous people and through the prism of racism and racial division, it was widely understood that socialism and its narrative of working class unity needed to be articulated in ways that

took into account the conditions of colonial and national oppression.

It is this struggle to indigenise Marxism that has such a rich and varied history; an indigenised Marxism that both enriched Marxism as well as the actual struggle for national liberation. Here we can highlight the debates on the land and national question, theories of the development of capitalism in the underdeveloped world (articulation of modes of production), transition to socialism, etc.

It is especially important to recognise the contribution of two movements which in post-1994 SA are increasingly ignored or falsified.

The Non European Unity Movement was formed in 1943. It was a movement which aimed to unite, on a federal basis, members of the three main black population groups - Africans, Coloureds and Indians - irrespective of religion, caste or tribes. The unifying factors would be a programme of democratic demands contained in its Ten Point Programme. The ANC-led Congress of the People and adoption of the Freedom Charter in 1955 were obviously influenced and inspired by the example of the Unity Movement.

The Unity Movement's legacy was expressed through the politics of non-collaboration and the tactic of the boycott, which became a critical instrument of resistance to the apartheid government's divide and rule and co-optation attempts via its Bantustan strategy of the 1970s and '80s; it was also found in the politics of non-racialism, meaning the

rejection of race as a base for organising, and in the construction of a united single nation with perspectives on the language and land questions that influenced all formations of the liberation movement. Yet, because of splits, weak organic links to black working-class communities (with some exceptions) and the dominance of middle-class professionals in its ranks and leadership, it largely failed to make these ideas and tactics a material force in the struggle.

It was left to the Black Consciousness Movement, led by Steve Biko, and the rise of the independent trade union movement to give effect to some of the more important ideas of the Unity Movement and to give them mass impact.

The Black Consciousness Movement was centred on an ideological position that espoused the importance of self-reliance, reawakened a sense of pride and self-esteem in black people and challenged the apartheid categories of Non-White or African, Coloured and Indian. The BC movement saw all the oppressed as black and in effect gave expression to the need to overcome apartheid's divide and rule strategy by uniting all the oppressed in a struggle for national liberation. In essence, this was at the heart of the strategy advanced by the early proponents of non-racialism and endorsed by science's rejection of race as a valid biological category.

This was taken forward by the rise of the independent trade union movement in the 1970s and early 1980s that eventually led to the formation of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU). FOSATU was a militant trade union federation formed in 1979. It championed workers' control and democracy within the union and at the work place. FOSATU believed that unions should be non-racial and was one of the first trade union federations to effectively organise across the colour line.

The 1976 student uprising, followed in the 1980s by waves of mass strikes and township protests, signalled the beginning of the end of the apartheid system. Anti-capitalist politics were taking root in South Africa and the

mass movement was challenging the State from many fronts. A revolutionary situation was maturing and it was clear that the ruling class could not rule in the old way and that the masses refused to be ruled in the old way.

For the first time in the history of the liberation movement, popular mobilisations, mass revolts, self-defence groups and workers' struggles not only co-existed but created political conditions that went beyond the demand for one person, one vote. It was a period of heightened consciousness which transformed and radicalised the ANC. This was captured in the ANC's call to make the country ungovernable. It was also seen in the ANC's analysis of the South African situation at the time as one of dual power, i.e. the mass revolts led by township-based street committees, people's courts and the paralysis of local government structures versus the state and its repressive apparatus. Taking power was being forced on to the national agenda.

In this situation, socialist forces were increasingly becoming hegemonic in the broad mass movement that was being forged in struggle on the ground in South Africa. The strategy of building a broad alliance of popular forces in the form of the mass democratic movement and more particularly in the United Democratic Front held out the possibility of ensuring a socialist hegemony in the struggle against apartheid.

Yet this never materialised, and in just a few years the radicalisation of the mass movement and the ANC was to be undone by both objective and subjective factors. The collapse of the Soviet Union was devastating for the ANC and the SACP, which had become so dependent on it for material and ideological support. It was not just the ANC that was affected by the changed international balance of forces; national liberation forces from Ireland, Palestine, El Salvador and many others were forced to reinvent themselves, given the changed situation. The collapse of the Soviet Union created an ideological crisis for the left. The crisis of credibility of socialism had a devastating impact on the SACP. Leading members of its

Central Committee, including Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma, left the Party. The leadership of the SACP retreated.

The ANC seized the opportunity to enter into negotiations with the apartheid government when De Klerk eventually crossed the Rubicon, but in the negotiations and subsequent transition from apartheid it was unable to create the space for on-going struggle that would open a transition to a much more radical transformation of the existing system. Instead, the ANC leadership, with sections of the UDF, demobilised and displaced popular resistance. Like a tap, popular voices and mass organisations were turned on and off according to the requirements of negotiating a settlement with the apartheid regime. The dynamic of mass mobilisation and working-class power that shaped the politics of liberation in the 1980s was consciously side-lined as the political transition and the negotiations took centre-stage.

Initially, in the first years of the negotiations, the ANC retained a radical public posture. In the first public statements of Nelson Mandela after his release, he confirmed that nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy remained ANC policy. This was also echoed by Chris Hani, Harry Gwala and many leaders of the popular movements. However, as the negotiations unfolded, the ANC agreed to revoke armed struggle and denounce violence. In this period the moderate exiled leadership and reformist elements in the internal structures of the ANC converged and became the dominant force which led the ANC in reaching a settlement with the apartheid government.

The iconic status of Mandela, Tambo and Slovo, who were in favour of an accommodation with the ruling class, was sufficient to paper over the deep class differences and class interests within the mass democratic movement. Based on their leadership as well as the ideology of African nationalism - the glue that held the broad church of the ANC together - they were able to sideline radical forces within the ANC and outside that opposed the settlement with the apartheid regime.

The left outside of the ANC boycotted the negotiations, demanding instead a constituent assembly, and made the mistake of staying aloof from the negotiations. Retaining their purity, they lost influence in the broader society and became more and more marginalised. The ANC was given a free hand to make significant compromises without having to pay a political price in terms of their support among the masses. The successful concluding of the negotiations and the fact that they led to a one person, one vote election meant that the ANC was able to appear as the movement of liberation.

Towards new struggle and movement
It is clear that the past twenty years has transformed the ANC from a movement embedded in the struggle for freedom and resistance (the movement that led bus boycotts, the women's anti-pass march on Pretoria, mineworker strikes, campaigns to free political prisoners, convoking the Congress of the People and the adoption of the Freedom Charter) to a political party that is ultimately responsive to the needs of international and local capital. This is true even if aspirant sections of the petty bourgeoisie rooted in the state bureaucracy and state enterprises rest on the ANC's support in the working class.

In power, the ANC has failed to break up the monopolies that dominate the South African economy when it was on the agenda, allowed the biggest corporations to de-list from South Africa and re-invent themselves as foreign corporations, corporatised and

privatised key state enterprises and functions, and delivered our economy to the WTO and the needs of predatory finance capital.

Under successive GEAR-like policies, the liberalisation of the South African economy has led to the deepening of inequality (South Africa is now regarded as the most unequal country in the world), and unemployment has more than doubled, with real unemployment today being closer to 40% - one of the highest rates in the world. And it is under the ANC's watch that almost 40% of the workforce is now employed through labour brokers. By prioritising Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) and the promotion of a black capitalist class (as its strategy for deracialising the economy) the phenomenon of tenderpreneurial corruption has come to paralyse state capacity, creating deep crises in the education and health systems and eroding local government capacity.

The crisis in delivery of basic services such as housing, sanitation and electricity have given rise to, according to police statistics, more than 6 000 protests last year alone. A new wave of class struggle driven by the precariat on the one hand and organised labour in defence of jobs and wages on the other hand, cries out for political coordination and unity in action - something the ANC-of-struggle provided previously. The SACP, which still sees itself as the 'vanguard of the working class', rather than recognising the significance of these struggles for

determining a new working-class agenda in the yet to be transformed South Africa, has liquidated itself into the Zuma project, taking responsibility for governing over South Africa's post-apartheid tragedy.

In the past two decades, the ANC has shifted its base from the masses to a dependence on the state bureaucracy, the party machinery and a new elite in both rural and urban areas. Increasingly the ANC is becoming a party of the new elite.

Change can no longer come from within the ANC. Polokwane was an example of the inability of the left inside the ANC to bring about any meaningful change. Polokwane, as an attempt to re-invigorate a democratic culture and reconnect the organisation with the general membership, so as to replace the '1996 class project' (neoliberalism) with a radical strategy of wealth redistribution, has been blocked by the hold of a bureaucracy within the state and in the ANC itself. The predatory elite (tenderpreneurs) have undermined any progressive change in economic policy. The pace of land reform remains the same. Even the discredited willing-buyer, willing-seller policy remains in place and the promised National Health Insurance is very far from being realised.

Unless social movements, strong unions and radical initiatives such as the recently formed Democratic Left Front exist and mobilise around alternatives for a broad-based anti-capitalist platform, we will not see the fruits of 100 years of struggle.

Understanding the regime and the revolutionary process

19 June 2012, by Khalil Habash

These positions all show a lack of analysis and understanding, firstly, of the policies and the nature of the regime and, secondly, of the dynamics of the uprising.

Nature of the

regime

Three main groups have been at the core of the support of the regime: the

high military and security establishment, the bourgeoisie and the high religious establishments of all sects.

The High military establishment has accumulated profits since the arrival to power of Hafez Al Assad in 1970 that encouraged massive corruption of the military and government officials in exchange for total loyalty to his person. The states through this generalised corruption became a real cash machine for the nomenklatura and in particular for the inner circle of the dictator, his family and his most loyal lieutenants.

This new "class" organically linked to the state needed to invest its wealth in the various sectors of the economy. Decree No. 10 of 1991 was the springboard by which this class could "launder" their wealth. It allowed investment in the private sector and has opened up import-export opportunities but is still under state control, enriching each of them and continuing the system of generalized corruption. The 1990s saw the emergence of this "new class" or nouveau riche/bourgeois class hybrid resulting from a merger of the bureaucracy and the survivors of the old bourgeoisie, the "private bourgeoisie."

The regime bourgeois credentials were accelerated with the implementation of neoliberal economic policies with Bashar Al Assad's arrival to power in 2000. These policies especially benefited a small oligarchy and a few of its clients. Rami Makhlouf, the cousin of Bashar al-Assad, represented the mafia-style process of privatization led by the regime.

A process of privatization created new monopolies in the hands of relatives of Bashar al-Assad, while the quality of goods and services declined. These neoliberal economic reforms allowed the appropriation of economic power for the benefit of the rich and powerful. The process of privatization of public companies has been made for the benefit of few individuals close to the regime. At the same time the financial sector has developed inside the establishment of private banks, insurance firms, the Damascus stock

exchange and money exchange bureaus.

Neoliberal policies undertaken by the regime have satisfied the upper class and foreign investors, especially from the Arab Gulf, by liberalizing the Syrian economy for their benefits and at the expense of the far majority of Syrians hit by inflation and the rising cost of living. In addition to that, Syria's agricultural and public sector were also declining and no effective strategy to strengthen them have been suggested yet, which could jeopardize the country's alimentary autonomy and harm the population by the constant rise in prices of food and non-food basic needs.

The last important base of support for the Syrian regime is the high religious establishment of all sects, which has benefited the regime for the past twenty years and supported it since the beginning of the revolution. The Syrian regime and its security services established political and economic links with the religious establishment, especially from the Sunni community following the repression of the 1980s. The high religious establishments of all the sects have increasingly been presented by the regime as actors of the "Syrian civil society" in the past as soon as a foreign delegation would visit the country.

The State's behavior these past years has been in total contradiction with the official picture of a secular country. A religious vocabulary appeared more often in political discourse, along with a massive increase in the building of religious sites from the eighties until now. These government measures were also accompanied by censorship of literary and artistic works, while promoting a religious literature filling more and more the shelves of libraries and Islamizing the field of higher education. This is true particularly in the humanities and expressed itself in the rather systematic referral to religious references of any scientific, social and cultural phenomenon. Around 10,000 mosques and hundreds of religious schools were built. More than 200 conferences headed by clerics were held in cultural centres of important towns during 2007.

In the same time, the regime has fostered sectarian division. It built the army according to sectarian criteria to maintain loyalty. While the majority of the conscript soldiers are Sunni according to their population share, the officers' corps is predominately Alawis.

Nevertheless, this regime is above all a clientelist regime, which finds support - alongside the security service apparatus - among the predominantly Sunni and Christian bourgeoisie in Aleppo and Damascus, which benefited from the neoliberal policies of recent years. The regime has built a network of loyalties through various ties, mainly economic, with individuals from different communities as we have seen above.

Anti-imperialist regime challenging Israel and the West?

Syria has been able to portray itself as an anti-imperialist state by its support of the resistance in Lebanon and in Palestine for many years now, and has taken very strong rhetorical positions in opposition to Israel. But this position is not based on anti-imperialist principles, but on conjectural national interests. These are guided by the necessity to ensure the security and continuity of the regime as well as a balance of power in diplomatic negotiations with Israel to recover the Golan Heights area seized in 1967.

The regime has actually collaborated with Western imperialist governments on many occasions. It is that same regime that refused to assist the Palestinians and progressive Jordanian groups to overthrow the conservative Hashemite regime in Jordan during the popular uprising in 1970, known as the Black September. This is the same regime which crushed the Palestinians and the progressive movements in Lebanon in 1976 with the tacit acceptance of the West, putting an end to their revolution, while participating in the imperialist war against Iraq in 1991 with the coalition led by the US. They have also participated in the War on terror launched by President George W. Bush by collaborating on security issues. Israel has actually several times called on the US to ease the

pressure on the Syrian regime which has not shot a single bullet for the occupied Golan Heights since 1973.

Syria has not responded to direct attacks on its soil widely attributed to Israel, including a 2007 air strike on a suspected nuclear reactor or the assassination of a top Lebanese leader Imad Moghniye, the following year. It also has engaged in multiple rounds of peace talks, most recently in 2008. Although these talks have not yielded an agreement, their repeated failure has led to nothing worse than a continued chill.

Syrian officials have repeatedly declared their readiness to sign a peace agreement with Israel as soon as the occupation of the Golan Heights would end, while nothing was said on the Palestinian issue.

Rami Makhlouf, the cousin of Bashar Al Assad, actually declared in June 2011 that if there is no stability in Syria, there will be no stability in Israel, and adding that no one can guarantee what will occur if something happens to the Syrian regime. As a result, we can understand Israel's satisfaction with the status quo under the current the Syrian regime.

The Palestinian refugees of Syria fully aware of all this has increasingly been participating in the revolution alongside their Syrian brothers and sisters. They have suffered from the regime's repression, with more than 40 martyrs and hundreds arrested by security forces. Actions of support from the Palestine occupied territories and '48 territories (Israel) to the Syrian revolution have multiplied these past few months.

The popular movement

The geography of the uprisings in Idlib and Deraa as well as other rural areas, including the suburbs of Damascus and Aleppo, show the massive involvement of the downtrodden in this revolution.

The bulk of the protesters of the Syrian revolutionary movement

actually include the economically disenfranchised rural and urban working and middle classes who have suffered from the accelerated imposition of neoliberal policies by Bashar Al Assad since his arrival to power. Successful campaigns of general strikes and civil disobedience in Syria during the period December 2011 that paralyzed large parts of the country showed notably the activism of the working class and exploited who are indeed the heart of the Syrian revolution. This is why the dictatorship has laid off more than 85,000 workers from January 2011 to February 2012, and closed 187 factories (according to official figures).

The degradation of living standards of the majority of Syrians, coupled with political repression, actually led to visible protests since 2006. In May 2006, hundreds of workers of the Public Building Company in Damascus held a demonstration that erupted in clashes with security forces. In Homs, clashes broke out between the police and demonstrators protesting against the demolition of homes occupied by poor people. Data from 2007 shows that people living in extreme poverty, defined as those unable to obtain their basic food and non-food needs, rose to 2 million. About 62% of the people living in poverty are from rural areas and live in food insecurity or are vulnerable.

In 2007, several clashes between the police and demonstrators took place in different areas in Syria such as the al-Moussrania district of Aleppo, al-Mazra in Homs, and Alroudhra in Damascus. In 2008, demonstrations were held by workers in the port of Latakia, and Dhabia and Zabadani near Damascus. In 2009 and 2010, the regime also faced protests, until the beginning of revolution this year. Wealth gaps and inequality had continuously increased these last few years.

Prior the revolution, the percentage of Syrians living under the poverty line rose from 11% in 2000 to 33% in 2010. That is to say, about 7 million Syrians live around the poverty line. The unemployment rate was actually constantly rising and there were up to 20 to 25% unemployment in society,

reaching up to 55% for people under 25 in a country where young people under 30 exceed 65% of the total population. The labour market was unable to absorb the 380,000 people who swell the ranks of job-seekers every year, while the government promised the creation of 250,000 jobs every year in the tenth year plan, which besides it was not able to realize. In addition to this, a new labour act in Syria has been adopted in April 2010 and is clearly favoring employers against employees.

The supporters of the Syrian regime and the left refusing to support the Syrian revolution therefore consider that the downtrodden and the exploited of Syria, who are the bulk of the Syrian popular movement, are just simple instrument of Saudi and US imperialist policies. At the same time they are defending or not taking a position against a regime collaborating with Western Imperialism and protective of Israel, which is pursuing neoliberal policies for the interests of a small economic elite that is far from being secular but actually draws its support from the corrupt high religious establishment.

Conclusion

Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman was right to say that post-revolution Egypt is a larger threat to Israel than Iran, and this can also be applied to Syria. A free, progressive, democratic and truly independent Egypt and Syria are infinitely more dangerous to the Zionist apartheid state and its occupied territories than the repressive Syrian and Islamic Republic.

The Syrian revolution is part of the revolutionary process taking place in the Arab world, and should not be separated. The Syrian people are struggling like Egyptians, Tunisians, Bahrainis and other democrats, socialists and anti-imperialists in the region.

The Syrian people are the true revolutionaries and anti-imperialists, and not the regime of Bashar Al-Assad. It is the Syrian population who welcomed Palestinians, Lebanese and Iraqi refugees when they were

attacked and occupied by the imperialist powers such as Israel and the US. The victory of the Syrian revolution will open a new resistance

front against the imperialist powers, while its defeat will strengthen them. Long live the Syrian revolution.

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Fear triumphs, but hope continues

18 June 2012, by **Josep María Antentas**

The reality is that the economic and social crises have been transformed into a generalized political crisis, in Gramscian terms a crisis of hegemony and an "organic crisis of the state". Structural adjustment policies have imploded Greece's traditional party system and the breach opened will not easily be closed.

Fear, fed by a veritable media campaign of terror from the right and the neo-colonial blackmail of the Troika, triumphed over hope. But the Troika's joy may prove ephemeral. The new government will be weak, formed by discredited parties lacking legitimacy, and will have the task of continuing with unpopular policies which will lead to new and decisive mobilisations. The statement of the New Democracy candidate Samaras acknowledging his victory, which talked of returning to the "path of prosperity", was little more than an exercise in cynicism that will soon be denied by reality.

No Future is all that the policies of the Troika offer to the Greek people. Although tired by two years of tenacious resistance, this people has decided not to die without a battle, nor to abandon its indignation. From the accumulation of defeats, the Greek people have paradoxically recovered their best weapon - confidence in the ability to overcome.

The rise of Syriza, out of the ashes of a broken and ruined PASOK, is based on its ability to combine political and social credibility with electoral credibility, in a context of prolonged social uprising. The key to its success

is appearing as a "distinct" formation which is untainted with respect to collaboration with the cuts, unlike PASOK, and which has not been responsible for governing regions and municipalities and implementing cuts there. Its proposal for the formation of an anti-Memorandum government of the left during the campaign for the May 6 elections was the lever that propelled it electorally and changed the coordinates of the electoral debate. Suddenly, the possibility of a "left government" appeared as a specific and feasible way out of the nightmare of the cuts, as a quasi magical formula to a part of the Greek people in the midst of destitution

The positive and impressive rise of Syriza has given a ray of hope to Greek workers, but it also captured the imagination of the European left, lacking practical successful references and experiences and aware that the most decisive battle of the continent against finance capital's plans is taking place in Greece. It is important, however, not to uncritically idealise Syriza, a plural coalition in which distinct orientations coexist - some of them very moderate, others consistently anti-capitalist. Its weaknesses in terms of organisation and social implantation are huge and its programmatic proposals and political discourse present significant limits and inconsistencies. From May 6th to June 17th there was a slight shift in Syriza's proposals on the Memorandum, the debt and other key questions towards formulations which were a little more ambiguous and less for a radical break, while maintaining

a clear profile of opposition to the logic of structural adjustment, which underpins its political credibility and identity.

In this new scenario, the strengthening of self-organization in the neighbourhoods and workplaces continues to be the key variable because there can be no rupture with the policies of structural adjustment without a mobilized and organized society. It is also a crucial task for this new stage for those opposed to the Samaras government to seek ways of unity and collaboration for the main components of the Greek left, in particular between Syriza and the anti-capitalist coalition Antarsya, weak electorally (0.33 % yesterday) but with a social implantation equal to or greater than the former, without forgetting the KKE (4.4% yesterday), the main leftist party in militant terms and whose sectarian policies practiced thus far have clearly failed.

"The future does not belong to the frightened, but to the bearers of hope", Tsipras said yesterday after learning the results. In his final speech before hundreds of supporters and followers, a little disappointed by what might have been, but realizing that the fight is long, he came out strongly against the cuts and stressed the need to continue the mobilisation. A battle was lost yesterday, but this is far from over. When Tsipras finished his speech the voice of Patti Smith came through the speakers, sending a direct message to the Troika - "People have the power".

Athens 18 June 2012

"You can cancel the debt"

18 June 2012, by **Despina Papegeorgiou, Éric Toussaint**

He stood alone in front of the crowd; he loosened his tie and opened his shirt. "Here I am, if you want to kill me. Kill your president if you are so dissatisfied, if you are so brave!" The dark-haired, strong-featured man shouted these words, unafraid of the angry crowd. He was the president of Ecuador, Rafael Correa, and facing him were the policemen who, on the pretext of protesting against wage cuts, were actually attempting a coup to overthrow him. Behind this move was the oligarchy of the country, which today still opposes a president who brought his country out of the IMF-World Bank driven "long neoliberal night" and who currently enjoys a popularity of around 70%.

Three years earlier, in 2007, a group of experts entered their respective hotel rooms and were struck speechless: entire boxes of documents from the Ministry of the Economy, pertaining to the period before Correa's presidency, had simply disappeared. These experts were members of Ecuador's Debt Audit Committee, which had been set up after Correa's election. The Committee was composed of twelve experts from Ecuador and six from abroad. The Belgian political scientist and historian Eric Toussaint was one of them. Eric Toussaint is speaking today at "Crash" magazine and he describes how the myth of David conquering Goliath once again materialized in Ecuador, despite the expected difficulties. After 14 months of hard work, the Debt Audit Committee produced the first findings, declaring a large part of the debt illegitimate. The government then cancelled this part, paying creditors only 35 cents to the dollar. Washington had a stroke ...

A decade before, Ecuador was being characterized as a "banana democracy". Now, according to the

British "Guardian" newspaper, it may be "the most radical and enthusiastic place to live". There are more social benefits, the poor receive allowances and health care is completely free. Public spending has also risen. The percentage of people living below the poverty line has fallen to 28.6% (2011) - from 37.6% (2006).

Eric Toussaint is a professor at the University of Liège (Belgium), the founder and president of the Committee for the Abolition of Third World Debt (CADTM, www.cadtm.org) and the author of many books. He worked voluntarily for Ecuador's Debt Audit Commission. He has the knowledge and the experience to certify that there is an alternative way. Provided that there is the political will.

We contacted Eric Toussaint via e-mail ("you won't find him at any specific phone number, he travels all the time", I was informed). He was obviously interested in the Greek case: "Is it confirmed that you will have elections again?" he asked me. I called him the next day in his hotel in Croatia, where he was to take part in an international forum for the future of Europe.

Eric Toussaint declares categorically to "Crash" that the debt created because of the Memorandum is definitely illegitimate and/or odious. He also publicly states through our magazine that his organisation and he will support any effort in Greece for a Debt Audit Commission. "It is easier for you to analyse your debt than it was for Ecuador", he says. "So do it!" Will the new Greek government - after the elections of 17 June - hear the professor's call? An earlier warning to another Greek government fell on deaf ears. "We had warned George Papandreou in time! Before Greece went to the IMF, the ex-Greek Prime

Minister asked Rafael Correa for his advice - based on his own experience - on how to handle the debt issue", recounted Ecuador's Minister of Foreign Affairs Ricardo Patino in a speech in Quito (as quoted by L. Vatikiotis). "The Greek Prime Minister was talking a lot", Patino continued. "Look", Correa said. "There is something you must not do and something you definitely must do, in order not to pay. You must not go to the IMF. And you must create a Debt Audit Committee." Then Papandreou did exactly the opposite"...

My conversation with Eric Toussaint started with the issue of Greek elections. I remarked that the proposal for the constitution of a Greek Debt Audit Commission came up again in the election period.

It is indicative, though", I said, "that the proposal was rejected by the two parties that governed Greece for decades. Why do you think they may not want to analyze the debt, and why would they undermine such efforts for its cancellation?

It is clear that PASOK and New Democracy are not interested in supporting an audit, because an audit will show up their responsibility in the country's debt. They have a huge share of responsibility for the debt in the years 1990 to 2000, and the new debt with the Memorandum. For me this is an illegitimate debt.

It should be mentioned here that illegitimate debt is a debt a) which has been agreed without the consent of the nation, b) the money of which was spent contrary to the nation's interests and c) the lender of which was aware of the above facts. The term is attributed to the Russian law professor Alexander Sacks, who in fact changed the leading question from "if

the country can pay its debt" to "if a country should pay its debt".

How do you explain that the debt is illegitimate?" I asked Eric Toussaint.

Maybe we should begin with the new debt, from May 2010 until today.

The rules laid down by the Troika are a violation of the economic and social rights of Greek citizens, as illustrated by reduced wages, reduced pensions, the violation of the economic and social rights of the Greek people. For instance, the first Memorandum was not properly deliberated by the Greek parliament; the procedure for the Memorandum was not democratic. The Troika says you must accept. If you do not accept the rules, you will not receive help. All this in total disrespect for the principle of democracy in the governing country. So for me this new debt in 2013 will represent the major part of Greece's external public debt. This new debt is illegitimate and should be cancelled.

We also have to analyse the debt of the years 1990 to 2000, the debt linked to the preparation of the Olympic Games, and also the debt under whose conditions Greece entered the Eurozone. A great deal of money came from German and private banks of the core countries of the EU. It is clear that a lot of money entered Greece in the form of private or public debt. The private banks of Germany, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg granted these loans because they were profitable for them. And they knew that if any problem occurred, they would be bailed out by the European Central Bank. So we can also discuss, we can question, the legitimacy of this type of loan.

Indeed, the banks were bailed out by the ECB at 1% interest...

The ECB granted loans (in December 2011 and February 2012) for an amount of 1.000 billion euros (1 000 000 000 000 €, -) with 1% interest over three years to help the European banks. The major banks of Germany, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Austria, and also the Greek and Italian banks took the money.

And now countries borrow from the banks at high interest...

They receive the money at a 1% interest rate and after that they lend this money to the peripheral countries at 4, 5, 6 or 7% interest. In commercial law, when you finance these loans through credit granted at 1%, it contravenes commercial rights. These lenders make themselves rich in an abusive way.

So, is debt just a tool used by the financial and political elite to patronize and control the population and impose certain policies?

It is clear that the Troika is using the Greek debt as an instrument, as a tool, to impose a policy which violates the human rights of the Greek people. Greece is being used as an example to blackmail other countries - like Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Spain - and to impose the same type of policy to other countries. Greece is not an exception. Greece is a laboratory where the new shock therapy is being applied.

This brings me to the next question. In one of your recent articles, you wrote "Europe gets shock therapy like Latin America in the 80s and 90s".

Do you think that Europe, too, has now entered a "long neoliberal night"?

Certainly. The parallel is evident. In the 80s and 90s, the IMF, together with the World Bank and the Paris Club, imposed such a therapy on the Latin American countries, and also on other countries in the Third World, in Asia - for example Indonesia, the Philippines, South Korea - after the Asian crisis in 1997. So it was not only in Latin America, but in all parts of the Third World. We could draw a comparison with the shock therapy applied in Russia, Poland, Hungary and East Germany during reunification in the 90s. So, what are the policies? Privatization, as is the case in Greece right now, increased VAT, indirect taxes on the majority of the population, lay-offs in the civil service, reduced wages, etc.

The classic IMF recipe...

Exactly. What they are doing in Greece was implemented 20 or 30 years ago in Latin America, Asian and African countries and ex-Soviet block countries.

And the results are obvious...

It failed because it didn't create growth, or employment. But the real motivation is not the growth of the economy; the real motivation of the IMF and the other elements of the Troika, the ECB and the European Commission, is to NOT provide growth. They know perfectly that with this type of policy, Greece will not recover at the economic level. They know that perfectly well. They are not stupid. They are clever. They are using the crisis strategically to reduce the wages and the living standards of the population, because they want a country and a world of ever-increasing profits for the big corporations. That's really the motivation. They want to help and strengthen big financial corporations like Goldman Sachs, Deutsche Bank, JP Morgan and all the big private banks in Europe and the US.

Someone who is not a leftist economist, Joseph Stiglitz, the 2001 Nobel prize winner, wrote in his book "Globalization and its Discontents" that if you analyze superficially the policies of the IMF, they could seem absurd and headed for failure, but if you consider that the IMF is helping and servicing the interests of financial capital, you will realize that its policies are really coherent and clever.

And they are trying to persuade Greece that this is the only way to go, but, as you very well know, we have examples of countries that cancelled parts of the illegitimate debt. One such example is of course Ecuador, where you participated in the Debt Audit Commission. Could you tell us briefly how this effort evolved, how it bore fruit?

First, we have to say it was 100% successful. And with no retaliation. What Ecuador did: it elected a new president in November 2006, who by presidential decree, created a Debt Audit Commission in July 2007 to analyze the debt for the period 1976

to 2006. He selected 18 experts, 12 from Ecuador, 6 from abroad. I was one of the six persons from outside the country. He also asked for organs of the State to be part of the Commission, the Anti-Corruption Commission, the General Office of Accountability, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Finance.

So, the government fully supported the effort.

We worked during 14 months and, at the end of the 14 months, in September 2008, we gave our conclusion and recommendation to the government. After two months of deliberation, they decided to suspend the payment of debt in form of bonds.

That's amazing, it took you only 16 months, 14 for the work plus two for the government to act...

It took 14 months to analyze and two months to discuss within the government what had to be done. We had several meetings with the government during those 14 months and after our conclusion, but the government took the final decision to suspend payments of the bonds. After eight months of not paying, they succeeded in forcing bond holders to accept a 65% reduction in value. The State, Ecuador, bought the bonds at a discount. For a bond valued at 1.000 dollars they paid 350 dollars.

But I guess you faced difficulties. I mean, you stood up to the international creditors, the banks and the system. It was reported in an article that boxes with documents from the Ministry of the Economy disappeared from your rooms.

It is evident that while we were at work, those in power before the election of the new president and who had bribed, or signed illegal contracts contributing to the indebtedness of the country, didn't want to give us all the documentation we needed for our work. In some regard it was difficult, but at the end we got all the documentation we need.

In the case of Greece, I think in some ways it is easier because more information is available. We know the conditions imposed by the Troika for

instance; there is no secret about these conditions. We can analyze exactly what the Troika has done with Greece in the last two years. So we don't have to really gain access to secrets of State.

The debt of Ecuador had risen from 1.174 billion dollars in 1970 to 14.25 billion dollars in 2006. It was smaller than the Greek debt, though. So I asked Eric Toussaint:

Given that Greece is in the Eurozone and its debt is larger than that of Ecuador, do you think it would be more difficult for Greece to erase the illegal part of its debt?

I believe it is easier to analyze the Greek debt than the debt of Ecuador, because the latter was more complicated and concerned many more contracts than is the case in Greece. In the case of Ecuador, we had to analyze one by one the contracts of the country with the World Bank, the IMF, the Inter-American Development Bank, the 20 countries of the Paris Club, but also its debt (bonds) to the markets.

In the case of Greece, the largest part of the debt is in the form of bonds or loans from the Troika. So I think it's easier. In the case of Ecuador, the debt might have been relatively smaller, but there were more than 100 contracts. So it was more difficult to analyze.

I remember what the Correa government declared via the then Minister of Finance Ricardo Patino - and it abided by this declaration: "We do not accept what other governments accepted. That is, for our economic policy to be dictated by the IMF. We consider this unacceptable." Will the Greeks dare to do the same? I asked Eric Toussaint:

The Greek people are afraid that if they analyze and then cancel the illegitimate debt, there could be retaliation from the markets and that they may not even be able to eat. In the case of Ecuador, there was no retaliation. Is there a possibility of retaliation in the case of Greece?

We have to be clear. I said there was no retaliation, but we have to remember that Ecuador no longer goes to the markets to finance its policies. So there was no retaliation, but it is clear that if you stop paying the debt to the private banks, it will be some years before the banks agree to finance you again.

The thing is, though, that Greece, under the present conditions, should find alternative methods of financing its policies and development. Greece should combine a suspension of debt payments and an analysis of the debt, and reform its fiscal policy. It should develop a tax policy that abides by the rule of equality. I should mention, for example, that in Greece, the Church, as well as the defense sector and the shipping sector, are tax-exempt. The various institutions and sectors of the country should contribute to taxation.

You have to draw up a budget based not only on money from abroad, but from inside the country also. And, of course, I don't mean by imposing higher VAT on the poor. I am just saying that sectors which do not contribute to the budget should contribute to it.

Meanwhile, would the Greek people be able to survive?

The answer leaves me speechless:

If you stop paying, you will have the money! If you don't use the money to pay the banks, you could use this money to pay the wages, raise the pensions, pay the public servants, create jobs, stimulate the economy. It is exactly what Argentina did after it stopped paying its debt in 2001. Since 2001, they have not applied for financing from private banks and markets. And Argentina is doing very well. What Argentina and Ecuador did was that they recovered by imposing bigger taxes on big corporations. I insist: it does not mean that Greece should ask the majority of the people, the poor, to pay more taxes. I say that the big private corporations should contribute.

It is indicative that despite the fact that Ecuador is an oil exporter, the country received small revenues from these exports, since the multinational

oil companies were getting the lion's share of the profits. This changed when, in July 2010, through a law passed by the Correa government, the State's share in oil exports rose from 13% to 87% on gross oil revenues. 7 out of the 16 oil companies fled the country, and were replaced by State-owned companies. The rest stayed. The increase in State oil revenues was 870 million dollars in 2010.

Moreover, the immediate taxes, imposed mainly on companies, rose from 35% in 2006 to more than 40% in 2011. The project required strong political will in its clash with big interests. There was also a collision with the domestic elite. This leads me to the next issue:

We would also have to open the bank accounts of people that handled the debt. You did that in Ecuador, too.

If we want to show up the cases of bribery, etc. it is clear that the law should initiate the procedure and that the Finance Ministry should call on certain people to answer concrete questions about the wealth, how they got wealthy, from what sources they received the money they have and the fortune they have accumulated. An Audit Commission would need the help of those in charge of controlling taxes and also the justice department.

You talked about bribes. So you are certain there are bribes.

In some cases. Yes. That may be not the major problem, but it is clear that there were contracts financed by loans, contracts to buy equipment from Siemens etc. Already the justice department in Greece has shown that, in the case of Siemens HELLAS there was a huge amount of bribes to politicians in Greece to approve the contract with Siemens. So it is not a secret. It is well known».

In Ecuador, you also discovered bribes made by multinational companies and banks. Could you give us a couple of examples, besides Siemens?

People in government during the 90s and up to the year 2000 received money to sign contracts with the

banks, to accept conditions favourable to the bankers.

Do you mean that bribes were offered so that officials would accept conditions favourable to companies and not to the citizens of the country?

Exactly.

Do you remember some cases?

Citigroup, but also JP Morgan was involved. JP Morgan is well known now because they lost 2 billion dollars ten days ago with CDS.

And there was also the participation of lawyers in New York who specialized in advising banks and government and who also received their intermediaries in corruption.

It is clear that Correa brought about - at least to a degree - the "Citizen's Revolution", which he had declared when he came to power. The president of Ecuador is the West's "goal against itself": despite being educated in European and American universities - some of them fortresses of the Chicago School - when he came to power, he practised the exact opposite of what he had been taught. Today, though, he gets criticism even from the left, with the accusation that he has not gone all the way.

Have you had an update from president Correa on the abolition of illegitimate debt?"

In the case of Ecuador, it was 100% successful. I met the president of Ecuador in January 2011, two years after the work of the Audit Commission. He told me it was a 100% success because there was absolutely no retaliation against Ecuador. And he was thinking about suspending other parts of the external debt payment. We will see what he does.

There are critics that say Ecuador didn't go all the way, that it didn't continue with the debt audit based on the more recent findings of the Committee...

At the time they were isolated, so it is natural. But they could have done more and they know that. So they are still thinking about other parts of the

debt payment.

Meanwhile, however, Ecuador borrows from China at high interest rates.

There are certain agreements between Ecuador and China, for petrol and oil exploration and exploitation and they borrow some money from China's corporations".

Eric Toussaint says that he is not a representative of the presidency of Ecuador and that he simply approves the positive political moves and criticizes the negative ones.

China has been the number one lender to Ecuador after the default in 2008. The State agreed on a 2 billion dollar loan in 2011 with the China Development Bank. The conditions of the loan, though, do not seem to have reduced social spending: Ecuador has the highest percentage -in relation to its GDP- in social spending (10%) of all of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Under what conditions can Greece follow the example of Ecuador?

There are two scenarios. If, after the elections, a conservative government follows the Troika policy, it is impossible to imagine such a government supporting an honest audit. That's the first scenario. The other scenario is if the next election elects a progressive left government. And on condition that it is a progressive, democratic and sovereign government, it will abrogate the agreement with the Troika and should then begin an audit of the debt. So, yes, in this case it will be very positive. Such a government will know how to reveal what really happened with the Greek debt. And, in the first scenario, if you still have a government to uphold the agreement with the Troika, what should be undertaken is a Citizen Audit, totally independent from the government. I would express publicly that in the two cases, if the people want to launch a real citizen audit of the debt, we could support this option. It would be possible in the first scenario, and in the second scenario, where a progressive government suspends the Troika agreement and wants to audit the debt, we would support this

initiative with enthusiasm.

Suppose Greece cancels a part of the illegitimate debt. Could this trigger a European “revolution” against debt?

If Greece does that, there will be a lot of people in Portugal and Spain and hopefully in Ireland and Italy, who will support this decision. And they will also have support in countries like France, Germany, Belgium, the UK. We are active in these countries and we have a campaign of solidarity with Greece. Our campaign receives significant support. I would not say, in fact it would not be realistic to say, that people in all these countries already understand what is really happening. But there is a significant portion of public opinion that does understand that the conditions imposed on the Greek population are totally unacceptable, while many people in other European countries are hoping to see the Greek people

emerge as an example of a country that has regained its sovereignty and thus be an inspiration to an alternative force in Europe

With this insight to another, democratic Europe, we concluded our conversation with Eric Toussaint. His last phrases lingered long in my mind: Greece could lead the way out of Europe’s “long neoliberal night”.

“I will make you an offer you can’t refuse” was the memorable phrase of “Godfather” Marlon Brando in the well-known movie. In a similar way, Greece seems to be blackmailed into abiding by the Memorandum. But the key to understanding the international elite’s stance against the country lies in the words of the judge towards the Mafia members in this very same movie: “The rotten apple may spoil the barrel”...

...According to the “rotten apple”

example (which Noam Chomsky has often used), the reason the US were punishing Cuba was not that Fidel Castro was a real threat to them. Their main fear was that the “rotten apple” - the Cuban leader - might inspire others and create a domino effect that would turn the whole barrel “rotten”. Indeed, as Latin America rode the “red tide” of leaders bent on terminating the “Washington Consensus”, Washington experienced its biggest nightmare.

In the case of Greece, if the “guinea pig occupies the lab” - as Costas Douzinas puts it - if Greece renders the policy of the Troika void and proves that democracies have no dead ends and no unique solutions, Europe can ride towards democracy. In this case, of course, the “apples” will not be rotten. They will just be ripe...

The English version of this interview was prepared with the collaboration of Judith Harris.

The bank hurricane continues along its path of destruction

18 June 2012, by *Éric Toussaint*

According to the prevailing rhetoric, the mounting fear stems from the over-indebtedness of countries, a possible default by Greece, and the adverse effects it would have on Spain and Italy. As far as the banks are concerned, the rehabilitation is supposed to be going forward, and the ECB has everything under control. From January to the early May 2012, the following general message was repeated ad infinitum: “Thanks to the 1000 billion euro loan banks have been given by the ECB in two phases (December 2011 and February 2012) for 3 years at 1% interest, private financial institutions are now in a good position to handle the difficulties facing countries in terms of sovereign debt. The financial markets have been stabilized, and the stock markets have risen after a particularly bad year.

Public finances are being cleaned up thanks to the golden rule, which is being adopted everywhere, the efforts made by countries to reduce expenditures, and the reform of the labor market to make it even more flexible and of retirement regimes to cut costs. Some additional efforts must be made, but the end of the tunnel is in sight. Sweet dreams, dear friends!”

In May 2012, this rosy message was strongly refuted. It had become clear that private banks have not fundamentally cleaned up their accounts, have not modified their high-risk behavior, and their Directors have not lost their thirst for hefty bonuses and golden parachutes. Bankers consider that public authorities will always be there to

save their skin. Bank bailouts with public funds continue. The depression is deepening, and public debt is increasing due to the combined effect of the bailouts and the depression. Meanwhile, the financial markets are blackmailing the weakest members in the euro zone more than ever before.

The banking system is in the eye of the cyclone, which is continuing along its path, hitting all major private banking institutions one at a time as it hums along, and paying no heed to national borders. Contrary to a real hurricane, which is a natural phenomenon, the financial cyclone is 100% artificial: it is the direct product of the cyclical nature of capitalism, worsened by 30 years of neo-liberal deregulation.

The Spanish case is emblematic because it demonstrates that the crisis does not stem from excessive public debt run up by spending too much money on social programs. In 2007, when the crisis erupted in the United States, and before Spain was submerged in it, Spanish public debt was only 36% of its gross domestic product. Spain was one of the model students in the euro zone with a public debt rate far below the 60% threshold stipulated in the Maastricht treaty, and its fiscal balance was positive (+1.9% of its GDP, whereas Maastricht imposes a maximum 3% negative fiscal balance). At that time, Spanish public debt only accounted for 18% of its total debt. Clearly, public debt is not the culprit, rather the deepening crisis affecting Spain was directly caused by the private sector, namely the real estate and credit sectors.

In May 2012, Bankia, the 3rd largest bank in Spain in terms of assets, requested 19 billion euros in government aid (in addition to the 4.5 billion already given). The Bank of Spain estimates that the Iberian banking system is sitting on toxic assets of 176 billion euros. Various specialists estimate that 40 to 200 billion euros are needed to recapitalize the Spanish banks.

The Spanish private finance industry is far from being an isolated case.

Bailed out a second time in October 2011, the French-Belgian-Luxembourg bank group Dexia now acknowledges losses of €11 billion in 2011, and the downside is not over: it again calls upon governments to recapitalize (at least €10 billion are needed). JP Morgan, one of the big US corporate banks, had to acknowledge losses of \$2 billion in May 2012 (this announcement triggered a \$25 billion loss in its market capitalization within a few days) and far more substantial damages are to be expected. Greek banks are on the ropes, facing a massive bank run, in which top managers and shareholders are also participating, and can only survive today thanks to emergency loans granted on a daily basis by the National Bank of Greece up to an amount of €100 billion, with the ECB's consent. [69]

Among the 800 European banks that borrowed this amount from the ECB, several (including some of the biggest) are again or will soon be short of cash, and they are urging the ECB to renew the same kind of low rate and fairly long term loans.

While attention is focused on the public debts accumulated by States, the main cause of the crisis lies with the balance sheets of private banks (and of some major insurance groups). Indeed they have accumulated huge debts [70] in order to finance high risk operations that often result in abysmal losses that occur as contracts on

structured products and other toxic assets reach maturity.

The lesson to be drawn is that we must, now more than ever before, demand the transfer of banks to the public sector under citizen control. We must refuse costly bailouts that increase public debt without solving the bank crisis. Expropriation must occur without compensation for big shareholders (small shareholders will be compensated), and the cost of cleaning up the accounts of expropriated institutions will be paid for by their patrimony at large (for they usually own a patrimony that extends far beyond banks). It is necessary to balance the power relations so that public authorities can repudiate the illegitimate part of the debt and release resources to set up policies that further full employment and public investments in activities that improve people's standards of living, preserve the environment, and break with capitalism and productivism. We have to carry out a number of consistent policies in terms of economic and social alternatives that lead to a post-neoliberal, post-productivist, and anticapitalist society. [71] On our way to radical change, a citizen audit of the debt is a valuable and indispensable tool to raise awareness and mobilize people.

Translated by Christine Pagnouille and Charles La Via.

Fear versus hope

16 June 2012, by Josep María Antentas

Structural adjustment policies have imploded the traditional party system in Greece. The economic and social crisis has been transformed into a generalised political crisis, a crisis of hegemony and an "organic crisis of the state". In this scenario, the appeal to fear has been the sole asset of the Greek right through an authentic campaign of media terror and demonization of Syriza that is fed with

permanent blackmail from the Troika. The infamous article appearing yesterday (Friday June 15) in the German edition of the "Financial Times" urging the Greek people to vote for the right-wing New Democracy party shows the exacerbation of the centre-periphery logic and neo-colonial relations within the EU in the context of the crisis. But also it is an example of the fear of the

dominant classes that the situation in Greece will open too large a fissure within the EU.

It is not clear whether Syriza will win the election or that it will have the majority to form a government. If not it is likely that another scenario of political crisis will open, possibly with new elections or a fragile pro-Memorandum government in the

midst of growing difficulty for the parties of the system in sustaining governability of the country. It should be recalled, on the other hand, that the rise of Syriza and the left coexists with the rise of the fascist wing that offers a way of channelling the social unrest in a reactionary sense and illustrates the growing polarization before the intensification of the social contradictions caused by the adjustment policies.

A government formed by Syriza, a plural coalition in which different orientations coexist, would be subject to contradictions and brutal pressures to which its reaction and resilience would be unpredictable. It would open a new scenario full of possibilities, but

also with an uncertain outcome and a sinuous trajectory. This being the case, the strengthening of social self-organization, of the currents of the anti-capitalist left (some within Syriza itself and others grouped in Antarsya, a coalition which is electorally weak but has a relevant social implementation), and combative trades unionism would be fundamental variables. There can be no consistent logic of rupture with the structural adjustment policies without a mobilized and organized society and the development and unity of currents and political and social organizations that argue more consistently for an anti-capitalist alternative.

Simultaneously a test bed and

laboratory for adjustment and social resistance, the outcome of the "Greek tragedy" will have a crucial impact crucial throughout the European Union. Here the most decisive battle of the continent is being waged in the global fight against the plans of financial capital, a battle in which this Sunday's election is a particularly significant moment.

Greece shows the dark side of the crisis and the high social and human cost that it entails. But, conversely, Greece also opens, for the first time in decades in Europe, the possibility of a beginning of a rupture, however imprecise, with an ever more unbearable present.

One divides into two - Nepal's Maoists in crisis

16 June 2012, by **Alex de Jong**



'Torch rally against the dissolving of the PLA'

Picture by Eric Ribellarsi
<http://winterends.net/>

For six years since 2006, the Nepali government has been unable to draft the Constitution that should have been the foundation of a new, democratic Nepal. The Constitutional Assembly (CA), elected in 2008, originally had a two year mandate but even after this had been extended several times, it remained in a deadlock, unable to reach any agreement. Ignoring a Supreme Court verdict that the CA could not be extended, Prime Minister and Maoist vice-chairman Baburam Bhattarai tabled a bill proposing just that. The Supreme Court ruled against him on contempt charges and at midnight May 28th Bhattarai dissolved the CA and called for new elections. The final stumbling block was the refusal of the anti-Maoist coalition in the CA to allow changes in the

structure of the state that would give greater autonomy to a number of the country's minorities. [72] It was the end of the second Maoist-led Nepali government. The Right hopes that the elections will give them the change to grow big enough to not only block any progress in the CA, like they have done for the last four years, but also influence its course.

The Maoists hope that the elections will be a chance to break the deadlock but with increasing division in their own ranks it is uncertain they can repeat their surprise electoral victory of 2008. Inside Bhattarai's party, the United Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) (UCPNM), that led a decade of armed struggle and controlled most of the country before agreeing on a cease-fire with the government, criticism of the leadership has been growing. Bhattarai and other leaders have been accused of betraying the revolution and preparations for a split have been going under way for months. To understand the crisis of the UCPN(M) and the end of the

second coalition government led by it, it is necessary to look at the evolution of its leaders' strategy.

A new step in the crisis

Negotiations between the establishment parties and the Maoists, building on a framework from 2005, led in May 2006 to a ceasefire and the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in December 2006. After long delays, elections for an Assembly that would draw up a new Constitution and function as an interim parliament took place in April 2008. Surprising most observers, the Maoists won a huge electoral victory, winning one third of all seats and becoming the largest party in parliament. Their chairperson, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, better known under his nom de guerre Prachanda ('the fierce one'), became Prime Minister. [73]

But the crisis of Nepali politics has

continued. For a long time, the main contradiction was between the old parliamentary parties on one hand and the Maoists on the other. The most important of these old parties are the conservative Nepali Congress (NC) and the Communist Party United Marxist-Leninist (UML, a party that is neither Marxist nor Leninist and supported the king for most of the insurgency). [74] Together with other establishment forces these parties have been resisting radical change and the drawing up of new constitution that would alter the existing power relationships to their disadvantage. On the other side were the Maoists who commanded an apparatus and electoral support that overshadowed that of any other single party but who were relatively unfamiliar with the game of parliamentary politics and had influence in the patronage based political machines.

The Maoists emphasized that they had not given up their goal of social revolution and that their participation in parliament was only a step towards this. In the Maoism of the UCPN(M), the revolution would need to go through two stages. First is the 'New Democratic revolution', as a step towards the establishment of socialism. [75] This first stage is meant to finish 'bourgeois democratic' tasks like land-reform, equal rights for all citizens and abolishing the monarchy and protecting national sovereignty, especially against traditional rival India. Although the Nepali Maoists had come out in favor of a multiparty system, including under socialism, they insisted that this first phase would be under leadership of the revolutionary forces and would immediately begin laying the groundwork for the second phase, that of socialist revolution. [76]

Since 2006, the establishment parties and the ruling classes of Nepal, with help of the United States and especially India, have been trying to channel the Maoists into parliamentary, institutionalized politics and convince them to postpone the New Democratic Revolution to some far undefined future. Nepal's fractured political landscape is dominated by patronage networks and the establishment

parties have been trying to integrate the Maoists into these networks and its political institutions and neutralize them, just like the parties that now form the UML have been neutralized years ago. [77] After a failed attempt at insurrection in 2010 and especially the disarmament and dissolving of the Maoist armed wing, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), and numerous other concessions by the UCPN(M), worries in the dissident camp that establishment forces succeeded in this have been growing. This has led to a new contradiction, this time inside the UCPN(M), between its right and left-wings.

Divisions

The last few years the UCPN(M) was actually divided in three power-centers. The right-wing was mostly closed identified with Baburam Bhattarai. Eloquent and highly educated, Bhattarai has been the chief diplomat of the UCPN(M), responsible for reaching out to other political forces and leading an important united front like that of the various national liberation organizations of Nepali minorities. He is the party's number two after Prachanda and is also considered to be their most important theorist. Bhattarai has long argued that under the current geopolitical circumstances a revolution with a socialist orientation is impossible in Nepal. He cites Nepal's position between capitalist China and pro-US India, its small population and the lack of natural resources or economic means and the low level of development as arguments for this. Nepal has a population of less than 30 million. In 1998, two years after the Maoists launched their 'people's war', approximately 82 per cent of Nepal's work force was employed in the agricultural sector, with a large majority being smallholders, tenants who have to provide their landlords with at least half of their harvest and free services in return for the use of a plot of land and subsistence security, or landless peasants. Nepali agriculture remains underdeveloped and ranks among the very lowest of South Asia in terms of crop yield and value added per worker. [78] In 2000, adult literacy

nationwide was a little over 50 per cent and life expectancy was under 60 years. [79] Indentured labor was only legally abolished a few years ago and still exists. The Human Development Index of the United Nations ranks Nepal 137th out of 177 countries.

Another cause of instability in Nepal is the oppression of a large number of minorities. Already before the people's war, Nepal was officially recognized as 'multi-ethnic' and 'multilingual', with various 'national languages'. But the demand of the pro-democracy movement that Nepal should become a secular state and the privileged status of Hinduism ended, was rejected. Nepal remained a Hindu monarchy and the king was celebrated as a living god. The state policy favored Hindus and the caste system remained intact. This policy marginalized a large and diverse part of the Nepali population. Officially, there are 44 minority ethnic groups in Nepal, making up over one third of the total population. The Hindu caste-system is also applied to the minority groups, delegating them to the lower castes. These groups are underrepresented in the state apparatus, in elected positions and are disadvantaged by the concentration of power in the Kathmandu valley. [80] Laws on marriage, divorce and inheritance were based on Hindu norms and extremely disadvantageous for women.

In the face of this lack of democratic and economic development, Bhattarai has been arguing that Nepal needs to pass through a pre-New Democratic 'substage' in which the progressive movement would not just limit itself to democratic tasks, not touching private property, but also accept the political hegemony of pro-capitalist forces. [81] Since the signing of the CPA, Bhattarai has been reaching out to India and the UCPN(M) has established contact with the Indian Communist Party (Marxist), long one of the ruling parties in large parts of India, and taking over their investment based, developmentalist approach.

Red faction



Already before the signing of the CPA, the approach of Bhattarai was criticized by other forces in the Maoist party. A left-wing current crystallized among the Maoists, already in 2009 leading to a small split under the leadership of Matrika Yadav, a former parliament- and politburo-member, who said the UCPN(M) was no longer sincerely striving for revolution. A more significant left-wing current remained in the party but is now leaving as well. Among its leaders are Netra Bikram Chand (party name: Biplab), Chandra Prakash Gajurel (aka Gaurav) and Mohan Vaidya (aka Kiran), all prominent UCPN(M)-cadres who have been pressing for a more radical course and the preparation for an insurrection to seize power for years. The recent disarmament of the PLA seems to have been the last straw for them. (this is discussed in more detail later). Since then this faction has formed a united front with forces to the left of the party in March 2012 to campaign against the policies of the UCPN(M)-led coalition government and grown more and more vehement in its denouncements of the UCPN(M) leadership. [82] The left-wing faction's orientation is much more classically Maoist, insisting on the (long term) possibility of armed revolution. The left-wing has also urged more cooperation with the Indian Maoists, the Communist Party of India (Maoist), also known as Naxalites, a party that sticks more closely to Maoist orthodoxy than the UCPN(M). [83]

Balancing between the right-and left-wings was Prachanda, allying with one, then the other wing in the intense faction fights, forging compromises on policy papers, reaching out to establishment forces one month, alluding to an insurrection the next, but always making sure he stayed in power. [84] But now it seems the party's right-wing has won the power struggle and the left-wing no longer distinguishes between Bhattarai and Prachanda. The end of the PLA was also a blow to the support base of

many of the left-wing leaders. In the highest party organs, the right-wing was also strengthened by the fusion of the CPN(M) with the Communist Party of Nepal (Unity Centre-Masal) in January 2009 (this led to the adding of 'united' to the party's name). Although also claiming to be Maoist and operating underground, this smaller party had remained uninvolved in the people's war. As part of the fusion agreement, a number of their cadres were given important positions in the UCPN(M) were they allied with the right-wing.

Zig-zag

A thorough evaluation of the evolution of the UCPN(M) needs to take its development during the people's war into account. The faction around Kiran has dated the degeneration of the party to the post-2006 period, arguing that by allying the Maoists with the parliamentary parties and against the king, Bhattarai and Prachanda already surrendered to 'bourgeois democracy'. In the words of Biplab, they have been functioning as 'agents of capitalist parliamentary democracy' ever since. [85] This approach ignores the role of especially India, the United States and the United Nations who have been trying to bring the Maoists into the 'democratic mainstream' through financial incentives, aid-projects and political pressure. It also reduces the political problems of UCPN(M) to one of the subjective orientation of Prachanda and Bhattarai. But the basis of this orientation goes deeper. For instance, a large part of the success of the UCPN(M) during the people's war was thanks to its forging of a large coalition that included many of the poor and oppressed in Nepali society. This was however a coalition on the basis of an essentially bourgeois democratic program and since the CPA, important parts of it have already broken away, especially among the 'national liberation fronts'.

Without doubt, an increasingly right-wing orientation has developed inside the UCPN(M) after 2006, building on a strategy formulated by Bhattarai and Prachanda and accepting the need for the capitalist 'sub-stage' described above. Three moments have been key

in the development of this right-wing orientation. The first was when in May 2009 the first UCPN(M)-led coalition dissolved after Prachanda as prime minister failed to bring the Nepalese army under its control. The army is very much an independent force in Nepali politics and before the abolishing of the monarchy it was a pillar of support for the king. The Royal Nepalese Army (RNA) was never defeated by the Maoists; the royal house kept it out of the operations against the insurgents for a long time, leaving most of the fighting to the armed police. [86] After signing the CPA, close to 20.000 Maoist fighters were restricted to dozens of cantonments. Until the handing over of the keys in late 2011 they retained access to their weapons that were put in UN supervised lockers. But the PLA was in no way a match militarily for the RNA; against 19-20.000 Maoist fighters with little over 3.000 guns (often poor quality ones at that), the government army was over 90.000 strong, trained by the US, Britain and India, armed by the US and later China as well. [87] Biplab, Gaurav and Kiran now vehemently criticize the parliamentary approach of Baburam and Prachanda but this approach was born out of an assessment of the relationship of forces after the signing of the CPA.

Bhattarai and others in the UCPN(M) leadership formulated an intricate plan to neutralize the RNA and 'crack Kathmandu'. First, they formed an alliance with the parliamentary parties and their followers after these had been disenfranchised by the king's grab for power in 2005. This alliance won support from India, one of the most important factors in Nepali politics as New Delhi had grown irritated by the increasingly pro-China orientation of the king. It took the US longer to come around: after 9-11, it had classified the Maoists as 'terrorists' and for a long time it insisted on the necessity of the mainstream political parties and the king to unite against them. However, as it became clear the king's grasp for power had only intensified the crisis and that he was unable to defeat the insurgency, the US too came to support the agreement of the 'Seven Party Alliance' of the parliamentary parties with the Maoists against the

king. As hoped, this alliance succeeded in driving out the king.

The second step for the Maoists would have been the neutralization of the army. The entrance of the UCPN(M) into parliamentary politics was justified as part of the plan for this: under the cover of entering into the parliamentary system, the Maoists would expand their support in the cities, primarily Kathmandu, and prepare for an urban insurrection against which the army would be unable to move. Under the conditions of the CPA, PLA fighters were to be stationed in UN supervised cantonments and to be paid an allowance. A number of PLA fighters however didn't enter the cantonments but were secretly organized in the Young Communist League (YCL). The YCL would be the core of an urban fighting force, possibly assisted by the PLA fighters that could at any time leave their cantonments and take back their weapons.

During the people's war, the UCPN(M) skilfully played out one of its opponent against the other: the royal house against the parliament, India against China, the US against India. This zig-zag of leaning one way one moment, the other the next moment, was called part of the 'Prachanda path', the UCPN(M)'s adaption of Maoism. The party's entry into parliamentary politics, so the leadership claimed, was only a new step on this path. Even the integration of PLA fighters into the government army was presented to the radicals of as part of the plan for taking power: after integration, the Maoist guerillas would carry out agitation aimed at the army's rank and file and be in a position to sabotage the army's operations. Exactly on this point the Maoists were outmaneuvered. India wished to see only a token integration of a few thousand Maoists in what was now called the National Army (NA). [88] Evidently, India had realized the danger of subversion from within the NA by former guerilla's. New Delhi, like Washington, had hoped the Maoists would suffer a defeat in the elections of 2008 and saw these as a way to lock them into the parliamentary politics. [89] After the unexpected electoral victory of the UCPN(M), a new struggle broke out

over who would be the first President of the new republic - a crucial position since as replacement of the king, the president would have command over the army. A contest broke out between the Maoist candidate and Ram Raja Prasad Singh, the candidate of the NC and UML. With all the conservative parties united behind him, Ram Raja Prasad Singh won the election. The NA then provoked a confrontation with Prime Minister Prachanda as it flat out refused to carry out the integration as agreed in the CPA. Instead, the army continued to recruit and refused to integrate the Maoist fighters.

Prachanda then tried to dismiss army head Rookmangud Katawal for violating the CPA that had stipulated that the army-size would be reduced to pre-civil war levels and PLA fighters integrated in the NA. However, the President, as the official commander of the NA, reinstated Katawal and in May 2009 Prachanda stepped down himself. Like during the election of the President, with the guidance of India a grand anti-Maoist coalition took shape and UML-leader Madhav Kumar Nepal became the new Prime Minister. Throughout 2009-10, India was crucial in propping the government of this Prime Minister who had lost in two constituencies in the previous elections.

The Maoists would only be allowed back at the head of the state after dissolving the PLA. This episode revealed the relative weakness of the Maoists in institutional politics and the ability of the Nepali ruling classes and its political representatives to maintain an united front against them. [90]

This led to the second turning point, the general strike/failed uprising of May 2010. The general strike of May 2010 was supposed to have led to the toppling of the government, the formation of a new, Maoist-led government and a new step in the revolution. After Prachanda had stepped down, the UCPN(M) started to mobilize its supporters for what was presented as the 'final push to topple the government'. The Maoists hoped that the political crisis and the obvious lack of legitimacy of Prime Minister Madhav Nepal would work in their

favor and help organize a mobilization against the government. It needs to be pointed out that a strike or *bandh* in Nepal is more than just a work-stoppage, often it includes the blocking of roads and the paralyzing of all commercial activity. Maoist supporters were brought into Kathmandu from the countryside for this strike and were told to prepare for a long, hard struggle. However, the strike - that many on the party's Left hoped would blossom into the long awaited insurrection and lead to the taking of power - failed. After a few very tense days and some clashes in Kathmandu, the UCPN(M) leadership called it off. [91]

During the evaluation of the strike in November, divisions in the party turned out to be insurmountable. For the first time, Prachanda was unable to present a political statement all factions could agree upon. The party's Left blamed the leadership for a lack of nerves, and not carrying the struggle forward. They claimed the strike could have been stronger and that it had been weakened by the Maoist earlier concession to dismantle their parallel power structures in the countryside, the UCPN(M)-led 'people's governments', as had been agreed in the CPA. The UCPN(M) reaffirmed its orientation on seizing power but for the left-wing this was empty talk.

The party's right-wing seems to have drawn opposing conclusions from the experience. For them the strike appears to have shown the brittle character of their support and the inability to win in a direct confrontation with the state. There have been reports that Maoist supporters began leaving the city after only a few days, confused about the character of the movement and its goal (new elections, a new parliament? or revolution?) and complaining about being pressured into participating in the movement and the risks of a confrontation with the army. The Maoists appear to also have made a mistake by timing the protests just as planting season began, prompting many of their peasant supporters to leave for home. [92] The UCPN(M) then agreed to new elections and Bhattarai became prime minister in August 2011. But the price

of this was the signing of a slew of new agreements that committed the government to a liberal economic policy, based on foreign investment. [93] Other agreements further eroded the UCPN(M)'s support with the dissolving of the PLA and the return of lands that had been seized by peasants during the civil war to their 'legal owners'.



Prachanda meanwhile has been the subject of a number of scandals in the last months, involving the use of government money by his jet-setting son and the purchase of a luxury house in Kathmandu's most expensive neighborhood. These are not the only scandals that have been plaguing the UCPN(M). The party's left-wing has been complaining about corruption of cadres for years, at times pushing the leadership to organize anti-corruption drives. [94] Other scandals have also come to light, affecting former PLA-fighters. As described, not all of them entered into the cantonments. The fighters were promised that their allowances would be set aside for them but a lot of this money has gone 'missing'. These scandals have not only hurt the support for Maoists, who during the people's war gained sympathy among many of Nepal's poor with their dedication and simple lifestyle. They have also led to conflicts in the party, with clashes between pro- and anti-Prachanda groups of the former PLA. [95]

'Without an army, the people have nothing' [96]

The handing over of the keys of the weapon lockers in September 2011 was the third key moment in the evolution of the UCPN(M). After the dissolving of UCPN(M)-led base areas, the local 'people's governments' and the return of seized lands, the disarmament and dissolving of the PLA was seen by the party's left-wing as the final capitulation of the leadership before the existing power structure. It was clear this dissolving

was in no way part of the kind of tactical maneuvering outlined above: against the wishes of the Maoists only a part of their fighters were integrated in the NA. Former guerrilla-commanders that were integrated were separated from their men who were scattered over different units. And only a small part, around 3000, of the former PLA-fighters were integrated after the government made the offer to resign, receive compensation and go home more attractive than the terms of integration. Many former guerillas were not even given weapons but instead given jobs as unarmed forest-guards and the like! Instead of the PLA subverting the army from the inside, the Maoists were dissolved into the much larger NA. [97]

Special mention needs to be made of the role of the UN and international NGO's in this whole process. The United Nations Missions in Nepal (UNMIN) was crucial in first establishing the cooperation between the parliamentary parties and the Maoists and later the demobilization and disarmament of the PLA. The Maoist leadership agreed to the UN DDR program (Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration) program and the UN assisted in implementing a number of the more moderate demands of the Maoists: the abolition of the monarchy and political participation of marginalized groups like the lower caste Dalits and national minorities.

There is not much hope that the mainstream of the UCPN(M) will change its orientation. Baburam Bhattarai has been explicit in saying Nepal needs to go to a whole generation of 'capitalist development' and Prachanda declared Switzerland his dream for Nepal. [98] Where before the UCPN(M) boasted they would make Nepal into a 'base area of the world revolution', they now urge the Indian Maoists to give up the armed struggle. Where before the government of China was attacked as traitors to Maoism (and an ally of the king during the last phase of the civil war), UCPN(M)-members now tour the country on invitation of the bureau of external relations of the Chinese CP, writing fawning reports about their travels. [99] More significantly, the

dissolving of first the people's governments and later the PLA has ended the situation of dual power that was created during the people's war. The 'red faction' in the UCPN(M) claims Prachanda and Bhattarai are effectively reducing the UCPN(M) to one parliamentary party among others - and one with relatively little experience in Nepali style elections or influence in patronage politics at that. The ongoing integration of UCPN(M)-leaders in Kathmandu's traditional politics has also alienated many of their followers. The party's maneuvering has angered its most radical supporters who have been asked so many times to be patient and prepare for an insurrection that never came. Once lauded by his followers as the greatest Leninist strategist alive, dissident Maoists members now burn effigies of Prachanda.

Stepping forward?

Whatever one may think of the failure of the orientation of Bhattarai and Prachanda and their current trajectory, their post-2006 strategy was a serious attempt at answering the difficult question of how to make a revolution in country like Nepal, an extremely underdeveloped, dominated country, 'caught like a yam between two boulders' (China and India). The last few years the UCPN(M) developed a remarkably flexible and open kind of Maoism, embracing multi-party democracy, and widening its ideological horizon by drawing on formerly taboo figures like Rosa Luxemburg. In what must have been shocking to orthodox Maoists, Bhattarai even approvingly quoted Trotsky.

An example of the ability of the UCPN(M) to change was its shift regarding homosexuality; during the war, they denounced homosexuality as a sign of 'bourgeois decadence' and after the CPA, Maoists harassed LGBT-people. After internal and external criticism, the UCPN(M) reevaluated their stance and under their leadership the Nepali government defended legal rights for sexual minorities nationally and internationally. In 2008 homosexual relationships were (finally) decriminalized and in 2011, in an

international first, Nepal officially recognized a third gender (like other South Asian countries, Nepal has a long tradition of third-gender communities that however have been very marginalized). [100]

Other examples of the genuinely progressive character of the UCPN(M)-led movement are of course the abolishing of the monarchy and the Hindu character of the state but also the increased role of women in public and political life. The interim constitution stipulates a 33 percent ratio of women representatives for the parliament and the Maoists have by far the largest proportion of female parliamentarians. The party has long campaigned against arranged marriages, domestic abuse and for

rights of women. [101] But significant as these steps are, they are not ending the crushing poverty in the countryside or laying the groundwork for a more egalitarian economic order.



The left-wing of the UCPN(M) commands significant support, claiming that around a third of the party's base and lawmakers will go with them. But at the moment this left-wing seems to have little perspective for carrying the struggle forward. They insist that the next step must be the seizure of power but admit that the UCPN(M) is weaker now than it was six years. The only thing they seemingly offer is a return to the

people's war and the rebuilding of the PLA and people's governments. Confronted with what they consider the betrayal of the Bhattarai and Prachanda factions, they are returning to the classic Maoist stratagems and concepts. But after ten years of war, the winning of some democratic concessions and the prospect of further, lucrative inclusion in the clientelist networks of Nepali politics, the taste for war has declined among significant parts of the old pro-Maoist coalition of peasants and national minorities. Dissatisfaction among supporters of the UCPN(M) is likely to increase, freeing up room for a new Left – but if the recent history of Nepal has shown one thing, it is that the old forms of thought are no longer sufficient.

“The democratic content in self-determination struggles must be safeguarded”

12 June 2012, by Anzelmo Guerrero, B. Skanthakumar

Tell us briefly about the origin and social base of your party?

The comrades who built the Revolutionary Workers Party of Mindanao (RPM-M) were once part of the (Maoist) Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). We were in the leadership of the CPP, especially in the southern part of the Philippines, that is, in Mindanao.

In this region, there are three main communities or ‘tri-peoples’: the Bangsamoro (Moro or Muslim nation); the Katawhang Lumad (non-Muslim and non-Christian indigenous peoples); and settlers and their descendants (mainly Christians from the majority nationality who migrated from central Luzon and the Visayas). We were tasked by the CPP to work with these three peoples. Our strategy at the time was that of “encircling the cities from the countryside”.

On the island of Mindanao, the indigenous peoples and the Bangsamoro were concentrated in the interior, whereas the settlers were in the urbanized settlements along the coast. So, we began organizing the indigenous and the Muslims in the mountains and plains ... to encircle the cities populated by Christians!

We did not root ourselves in those communities in defense of their interests or for their right to freely determine their future, but for the purpose of carrying out the strategy of the protracted peoples' war. Ironically, the party militants implementing this perspective were generally from the majority Christian community themselves!

We were trying to organize the Bangsamoro and the indigenous along class lines, when social classes were not clearly developed in these

communities, and our comrades were dying in the process. For example, the farmers identified with the clan and would report on our propaganda and activities to the clan leader (datu or sometimes sultan), to whom they were often related. So we drew the lesson that we should organize on clan lines, and we succeeded.

From the 1980s we began organizing people from Mindanao who were studying in Manila. These were the children of the upper middle class or elite of Mindanao, especially from the Bangsamoro. Also, we were able to organize others who were displaced by the conflict. We succeeded in recruiting them to the Party and many became full-timers. Through them we did legal work through front organizations.

What was your analysis of the right to self-determination and the

national question in the Philippines, and how has it evolved?

In 1976 the CPP formulated its policy on the right to self-determination in the context of the Philippines. We supported the right to self-determination of the Bangsamoro, based upon the highly repressive nature of the Marcos regime, and the CPP supported their right to take up arms in waging that struggle.

Now, this was a flawed application of that right because it was tied to the issue of state repression. We did not then understand that the right to self-determination is a natural right of peoples, regardless of the political regime etc.

The danger of the CPP's position - which we were engaged in debating within that party before the split (actually, our expulsion) - was that it assumed that once the national democratic revolution (which as Maoists was our goal) had been achieved, thereafter the Bangsamoro and the indigenous peoples would no longer be eligible to exercise their right to self-determination!

This was the historical experience in China too, where the Chinese CP initially supported the movements of indigenous peoples but after it had won power, denied that right as if it ceases to exist. Similarly, in Nicaragua where the indigenous Miskito's joined the revolution against Somoza, but were told that post-revolution they were no longer oppressed and therefore there was no need for any political arrangement that considered their aspiration for self-rule.

So this error of the CPP was also common to other Communist parties elsewhere: the belief that the right to self-determination was appropriate in the context of feudal or capitalist relations but no longer valid after a revolutionary process led by Communists.

Our criticism of the CPP line was that as Marxist-Leninists we do not organize in all sectors, but only among the most advanced part of the working class that is politically conscious. Therefore our program is most relevant to that section of the working class alone, and not even to the

working class as a whole - though of course we aspire to convince those sections also of its correctness.

So where does this leave other classes and groups who are not organized by the Party such as the peasantry, the middle-class, the indigenous, and the minority nationalities? Our view was that as the Party did not organize in these sectors, it should support their own program as expressed by the democratic and political associations created through their self-organization, rather than forcing our program upon them.

Let me put it another way. If the socialist revolution succeeds, then it is (or should be) automatically understood that there will be a multi-party system. Even if it was one party that led the revolution, it does not have a political monopoly, and not can it impose its program on others who have the equal right to organize their own political associations and promote their own program. Likewise, as Marxist-Leninists in Mindanao, we do not have the right to impose our program on those whom we have not yet won to our program.

The right to self-determination struggle is a natural right of people to freely determine their own economic, political and cultural future. The role of party members who are also members of communities exercising their right to self-determination is to ensure that the democratic content of those struggles is safeguarded, both in the course of those movements, and once their goal has been realized.

Why is this? Well, the self-determination struggle is a multi-class movement and includes - as for example in the case of the Bangsamoro - its bourgeois class too which often provides its political leadership. While struggling for the political objective of removing the oppression of the minority nationality, the democratic content - by which I mean the participation of workers and peasants' - should be already there, so that their interests are also protected in the future political order.

Otherwise, once the national oppression by the majority nationality is removed, it will be replaced by the oppression of the ruling class within

the minority nationality. World history would attest to this dynamic.

How does the RPM-M relate to the movements for self-determination of the Bangsamoro?

When we were in the CPP we had close links with the Bangsamoro movements, beginning with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). Even when the MNLF leadership-in-exile was based in Libya in the 1970s, the CPP also maintained an office in Tripoli for liaison with them.

We had many debates with the MNLF. Their position was that our role was to combat the State, while they should organize the Bangsamoro. We responded that we would not build competing organizations, but that our members from the minority nationality should be able to work freely among the working class, peasantry and urban poor and that these sections should be integrated in the self-determination struggle.

Similarly we worked with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) from its inception. We have been debating with them recently too, regarding their conception of an "ancestral domain" of the Bangsamoro, as it directly conflicts with the rights of the indigenous communities who occupy the lands that are being claimed.

The MILF leaders argue that the first stage is to win these lands into their control, and thereafter the question of the rights of the indigenous can be addressed! The leaders of the indigenous peoples reply, "why not discuss now...why wait until after the struggle is won?"

This is another illustration of what we mean by the democratic content of the self-determination struggle. We agree with the indigenous peoples that they need to be consulted and their rights have to be respected; otherwise, one war (against the majority nationality) will be replaced by another war (between the minority nationalities).

The MILF is also a bourgeois-led movement and this is very clear from the composition of its "peace panel" that is currently conducting negotiations with the government of

the Philippines

There is a gulf between the leadership and the ordinary Bangsamoro who don't understand the deep and radical meaning of 'self-determination'.

In my view, there is a parallel here with the LTTE [Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam] and its relationship with Tamil people in Sri Lanka. The LTTE was leading the struggle but it didn't value the role of peasants and other oppressed social classes in the movement for self-determination. It believed that only its leadership knew best how to conduct the struggle, and also how to rule the state [Tamil Eelam] that it wished to create. Unfortunately, the LTTE also antagonized the oppressed among the majority Sinhala nationality, through targeting of civilians and suicide bombings, instead of making them allies of the Tamil people.

How do you take up the question of self-determination with the majority nationality in Mindanao who may identify more with the State?

Yes, we are very conscious of this issue. Our approach is to encourage the tri-peoples to work together on their democratic rights; which of course is viewed with suspicion by the leaderships of these peoples because they fear that they will lose control of their communities once the oppressed become conscious of their rights. Our perspective is that social liberation cannot wait until after national liberation but must be pursued together.

We link the problems of the working class in the majority community with those of the poor and oppressed in the minority nationalities, and try and show them that the causes are common and therefore the solutions can be found when they act together. We explain that unless the democratic content is present in the self-determination struggle, then once the goal has been achieved, the oppressed will find that all that has happened is that one (external) oppressor has been replaced by another who is internal to your community.

If the political expression of the struggle for self-determination is

secession, then that too as a proletarian party is what we support. If later, through democratic decision, there is a voluntary union between Mindanao and the rest of the Philippines then we would support that too. However, for now, there should be no doubt in the minds of the minority nationalities that we are with them in their struggle for self-determination.

What were the consequences of the split in the CPP in the early 1990s for your revolutionary organizing in Mindanao?

Actually, we just carried on doing our work among the Bangsamoro and the indigenous, as had been our responsibility when we were members of the CPP. However, we maintained our armed units [Revolutionary Peoples' Army - RPA] because we have to be able to defend ourselves in the course of our political work.

It is a complex situation in Mindanao where in addition to the armed forces of the Government of the Philippines, and the New Peoples' Army (NPA) of the CPP, we also confront the armed goons of political warlords. Even as we try to organize the tri-peoples on democratic issues and struggles, we also have to be able to defend the gains of peoples' movements and struggles.

I should explain that we don't only organize on the island of Mindanao. We also work with the majority nationality from Mindanao who have migrated to the northern (Luzon) and central (Visayas) regions of the country and try to win their support for the self-determination struggle.

In this way, we want to ensure that any 'peace' agreement between the elites of the Bangsamoro and the Government of the Philippines is subjected to the critique of the majority nationality too and that their issues and concerns are also integrated.

In addition to working with migrants from Mindanao in other regions of the country, how does the RPM-M relate to other revolutionary groups and parties based on the majority nationality

in those regions?

The 'split' in the CPP was unplanned and unforeseen. The debates had begun in the late 1980s. The Party fractured on the lines of its regional bureaus and territories which were more or less intact and retained their own cohesion.

For example, in the central or Visayas region, we were supported by the highest unit of the Party known as the 'Commission'. Initially in Mindanao, 4 of the 7 party regional committees supported us 'Rejectionists', but after the counter-ideological offensive, only the Central Mindanao Region and its armed wing remained outside the CPP. The Manila-Rizal region, which was numerically the largest, left the Party en-bloc.

As an underground organization, because of fears for our security and infiltration by state security agents, CPP militants did not know many other militants outside of our region or sectoral area of work. This was one factor which impeded the unity of those who rejected the strategy of protracted peoples' war.

In 1996, we convened the first ideological summit where we gathered those former Maoist organizations or Party structures that had territorial command: such as our group from Mindanao, others from the Visayas, and from Luzon. We had an open debate - which was new for us because nothing like it was (or is) allowed in the CPP - and developed our critique of the old Party and its strategy. So this was the period when we began developing political relations with each other.

Then in 1998, we in Mindanao became aware of the demoralization that had set in among many of the leaders of the other groups, for reasons of age and exhaustion, and to counter this we boldly called for the unification of the rejectionist forces.

We invited groups to Mindanao and prepared a unity congress based upon written documents. At the conclusion of the congress we proclaimed the Revolutionary Workers Party of the Philippines (RPM-P) and its military wing, the Revolutionary Proletarian Army/Alex Boncayo Brigade

(RPA/ABB).

One of our errors was that we immediately engaged in peace talks with the Government of the Philippines, before we politically consolidated ourselves. Deals were done to buy the support of the RPM-P leadership for an end to armed hostilities.

Finally in 2000, the peace agreement was signed by the leadership, and took its members by surprise as they had been excluded from the process and final decision. However, the only organized opposition was in Mindanao.

We formed the Revolutionary Workers Party of Mindanao on May 1st 2001, although we only publicly announced our formation in the following year. We knew we needed to consolidate ourselves, politically and militarily,

before we were attacked by our erstwhile comrades, in addition to all the other forces ranged against us.

As we anticipated would happen, our main camp was bombarded by the Armed Forces of the Philippines in 2002. We believe that its location could only have been disclosed by those who had visited there and stayed with us during the unity drive. Anyway, we had decided beforehand, not to die defending the camp, but to abandon it and build new camps elsewhere.

Still we didn't give up our will to unify, and in 2005 we joined with others to form the broad coalition Laban Ng Masa (â€˜Power of the Masses'). We were even willing to bury our differences with those ex-comrades in the RPM-P who had signed that rotten peace agreement with the

government, and most likely betrayed us. Many of the personalities of the Filipino Left such as Joel Rocamora, Horacio â€˜Boy' Morales, Walden Bello and Roland Llamas participated. But it wasn't successful.

Now, our perspective is not to rush into organizational unification. We want to have good relations with diverse groups and currents on the Filipino Left, including the Partido Ng Manggagawa (Labor Party - PM) and the Marxist-Leninist Party of the Philippines (MLPP). We think we should begin by working together on common issues and common campaigns, and collaborating in educational work, and use these experiences to know and understand each other better, so that in time we can also achieve lasting political convergence.

[...]

“The LPP is a socialist party, very much involved in the day-to-day problems of the people”

11 June 2012, by Farooq Tariq, Salman Ali

Farooq Tariq is a leading left-wing activist. He is on the Executive Committee of the Labour Party Pakistan (LPP) and is active in many working-class struggles. For his struggle against military dictatorship, he has spent years in exile and been jailed at least half-a-dozen times. In an interview with the Viewpoint, he comments on the political scene in the country. Read on.

Salman Ali - You have been active in left politics since 1974. What were your early political activities? How did you embrace Marxism as your political ideology?

Farooq Tariq - It is a long journey. I joined left-wing politics when I did not know what was right-wing and what was left. You can say it was a mere accident that made me a political

activist. In 1974, when I was a student, I was in favour of women rights and believed that women have a right to work with men in each and every sphere of social and economic life of society. I was against the biases and restrictions imposed upon the womenfolk of our country in the name of culture and religion. Islami Jamaat Tulba (IJT), the student wing of Jamaat Islami, did not like my views and I was beaten up by its goons on campus. This incident made me political activist; with the passage of time I grew nearer to a left-wing ideology and politics.

I did my masters in applied Psychology in 1976 and then joined my family business at Toba Tek Singh. After the imposition of Martial Law in July 1977 I came back to Lahore and started writing articles opposing

martial law and in favour of democracy. I first interviewed Benazir Bhutto in September 1977 when she visited Faisalabad, then Lyall Pur. The interview was published in the Karachi-based weekly Al-Fatah. In those days Al-Fatah staunchly opposed martial law and supported the struggle for democracy and human rights.

In our struggle against Martial Law, our main opponents were religious fundamentalists. This reality made us leftists without any precise knowledge of leftism. In 1978, due to my anti-martial law political activities I was forced to leave Pakistan. I spent almost some eight years in The Netherlands and in England. During that time I helped establish the Struggle Group, which was active in Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's

Party. By 1986 the situation had improved in Pakistan and I returned home. The Struggle Group needed to develop roots in Pakistan's soil. But after Benazir's first stint in power, we concluded that the PPP would only serve the ruling classes. We left the PPP to begin campaigning for an independent workers party. After building a good trade union base, the Labour Party Pakistan (LPP) was launched in 1997.

Today we have a membership of over 3,000. One of the eight big trade union federations—the National Trade Union Federation (NTUF)—is a sympathetic body of the LPP. The NTUF represents over hundred thousand industrial workers. Our woman members set up the Women Working Help Line (WWHL), which has a membership of about 2,000.

Some people have criticised the LPP for being too tied up with NGOs. What do you think?

We take part in a Joint Action Committee for People's Rights, which includes 28 large NGOs in Lahore along with two other political parties (the National Workers' Party and the Christian National Party). There has been a division in the social movement in Pakistan over how much we should oppose fundamentalism and how much we should oppose American imperialism. Those NGOs who oppose fundamentalism have been physically attacked by fundamentalists, who have burned down their offices. Some NGOs favoured a measured attack on Afghanistan by American imperialism. We opposed that and were able to create something of a balanced position within the movement.

Our aim is to build the social movement along class lines. If we had a mass party in Pakistan most of these NGOs would have joined the Labour Party and campaigned through it. But since there is not a mass alternative of left force, NGOs play a role in organizing the social movements. The NGOs promote a liberalism that supports basic democratic, human values.

Do you think NGO's has damaged the work of left parties?

There are two kind of work, good and bad. That is the case within the NGO sector as well. In Pakistan, and especially in Lahore, there are many NGOs. They are issue-based and have limited influence. Some work with left parties for the welfare and capacity-building of local people. I think if these NGOs continue to work with left-based parties, we will have a chance to build a people-centered infrastructure that can bring positive change in the future.

What do you think about Pakistan's established political parties?

From the time of independence until today our country has been unable to establish basic democratic institutions. Most of the time so-called mainstream politicians jockey with each for power within the current undemocratic and corrupt system. To the detriment of our people and the progress of society they are committed to maintaining the social and economic status quo. All the political parties are dishonest; their leaders are doing nothing for the betterment of the country. Only representatives from the ordinary class can end this unjust system. The problems of ordinary men and women can only be understood by ourselves; only our representatives could ensure genuine solutions.

We want to form an electoral left alliance and we are talking to the left parties. We would like to organize around demands such as no to privatisation; nationalise all the privatised industries and the large monopolies; no to downsizing in the public sector—over 100,000 public employees' jobs have been lost in the last two years—demand a minimum wage of 7,000 rupees; cut the defence budget drastically; repudiation of the foreign debt on the basis that it is odious. We believe one fundamental step would be to cut the military budget and spend it on education and development. This will be an effective way to combat religious fundamentalism.

Some news commentators predict that Imran Khan will be in power in the future. What are your thoughts?

I really respect Imran Khan as a cricketer and as a social worker. But I personally believe that Imran Khan, if ever comes in power, will be one of the saddest moments for Pakistan. Why? Because he believes in the capitalist system and thinks it can reform itself. He attempts to inspire others through his statistics and talks on the various news channels. But his vision of reforming capitalism is a dream. People who think he can bring revolution to Pakistan are under an illusion.

Recently we read that Tehrik-e-Insaaf had meeting with LPP? What were the objectives and what results came out from this meeting?

Yes, we had a meeting with Tehreek-e-Insaaf. Nothing was decided or finalized. It was just table talk between the workers of PTI and LPP workers. We are working for the rights of working class and we will do this in future too.

What does LPP say about Kashmir issue between India and Pakistan?

The Kashmir issue was created by the British as they formally left the Sub-Continent. They wanted to set up a situation in which states would fight each other. The issue can be solved if the politicians themselves are interested in it.

The LPP stands for an independent Kashmir—the right of self-determination for the Kashmiri masses, independent of Pakistan and India. We demand an immediate end to state brutality on both sides and the withdrawal of both Pakistani and Indian armies. Kashmir belongs to neither Pakistan nor India. It is for Kashmiri people to decide; they must resolve the situation by their own hands.

What is your balance sheet of the present government?

I personally believe that present government has failed to deliver anything over their last four years in office. They have carried out Musharraf's policies. We can see the inflation rate increasing with the passage of time. The present

government governs in an ad hoc way. It doesn't have capacity to undertake issues and stay focused. I don't hesitate to say that this government is among the worst in the history of Pakistan. And I am sure that PPP will lose in the coming election. They will probably have a result similar to what they received in 1997, with only 27 percent of the vote.

Is there a future for left politics in Pakistan?

Pakistan is not a haven for left ideas.

It's a theocratic state, totally dominated by religious ideas. I hope that with the passage of time a countrywide left political party or alliance will emerge and shape an alternative to such an undemocratic state. The country's left is playing a critical role in the struggle for democracy and rights of workers.

We don't raise slogans of revolution now or claim that socialism will solve everything. The LPP is a socialist party, very much involved in the day-

to-day problems of the people. We develop campaigns around burning issues such as land rights. We have founded the Anti-Privatisation Alliance of Pakistan. We champion woman rights and human rights; we wage a struggle against child labour. We always try to bring together different groups and different trends to effectively network to accomplish concrete gains.

FROM VIEWPOINT ONLINE ISSUE NO. 103, JUNE 1, 2012:
<http://www.viewpointonline.net/imra...>

Call for an international week of action, 20-27 June 2012, for the release of Baba Jan and his comrades

10 June 2012, by Danielle Sabai, Pierre Rousset

For months now, a solidarity campaign has been underway in Pakistan itself [102] and internationally [103] to obtain the release of Baba Jan and his four comrades: Iftikhar Hussain, Amir Ali, Ameer Khan and Rashid Minhas. They were imprisoned in Gilgit, northern Himalayan country. Twice severely beaten and tortured [104] they were transferred to a prison with hardened criminals in late April where it was feared that their lives were in danger. The purpose of this transfer could indeed be that they were assassinated by other prisoners.

It is important not to take such a situation lightly. Not only are the cadres of popular organizations (peasants, trade unions ...) slaughtered every year in the country, but prominent figures have been killed by security forces, like the late Governor Punjab Salman Taseer [105], or threatened with death: as is the case today for Asma Jahangir [106] Former president of the Bar Association of the Supreme Court and the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (an NGO), she worked for the United Nations as Special Rapporteur on freedom of religions and beliefs.

Remember also that Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto was shot dead in broad daylight and that a commission of UN investigation concluded that the murder could have been "avoided" if the authorities had provided an "effective protection"... [107]

Faced with the threat to the "Hunza 5," the solidarity campaign was relaunched in a hurry, has grown and achieved early success: Twelve days after being wounded, Baba Jan and his comrades were finally visited by a doctor, organizations defending human rights began to mobilize and the Pakistani press began to take up their situation.

While their "crime" is to have supported a population which was first the victim of devastating floods in the Hunza Valley and then of police violence "with two dead during a demonstration" Baba Jan and his comrades were brought before an anti-terrorism court. They appealed against the decision, but the hearing is constantly being postponed on various pretexts (it is now scheduled for June 13). It is feared that the authority wants to obtain a conviction before

their appeal can be heard.

The solidarity campaign must be intensified with urgency. In particular a week of international action is being called from 20 to 27 June.

The solidarity campaign: what has already been done

Actions taken to date have helped to break the isolation in which the "Hunza 5" were kept and they may have saved Baba Jan's life. They should also serve as a fulcrum to expand the solidarity campaign. What needs emphasis here is that the initiatives involve a fairly wide range of personalities and movements.

Of particular interest:

Support from personalities. - On May 7, an "Open Letter" was published in defence of Baba Jan and his friends, originally signed by

thirteen writers and academics in Britain and the USA, including Tariq Ali, Noam Chomsky, Vijay

Prashad. [108]

Support from organizations defending human rights. On May 7,

the Commission of Human Rights (HRC) launched an “urgent appeal” in defense of the “Hunza 5” [