

International VIEWPOINT

International Viewpoint—magazine of the Fourth International

IV442 November 2011

MEXICO

The OPT, a proletarian alternative to the crisis of political parties

EUROPEAN UNION

On the European Union crisis and the dynamics of resistances

DOSSIER

Italy Greece Spanish state Pakistan

Arab revolutions

Britain

Egypt

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Obituary

Crisis of capitalism

CHINA

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G20 summit

Thailand

European Union

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G 20

Tunisia

International Viewpoint, the monthly English-language magazine of the Fourth International, is a window to radical alternatives world-wide, carrying reports, analysis and debates from all corners of the globe. Correspondents in over 50 countries report on popular struggles, and the debates that are shaping the left of tomorrow.

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International Viewpoint, 2 rue Richard Lenoir, 93100 Montreuil, France · ISSN 0294-2925 ·
www.internationalviewpoint.org

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ARAB REVOLUTIONS

The revolution continues

GILBERT ACHCAR ·

The revolution continues everywhere, defying attempts to abort it or divert it from its progressive and liberating course. These efforts are sponsored by the United States – protector of most of the afflicted regimes – and supervised by the bastions of Arab reaction in the Gulf oil states. They are engaged in a vain attempt to extinguish the flames of revolution by dousing them with petrodollars. And they are being aided and abetted – in exchange for a promised slice of the cake – by leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood backed by the emirate of Qatar and by Salafi groups backed by the Saudi kingdom.

Yet the revolution continues everywhere, as in Yemen, where "Our Revolution Continues" was the name given to last Friday's rallies rejecting the "compromise" agreement to which [President] Saleh, grinning broadly, put his signature. The Saudi kingdom is trying to impose the deal on the Yemenis in order to perpetuate Saleh's regime, like Mubarak's in Egypt, while Saleh himself continues running the show from behind the scenes in Yemen itself or from the Saudi kingdom – the sanctuary for corrupt despots, which welcomed Ben Ali, offered to host Mubarak, and treated Saleh after his injury.

The revolution continues everywhere, as in Egypt, where the masses have taken to the streets in a new uprising against military rule. They have realised that the army command, which for a while they took to be loyal to the people, is an inseparable part – indeed a mainstay – of the regime whose downfall the people had demanded. The greatest of the Arab revolutions in scale and importance has regained its vitality. The vision and resolve of those who carried on the struggle undeterred by tempo-

rary isolation have been vindicated. They were confident that the massive energy unleashed on January 25 had not been exhausted, and that it must continue to be harnessed in the democratic and social struggles. These twin struggles can only succeed when welded together. It happened when the tyrant was brought down, and will need to happen again on a wider scale once the workers' movement has consolidated its new organization.

The revolution continues everywhere, as in Tunisia, where in recent days the masses have risen in the Gafsa mining basin, whose 2008 uprising set the stage for the revolution that broke out two years later in Sidi Bouzid. They have revived the original demand of the Tunisian revolution: the right to employment. They have not been taken in by the "orderly transition" arranged by the dominant social "elite" to preserve its status, after ousting Ben Ali as a sacrificial lamb. This "elite" is trying today to co-opt yesterday's oppositionists.

The revolution continues everywhere, as in Syria, where the popular struggle keeps intensifying, in defiance of the regime's brutality and atrocious repression. Growing numbers of soldiers are daring to defect from the ranks of the army in order to truly carry out their duty of defending the people. Calls for foreign military intervention made by the right wing of the opposition are meanwhile being foiled. The right hopes that foreign intervention will hand them power on a steel platter, fearing that the popular uprising may succeed in toppling the regime on its own.

The revolution continues everywhere, as in Libya, where voices denouncing attempts to subject the country to foreign tutelage are growing louder. The Amazigh revolutionaries, who played a big part in liberating the country from the tyrant's rule, have refused to recognise the new government, because

it did not acknowledge their rights. Social demands are increasingly being raised, both in the regions that were most deprived under the former regime, and in the heart of the capital. All this in the absence of an apparatus holding a monopoly of arms and capable of protecting those who accumulated wealth and privilege during Gaddafi's protracted rule.

The revolution continues everywhere, as in Morocco, where a majority of people boycotted the elections by means of which the monarchy tried to contain popular protests, in the hope that its aides in the "loyal opposition" would be able to quiet the volcano. But it continues to rumble, in the form of demonstrations staged by the genuine opposition. And intolerable living conditions make a major eruption inevitable.

The revolution continues everywhere, as in Bahrain, where the rebellious masses were not duped by the "fact-finding" pantomime which the US imposed on the kingdom to ease through its planned arms-supply deal. They are continuing to demonstrate and protest, day after day, convinced that victory will ultimately be theirs, and cannot be denied them forever by the Al Khalifa dynasty and its patron the House of Saud. Instead, the latter's day of reckoning will unavoidably come.

The revolution continues everywhere, including in the Saudi kingdom, where the people of Qatif rose up some days ago, undeterred by the regime's

deadly repression. They will continue their struggle until its "contagion" spreads to every part of the Arabian Peninsula and to its entire people, despite the malicious sectarian incitement which has become the last ideological weapon of the House of Saud's tyranny and the obscurantist Wahhabi establishment which, along with their US protectors, props them up.

When the House of Saud's throne in the Arabian Peninsula falls, so will the principal bastion of Arab reaction, and the oldest ally and intermediary of US hegemony in our region (older even than the Zionist ally). On that day the whole autocratic and exploitative Arab order will have collapsed.

But until that day comes, the revolution must continue. It will definitely experience failures, setbacks, backlashes, tragedies, traps and conspiracies. As the main leader of the Chinese Revolution once put it: "Revolution is not a dinner party, not an essay, nor a painting, nor a piece of embroidery; it cannot be advanced softly, gradually..." The revolution must thus march tirelessly on, keeping in mind another famous maxim from one of the leaders of the French Revolution: "Those who make revolutions half way only dig their own graves. What constitutes a republic is the destruction of all that stands in its way."

This article first published in al-akhbar english on 29 November 2011, is an edited translation from the Arabic Edition.

BRITAIN

Trade unions take on crisis-ridden government

Public opinion is strongly in support of the strikes despite desperate attempts by the government to isolate those taking action. The coalition, consisting of the Conservative Party (popularly referred to as Tories) together with the Liberal Democrats as junior partners has unsuccessfully tried to pit workers in the private sector against those in the public sector but to little avail. A poll for the BBC published on November 29 showed 61 per cent in support of the strike.

This strike is now by far the most significant initiative in the fight against cuts, privatisations and austerity drive. It is a remarkable development in a situation where the trade unions in Britain have been almost dormant for a very long time – since Tory Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's defeat of the Miner's Strike in 1984.

It is the product of several key developments taken over the past year which have pushed the movement forward. The first was the student revolt a year ago which electrified the struggle and exposed the lethargy of the trade union movement, which, despite conference speeches had still to take any form of action.

Then in March half a million turned out for the TUC London demonstration, making it far bigger and more militant than the organisers had anticipated. Around the same time UK Uncut emerged as an important and innovative direct action group.

This was followed In June by the highly successful strike by the teaching and civil service unions. This brought large numbers of young teachers and civil servants into strike action and onto the streets for the first time making it a game changer for the unions. The strike was a tribute to those in the teaching and civil service unions – not least Mark

Serwotka of the Civil Servant's PCS and left-wingers on the Executive of the National Union of Teachers union who fought long and hard to deliver the action and make it a big success.

The November 30 strike is a big step forward over previous actions. Most of the teaching and civil service unions already had live ballot results which allowed them to take action on November 30 without reballoting. These include: the PCS, the NUT, the University and College Union (UCU), the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, the Welsh teachers union the UCAC.

The vote by UNISON, Britain's biggest union which organises across the public and voluntary sectors, with 245,358 in favour and 70,253 against, put the strike on course to be the most important such action for a generation. It is now by far the most significant initiative in the fight against the coalition cuts.

Following the UNISON result a whole swathe of other unions have followed suit from the EIS, the Scottish teachers union, Unite and the GMB (both of which are general unions but with significant memberships in the public as well as the private sectors), the NASUWT teaching union, the NAHT head teachers' union, the FDA civil service union, Prospect, the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, and NIPSA the Northern Ireland civil service union. All have delivered resounding yes votes with turn outs higher than in parliamentary elections. In all thirty unions will be taking strike action on November 30. Such united action has not been seen in Britain for a very long time.

The strikes are not just in defence of pensions – important as that issue is. They are widely seen as strikes against the whole of the coalition's cuts and austerity agenda. They seem to have been organised in this way to avoid the draconian anti-union

laws – the most repressive in Europe – which outlaw solidarity action.

But Len McCluskey, the General Secretary of UNITE (Britain's second biggest union) said that the strike "may be about protecting the pensions of our members against the Osborne onslaught, but just as importantly it is about standing up for an alternative policy, an alternative society."

He continued, "In the 1970s such crises were blamed wrongly on overpowerful trade unions. Today no-one can deny that it is unregulated, untamed capitalism to blame."

The decision of the Government to offer some marginal concessions – a slightly better accrual rate and some protection for workers close to retirement – just as the first ballot results were coming in was an attempt to split the strike. The unions, to their credit, rejected them and decided that the strike would go ahead.

This was a sign of weakness on the government's part. It was not a part of their plan, which was to face the unions down hard line and enforce their full terms. The offer was a clear sign that the coalition is losing confidence in its ability to see the struggle through.

The reasons for this are not difficult to see. They are shocked that they are facing a strike of three million workers at this stage and they are faced with the spectacular failure of their economic perspective, which, by whatever measure used, is falling apart in front of their eyes. They are facing the slide towards a double-dip recession with no chance of reversing it in time for the next election – which was the plan behind the coalition agreement. If they did not face a weak and compromised opposition, and did not have the media wholeheartedly on their side in the debate over the debt and the cuts, they would have been lucky to survive until now.

The coalition's problems are compounded by the economic and political tsunami taking place in the Euro Zone, which threatens to overshadow and derail anything the coalition might do in Britain. This

is exemplified by the catastrophe facing Greece, the contagion overtaking Italy, the imminent break-up of the Euro Zone, and the paralysis of the G20.

The crisis in the European Union has also triggered a remarkable revolt of Tory Eurosceptics, who are taking the chance to vent their nationalistic and xenophobic spleen. In fact Cameron is facing a bigger and more vociferous revolt than that faced by John Major in the 1990s – the ones he called 'the bastards'.

All this underlines the extent to which Cameron has swung the Tory party back to Thatcherism and the rabid rightwing nature of recent Tory MP intakes. It is also politically divisive within the coalition with the hapless ultra-pro-EU Lib Dems caught in the middle of this mayhem disingenuously defending a coalition which continues to use them as convenient shields for Tory policies.

The lesson from all this for the trade unions and the anti-cuts movement is clear. This is exactly the time to pile on the pressure and build the fight back to its full potential. It is the time not only to maximise opposition to the cuts but is a real opportunity to put the trade unions back centre stage where they have not been for a very long time.

The unions have been organising to make the strike as solid and effective as possible and building their organisation on the ground. The education unions were boosted by the strike in June. This strike is starting to do the same right across the public sector with unions like UNISON being inundated with new applications to join.

The whole of the labour movement and the anti-cuts movement will be backing the strike in any and every way possible. Trade union demonstrations, student demonstrations, occupations, and protests will take place in at least 1000 towns and cities right across the country.

An important new factor in this is the inspirational Occupy Movement with its highly successful tented presence at St Pauls in London and in other parts of the country. It brings to the struggle the spirit of

Tahrir Square, the powerful example of the Arab Spring, and the image of mass popular movements bringing down brutal dictatorships which had been there for years – practical demonstrations of how such power can be successfully challenged.

But a big success on November 30, however, is still only a stage in the struggle, if a very important one. It is crucial that the dynamic and momentum of the strike is continued and the pressure maintained.

This means not only consolidating the gains of this action but preparing for the next – as a number of trade union leaders have already made clear. This is the best opportunity yet to strike a serious blow against this government and it is vital that the movement takes full advantage of it.

This is an updated version of the editorial in the current edition of *Socialist Resistance*.

EGYPT

Egypt's revolution returns to the streets

LEE SUSTAR ·

The mobilization—which began just a week before scheduled elections for a body to write a new constitution—was on par with the mass protests of January and February that brought down the U.S.-backed regime of Hosni Mubarak.

After days of brutal attacks on demonstrators by the Central Security Forces and military police that left at least 33 dead, Egypt's de facto ruler, Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, promised a transition to an elected civilian president by July, about six months earlier than originally proposed.

The military regime that has ruled Egypt since Mubarak's downfall, led by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), also made other concessions, including an order banning former members of Mubarak's National Democratic Party from participating in politics for five years. Meanwhile, the civilian government, led by Prime Minister Essam Sharaf, resigned on November 21 under pressure from the mass movement.

However, Tantawi refused to withdraw a plan to impose a constitution that would give the military control over its own budget and ensure that the generals remain the ultimate arbitrators of politics. That stance only further antagonized protesters, who are arguing that the military rulers must go immediately.

Mostafa Omar, a member of Egypt's Revolutionary Socialists and journalist for Ahram Online, spoke with Lee Sustar about the dynamics of the movement and the prospects for the renewal of Egypt's revolutionary movement.

LS: What was the trigger for this latest crisis in Egypt?

MO: The trigger was an incident last Saturday, November 19, when the police went to break up a sit-in of no more than 100 people on the center traffic island of Tahrir Square. Most of them had been injured in the January 25 uprising that led to the overthrow of Mubarak.

The sit-in followed a big march the day before that was dominated by the Islamists, demanding that the Supreme Council hand over power to a civilian administration by the end of April 2012. The day went just fine. But one Islamist leader, a conservative Salafist, called off his plan for a sit-in and left with his supporters, so just 100 people were there overnight. Police came the following morning and began brutalizing them, and ejected them from the square.

But thousands responded to this repression by coming to the square to reclaim it. By the next day, there were tens of thousands of people in Tahrir Square again, and they kicked the police out. This is what started the showdown in the immediate sense.

The second factor is that there have been a number of protests against military rule and military trials of civilians taking place steadily over course of the last three weeks. They weren't massive—2,000 to 5,000 people at each point. But they were picking up steam, indicative that something bigger might happen.

In recent weeks, there has been a growing sense of confidence among families of those in military jails and activists who have been fighting military trials. You can look back on it and see that there was a readiness to go into the square—to fight the police and reclaim Tahrir Square.

The underlying reason is that the government and the SCAF have failed miserably in bringing about any economic or social reform that would improve

peoples' lives in last nine months. They failed to raise the minimum wage, as they promised in March, and they failed to institute any system of price controls over basic foodstuffs.

In fact, for the last five months, the SCAF has decided that not only will it refuse to make serious economic concessions, but it would slowly bring back the entire repressive machine of Mubarak. Its leaders have been attempting to rebuild the confidence of the police for months. The Central Security Forces, the main repressive part of the police, have been let loose on strikers, people sitting in, etc.

So instead of carrying out any meaningful reforms, the SCAF decided that it would crack down on protests, demonstrations and strikes. And while it promised that it wouldn't allow Mubarak's NDP to run in the elections as a party, NDP members formed eight new parties. In other words, the SCAF was re-engineering the political scene with all the old NDP people, who were going to make it back into parliament.

LS: What was the popular reaction to all this?

MO: A majority of those in streets today probably supported the SCAF in February and believed that it would take side of the people and dismantle the Mubarak regime. It has taken nine months of disappointments in the regime's economic policies and increasing repression to change that. A lot of young people and a lot of workers who believed in the SCAF have undergone a process of a change in consciousness since February.

There is another reason for popular anger, which is that the liberal and Islamist parties seemed to be looking for ways to share power with the NDP and SCAF through parliament and the presidential elections.

So consciousness was changing under the surface, but people lacked the confidence to fight back. But all of a sudden, unexpectedly, waves and waves of people have come out of months of silence.

Demoralization has suddenly it turned into its opposite.

LS: What is the attitude of the Islamist parties toward the government and the SCAF? How have they responded to the mobilization?

MO: Islamist groups have supported the SCAF and said effectively that they won't criticize the army and the military council. The Muslim Brotherhood in particular has intervened in many social struggles to contain them—and in strikes, to break them. The Brotherhood tried to break two doctors' strikes over the spring and summer. It has been 100 per cent behind military council.

But then the military announced that it would control the process of writing a new constitution, have veto power over any legislation that has to do with the army, and its budget would remain secret. The debate over this lasted a whole month, creating a fissure between the army and the Islamists.

For their part, the Islamists were afraid that the army would prevent them from placing religious clauses in the constitution allowing for Islamist jurisprudence—sharia law. That was the reason for the protest on Friday, November 19—it was the Muslim Brotherhood's attempt to pressure the SCAF into allowing sharia into the constitution.

On Friday, the Islamists demanded that the SCAF hand over power to a civilian administration by April. By Tuesday, the chant in Tahrir Square was "The people want the field marshal's out immediately." Plus, there is anger at the leaders of the Islamist movement. One of them—a presidential candidate—was beaten up in the square. Another, the number two figure in the Muslim Brotherhood, was chased out of Tahrir.

So what we have is a new mass movement—and it all happened within 72 hours. It's really driving a wedge between thousands of young Muslim Brotherhood supporters and the leadership of the organization. Many of young supporters have joined the protests against the orders and the wishes of that leadership.

So there are liberals, independents, leftists and Islamists in the square. This is creating divisions within the Islamist bloc. Their poorer and working class members feel they must come down to defend Tahrir Square against police brutality. There were up to a million people on the streets on Tuesday, November 22, and tens of thousands more across the country, all on less than 48 hours' notice.

LS: What has been the role of the U.S. in this crisis?

MO: U.S. Officials have said that they have been in constant contact and negotiations with the Muslim Brotherhood. They've said they were preparing for a coalition government of the Muslim Brotherhood, former members of the NDP and some liberals. The elections were seemingly set up to bring in a parliament almost identical to Mubarak's last one. The U.S. and the SCAF seemed confident that they had been able to stabilize the situation—that they had pulled the rug from beneath the revolutionary movement.

That's why police cracked down on the Saturday sit-in—just as they had done with many previous ones. Break some heads, break some bones, and that would be it—that was the thinking. They didn't expect the flood of anger and a willingness to fight.

It looked like the Islamists were ready to form a government with the agreement of the SCAF. But now the whole balance of forces has changed. It took 48 hours for the movement to win one demand that has gone unmet for nine months—a ban on NDP members from participating in parliament for five years, even though many of them are candidates for the election to be held in less than a week.

More significantly, the SCAF said it would stop investigating crimes committed by the military police and instead refer all accusations to civilian prosecutors. This has been a key demand since October 9, when military police massacred civilian police during a protest by Coptic Christians.

LS: How have the demonstrators been able to occupy Tahrir Square despite the repression?

MO: As we speak on Tuesday, November 22, there are a million people in Tahrir Square in a peaceful demonstration. But the side streets have witnessed a round-the-clock battle for 72 hours.

One street off of Tahrir Square near the old American University campus looks like a battlefield from the First World War. Thousands of police are trying to defend the Interior Ministry's headquarters. They have fired teargas into the crowd every five minutes for four days straight, thanks to an endless supply of from the U.S.. They're also firing rubber bullets.

But this isn't the usual police brutality. After the first police attack on Saturday morning, they came again on Sunday at 5 p.m., when there were 30,000 or 40,000 people in Tahrir. But this time, they came with military police, and that's when the massacre began. People were killed by rubber bullets and live ammunition. This was the result of a shoot-to-kill policy by snipers and the Central Security Forces—doctors said injuries were concentrated around the neck and head.

After people were killed, the police lined up their bodies on the sidewalk. They dragged one of the bodies a dozen yards and dumped it into a big garbage can. At another point, they were hitting bodies on the head with clubs to make sure they were dead—people say this is worse than the days of Mubarak.

The military's behavior shifted public opinion—it shocked people who believed that the worst days of Mubarak were behind them. They might not have liked the SCAF, but they thought at least it wasn't as bad as Mubarak. Now people say, "We don't have one Mubarak, we have 16 Mubaraks"—a reference to the number of people on the military council.

LS: What is the social composition of the protesters in Tahrir Square?

MO: It is very similar to what it was in January and February, but less middle class and more working class. Most people who died at the hands of police

are poor, young working class people who have come from the shantytowns—young people who have no hope after years of neglect.

One of those killed was helping a young woman who was breaking stones to throw at police. He said to her, "I'm uneducated, I have no future. The police will kill me someday anyway. I will die here—you go. You are educated, you will help the movement."

If this mobilization continues, you can expect more young Muslim Brotherhood supporters and Salafists to join in. Most of the doctors who are treating the wounded are Muslim Brotherhood supporters who say that they have come on their own because of their conscience.

LS: Some have raised the possibility of a general strike as the next step in the struggle. Are we close to that?

MO: In September we came close to a general strike situation when there was a national strike of teachers—the first since 1951—a strike of bus drivers in Cairo for almost 20 days and two big national strikes by government doctors. At least three-quarters of a million workers in key sectors of economy were on strike at some point in September. A lot of people on the left thought a general strike could happen then.

Those strikes didn't lose, but they didn't win, either. That was demoralizing for a lot of people. Workers are not well enough organized to deal with the SCAF. Today, if you strike, it isn't the police, but the army who comes in to break or contain your strike.

Today, there aren't any massive strikes, but there are a lot of strikes all the time. And there is no

doubt that the last 72 hours will give people confidence to take on the SCAF. The number of independent unions has jumped from about 90 in the early summer to 250 today. But while there are lots of unions, there is no political organization for workers in the country.

LS: What's next? Can the elections be held as planned?

MO: The last five months have been a period of ebb in the revolutionary momentum, despite the strikes, and the near-general strike in September. The SCAF had the upper hand, and there was mass demoralization. But all of a sudden, the situation has changed.

Can they hold an election in five days? The battle is still going on. But it is already a big victory that the government of Essam Sharaf has fallen. Sharaf promised to be the prime minister of Tahrir Square, but he brought people from Mubarak's NDP into all but three or four positions.

Right now, the demand of the movement is for a unity government with no NDP people. The negotiations are for a new government that will have Islamists, liberals and maybe even people from the left.

This new government will take over in very different conditions. People are saying that when we put in the Sharaf government in March, we gave them a blank check, and they stole the revolution. This time, we will hold them accountable.

This isn't just a demonstration against the SCAF. All this is taking place with a much higher level of consciousness.

<http://socialistworker.org/2011/11/...>

GREECE

Government of national unity: towards further confrontation

YORGOS MITRALIAS ·

Why all this Greek and international agitation? Why the threats and blackmail, why the Florentine intrigue, why all this Athenian political psychodrama? And why finally the Greek "national union" so much desired by the master cooks in Berlin, Paris, Washington and elsewhere? Why? Well, it's simple: because it was necessary no matter what to prevent the coming of the "barbarians", the eruption of the Greek masses in revolt on the political scène. Because it was necessary to delay as long as possible the holding of these general elections so much desired by the angry masses and still more feared by the Sacred Alliance of chancellors and bankers.

Indeed, to speak of the panic of the Greek bourgeoisie is to say little. Only a few days ago the then Greek prime minister and president of the Socialist International, Georges Papandreou, manifestly with his back to the wall faced with the nearly unanimous demand for immediate general elections, lost his head in trying to save it, inventing a (phony) referendum and the direct threat of an imaginary military coup! [1]The result was immediate: wholesale panic among his European partners and masters who, totally taken by surprise by the possibility of an uncontrollable referendum in Greece, summed Papandreou to explain himself immediately in Cannes. But the havoc wrought in Europe and above all in Greece by this "adventurist and irresponsible" prime minister were already so enormous that the feared elections seemed inevitable. So how could Papandreou be removed from government while avoiding general elections?

As if by miracle, all the centres of power and the media agreed in record time that salvation lay in a government of national unity of the two big neoliberal parties, PASOK and New Democracy. [2] The political quarrels of yesterday were forgotten, and the Greek "elites" briskly united around a single slogan, that dictated by their European masters: national union before the barbarians benefit irreparably from their disunity, their fears, their contradictions and even their gaffes.

What followed was predictable. Despite his heated *résistance* Papandreou had to bend to the pressure coming from inside his own government to form a government of national unity with the New Democracy leader, Antonis Samaras. The Greek right's opposition since the first Memorandum dictated by the troika gave way to cohabitation with PASOK inside the same government imposed by the Troika and Greek big capital.

This government has left no doubt as to its objectives: on the one hand it will push through the state budget and agreement of October 26-27, while on the other it will push elections off for as long as possible. Moreover the recent past of its prime minister is very eloquent: a leading banker, Loucas Papadimos was for a long time vice-president of the European Central Bank (ECB).

Is the crisis over then? No, not at all, but now there is a sizeable difference in relation to the past, the situation is no longer the same because the formation of this government has the great merit of clarifying a Greek political landscape which has long been confused and shrouded by political manoeuvres. Now the division is clear between the big and small bourgeois parties supporting the

Memorandums and their disastrous austerity, and the left parties who reject and fight them.

Obviously, all would be much clearer and easier if in this deadly confrontation the Greek left was less disunited and sectarian, more bent on confronting a Greek and international right determined to pursue its nightmarish projects to the end. However there is now a problem which urgently demands a realistic and credible response : what alternative and radical European project not just for the Greek movement but for all the popular resistance in Europe faced with this (terminal?) crisis of the European Union and the veritable war that its leaders wage against their own populations? The Greek case has just shown that exit from the euro (and Europe) does not represent a realistic or credible alternate for these populations in struggle. But in

addition, it does not represent a class solution to the class war waged by the European capitalists against employees and pensioners, youth and the unemployed, women and all the oppressed of this continent.

What then? Are we condemned eternally to be on the defensive without ever hoping to go on the counter attack and win? The elaboration of the response should be everybody's business. But in the last analysis one thing is certain, everything will depend on the ability of the popular *résistance* across Europe to coordinate and fight for the common project of a democratic Europe of the peoples which will have priorities diametrically opposed to the those of the current Europe of the bankers, speculators and capitalists. To work, then, comrades!

TURKEY

Turkish government attempts to own the Kurds

FOTİ BENLİSOY ·

Such detentions were once concentrated in the east but now the ring has expanded west of the Euphrates River to include academics and writers from the west of Turkey. It appears that the recent arrests of Professor Bülent Ersan and the publisher Ragıp Zarakolu will create a stir marked by considerable anger and energy within the intellectual community, which has long been targeted by a campaign of intimidation. It is not just that "the skull-cap has fallen", as the Turkish saying goes, but rather, it is completely gone, revealing baldness for all to see.

What is clear is that the AKP, which has long been strutting on the political scene as both victim and "revolutionary," has adopted the ideals of the Turkish state with voracious appetite and great enthusiasm.

The former governor of Ankara, Nevzat Tandoğan, famously said "If communism is to come, it is us who will bring it." Now the AKP says, "If the Kurdish problem is to be solved, it is us who will solve it," refusing to recognise any interlocutor except itself. Prisons are overflowing with those refusing to become the Kurds of the AKP.

There is not even the slightest indication of any connection whatsoever between "terrorism" and those arrested as part of the KCK operations, initiated under the pretext of wiping out the PKK's urban branch.

The asymmetrical war being waged against civilians by the government labels all advocates of peace as "the enemy." Since the electoral success of the Block Candidates supported by the BDP [Peace and Democracy Party, which supports the rights of Kurdish citizens in Turkey], the AKP, using "terror-

ism" as an excuse, intensified its repression on a daily basis. Its target is all non-governmental structures that draw their strength from the autonomous power of the Kurds.

The latest arrests are a sign that the well-worn cliché, "Let them lay down their weapons, come down from the mountains, and do their politics on the plains" [...], often repeated by so-called moderate statesmen, has completely rotted away. [...]

Democracy in Turkey²⁰¹¹ can be summarised in this way — support for a party took part in elections, and what's more, is represented in parliament—can render you the target of a "struggle against terrorism, being waged with utmost determination." Your legal party might continue to exist, but engaging in politics through this party is not legitimate.

This is so because on the basis of an indictment whose conceptualisation of "crime" may encompass your musical tastes or your private conversations, you might be declared a terrorist and arrested on the basis of evidence that even your lawyer cannot access. You might also be put imprisoned on the grounds that if you are not, you could potentially tamper with the top-secret evidence of your crimes.

The aim of all this is not just to make the Kurds—the best organised opposition force in Turkey—bow to AKP authoritarianism, but also by means of such black propaganda to target everyone who strives for a dignified peace.

The AKP government, by means of these KCK operations that it wages with great zeal, aims to erase from memory and political imaginary the Kurdish people as a political subject. Erdoğan once summarised the situation with the philosophical suggestion that "if you do not think about it, there is no

Kurdish problem," -- a statement that would turn even Descartes blue with envy.

It is now clear that this is not just a matter of weapons. To use one of his favourite expressions, the KCK operations have laid bare in a "clear and obvious way" the falsity of Tayyip Erdoğan's statement—pronounced only a month ago—that "we fight terrorism and we negotiate with political will. This is how we operate."

In the political horizon of the AKP bigwigs, their "Kurdish siblings" are nothing more than a body of folkloric figures living under their wing, an "indigenous population" to be approached only with the "white man's burden"—or with the "civilising" arrogance of the coloniser.

Each and every step which transgresses the boundaries of this horizon will become the foe of a war waged by the state—in the mountains, on the plains, and in cities—through its military, police, law and order mechanisms, and whenever needed, along with its "sensitive citizens."

This state of total war that we are currently facing should not simply be considered a new or local version of McCarthyism. As is well known, McCarthyism is the name of the Communist witch-hunt carried out in the United States from the late 1940s through the 1950s. During this period thousands of people, most of them public employees, union cadres, or intellectuals, were prosecuted as suspected Soviet spies or alleged agents of anti-American activities, and were convicted and discredited on the basis of unfounded grounds.

Thanks to the active role he played in this campaign, the rabid anti-communist and nationalist demagogue Joseph McCarthy, then a senator of Wisconsin, attained the honour of having these and similar operations—that is, operations lacking any sound basis or credible evidence—be named after him.

But now let us get back to our essential point. The waves of this operation, which have followed one another in rapid succession, are not just a cam-

paign of slander whereby petty politicians try to intimidate a real or imagined opposition by whipping up nationalist hysteria with the aim of consolidating their own position. What we have here is the systematic targeting of nearly all political and social organisation that express the demands of Kurds within the democratic domain. As we have already stated, it is clear that the AKP is trying to condemn all expressions and manifestations of the Kurdish question except its own, attempting to render the Kurdish question without a counter-part.

Beyond McCarthyism, such a situation can only be described as "politicide." Politicide is the name given to the annihilation or elimination of the political, cultural, intellectual, etc. leadership or potential leadership of an oppressed community, people or group.

The KCK operations can be interpreted as the elimination or the pacification—without the deployment of "murderous cleansing" methods or elimination by clearly violent means—of the extensive cadre of Kurds capable of providing leadership in the political, social, moral, and cultural fields. They want to silence those who are able to present and politicise the Kurdish question in terms different from those dictated by "government wisdom." In other words, the situation in which we find ourselves is not just latter day McCarthyism, but an act of annihilation, an operation of politicide.

Politicide can also be defined as the attempt to destroy and to eliminate a specific (often oppositional) way of comprehending, giving meaning to, and doing politics. It is exactly in this sense that the AKP government is not only targeting groups of people who express political concerns about the Kurdish question, but is attempting to dismantle almost all forms of Kurdish politicisation, as well as the political field constituted by the demands of the Kurdish people.

The AKP government expels from the political domain all forms—except its own—of understanding, giving meaning to, and hence politicising aspects of

the Kurdish question by totally identifying them with "terrorism."

In other words, the matter does not only consist of a "witch-hunt," of political hysteria, or of the conscious or unconscious, extreme or fanatical reaction of some politicians faced with existing problems.

What we have here is a much wider strategy: a plan to "solve" the Kurdish question without the Kurds—or to use a better term, to "sort it out." Consequently, comparisons with witch-hunts or with McCarthyism are neither sufficient, nor explanatory. As Albert Camus put it, "giving the wrong name to events means increasing unhappiness in the world."

On the one hand, the AKP government is seeking to silence the Kurdish people by depriving them of a political, intellectual, and moral leadership, while striving on the other hand to absolutely monopolise the ways in which the Kurdish question is understood and politicised. An attempt is being made through the KCK operation to turn the Kurds into a pariah people devoid of a political personality and dependent on the favours of state officials.

We should keep in mind as an example the gradual but systematic politicide to which Israel is subjecting the Palestinian people, with the aim of eroding their political and social existence.

The unbridled nationalist language developed by AKP politicians, especially on the campaign trail, is supported by calls for "revenge" at the top levels of the state. The profile of "those of Kurdish origin" created by adding to such calls a sprinkle of individual rights and culture—and at times a little religion to cement the deal—does not include a people engaged in autonomous politics and its legitimate representatives.

According to this mentality, Kurds can at most be a collection of victims dependent on the loving hand of a paternal state who "spanks and loves" at the same time—but not a political entity.

Their actual and potential political subjectivity must be annihilated. The result of this state of affairs has been 4,197 detentions, which have led to 1,595 cases of imprisonment in only the last six months. This ongoing operation, an act of politicide, is a sign of an impending doom that will swallow up not just the Kurds, but all of us, if we cannot stop it.

This article was originally published in Turkish on Sosyalist Demokrasi için YEN?YOL. It was translated into English by Adnan Tonguç and Amy Spangler.

<http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/...>

SPANISH STATE

Spanish state: victory for the right, major crisis looms

LLUÍS RABELL ·

Thus the economic crisis shaking Europe has swept aside another government. This time, certainly a social liberal one – Zapatero has paid the price for his unkept promises and his alignment with the injunctions of the financial markets and the institutions of the European Union. With five million unemployed, a ravaged property market and banks supported by public bailouts, the austerity measures taken since May 2010 (freezing of pensions, wage reductions in the civil service, budget cuts, and pensions counter reform) have only led to the disaffection of the left electorate, while the country sank into recession and the social situation visibly worsened. The two traditional socialist bastions of Andalusia and Catalonia moved to the right. In Catalonia, which played a decisive role in Zapatero's two victories, the socialists were beaten by the right nationalist CiU which headed the poll with a discourse mixing appeals to Catalan sovereignty in tax matters with populist complaints against immigration. In the spring, CiU had already taken the Barcelona municipality, a fiefdom of the left for more than thirty years, from the Socialists, after having also won the regional government, previously held by the plural left. The Generalitat is now in the first rank of neoliberal attacks on public services.

Izquierda Unida made significant electoral progress, going from 2 to 11 deputies, with a net in-

crease of more than 700,000 votes. With a critical and anti-neoliberal discourse, the IU scooped up part of the Socialist vote. (However, another part, notable above all in Madrid, drifted to right wing options). The impact of the movement of indignad@s also favoured the IU, which appeared as the "useful vote" to the left of the PSOE. The attempt to launch a green project, inspired by the example of Europe Écologie, has foundered. But the pressure for a "useful vote" was also felt among the sectors targeted by the "Anti-capitalists" candidacy, promoted, alongside other forces and activists, by the organisation of the Fourth International in the Spanish state. A bold campaign, calling for disobedience and punctuated by symbolic bank, stock market and ministerial office occupations, leading to legal action against our head of list for Barcelona, Esther Vivas - allowed the popularisation of an alternative programme and a detectable activist breakthrough. (The "Anticapitalists" received nearly 25,000 votes in the few provinces where the candidacy was able to surmount the restrictions imposed by the electoral law).

Victory, then for a right intent on redoubling the anti-social attacks, Yet recent weeks have seen significant mobilisations around schools in Madrid, a general strike in Barcelona's universities on the electoral level, Amaiur, the candidacy of the Basque pro –independence left, erupted on the scene with its own group in the Spanish parliament. Meanwhile the 15-M movement is far from over. In the context of the international crisis, a scenario of intense social and political conflicts is on the horizon. A new configuration of a combative left will be more than ever on the agenda.

OBITUARY

Daniel Noverraz, known as Léonce Aguirre (1949-2011)

JAN MALEWSKI ·

Charles-André Udry, a historic leader of the LMR and the Fourth International, wrote in a message after the death of Aguirre: "Then, pseudonyms were de rigueur. His was "Stanislas". But everyone called him "Nono". A diminutive which stemmed from his family name, but fitted in with his generosity.... The rebellious character was something he had in full. And perhaps this was at the origin of his adopted name of "Aguirre". He was involved in all the militant activities: the regular distribution of "La Brèche" leaflets at the workplaces; mobilisations in support of the struggle of the Vietnamese people against the US military intervention; those of youth for free access to the cinemas; the organisation of the "La Brèche" student circles; demonstrations at the Polish embassy in Berne in December 1970, during the workers' revolts in Gdansk; solidarity with the workers at LIP in 1973.

"His activist élan rested on a set of convictions consolidated by a real sense of social injustice and by the desire to understand the socio-economic and political reality in which he acted. Like other activists from Francophone Switzerland, he "emigrated" politically to France and joined the Ligue communiste révolutionnaire (LCR), French section of the Fourth International."

At the beginning of the 1980s he became a member of the LCR's central committee, and became a full timer, leading the minority "ARA" current, with reservations notably in relation to the majority projects of left recomposition with those such as

Pierre Juquin who had broken with the PCF.]He also challenged the analysis of the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe as "deformed degenerate workers' states", questioning the "tragic necessity" of the policy of the Bolsheviks during the Russian revolution and dwelling in particular on the tragedy of Kronstadt. He also considered the question of ecology as fundamental.

Favourable to the construction of class struggle trade unions, in 1988 he supported the creation of SUD PTT and the CRC Santé sociaux, which subsequently led to the creation of the Solidaires union, when the LCR majority, attached to the idea of trade union unity, hesitated.

In the early 1990s he was one of the founder of the "Révolution!" tendency, defending the construction of a revolutionary party against what he believed to be the drift of the LCR leadership, in the context of the policy of recomposition and construction of an alternative, and defended notably the alliance with Lutte ouvrière.

After the renewal of workers' mobilisations — marked by the strikes of November and December 1995 — Aguirre participated in the establishment of a new majority inside the LCR, which led to the promotion of common lists with Lutte ouvrière for the European elections of 1999, gaining the 5 % necessary to have deputies (3 LO and 2 LCR) in the European Parliament.

After the appearance of the global justice movement Aguirre took a full role, identifying a basic factor for political renewal and hoping that new forms of international organisation could emerge. During the World and European Social Forums (Florence, Paris, London, Athens), he tried to press

this perspective with comrades from other sections of the Fourth International.

The unitary campaign against the European Treaty in 2005 in France and its success convinced him that it was possible to build a lasting anti-neoliberal unity. He then took part in the fight for a unitary candidacy at the 2007 French presidential elections. He supported the creation of the Nouveau parti anticapitaliste, seeking to enlarge it to include both libertarian currents and organisations and radical reformist currents, but finding it not broad

enough. While complaining frequently about the minority culture which he considered as the "Trotskyist tradition" he was nevertheless involved in building a "unitary" minority within the NPA in France.

Yet beyond agreements or divergences, discussions with Aguirre were always marked by his respect for and recognition of others, and by his desire to go beyond tensions so as to build together the political tool that the workers need.

PAKISTAN

Labour Party Pakistan under attack; Help us to fight back!

FAROOQ TARIQ ·

Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani said on 14th November speaking at Mandi Bahuldin, that there are no political prisoners at this time in Pakistan. He was my university fellow, I am telling him that I know at least 24 members and supporters of Labour Party Pakistan are in jail for political reasons. There are many other languishing in jails of Baluchistan apart from those who are missing.

Six of the nine political prisoners in Faisalabad are convicted by an anti terrorist court to a shame full 490 years. Their crime was to lead a strike of textile workers in 2010. When a boss opened fire from a factory, workers retaliated in anger. The boss is free and workers are convicted to 490 years.

In Gilgit, when police opened fire and killed two, son and father for demanding a just compensation for all the effecties of Atta Abad Lake victims, people retaliated and occupied the area. The police officers involved in killing of two are free, however, Baba Jan, a former member of district council Gilgit, and a leading political activists of the region along 14 more are in jail. Where is the justice?

In Faisalabad, it is Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz that is after us including the provincial law minister Rana Sanaullah, who wants to teach us a lesson for building a movement of the textile workers in the city, never seen before. In Gilgit, it is Pakistan People's Party including the chief minister Mehdi Shah who wants to teach us a lesson for siding with revolting masses of Gilgit Baltistan against injustices and malpractices.

We are not going to give up and are going to fight back by building a movement for the release of

these political activists. We need your moral, financial and political support.

A track record of building movements

Labour Party Pakistan, established in 1997, is a small left wing political party that is helping to build the social and political movements in Pakistan. In 2000/2001, we initiated to build support for Anjuman Mozareen Punjab in Okara. The peasant movement went on to set best examples of Pakistan peasant's history. They fought back against the military farms administration, took over 68000 acre of land and are still defiant.

In 2003/2004, we played an important role in building the power looms workers movement in the third largest city of Pakistan. Labour Qaumi Movement, whose leadership is member of LPP, led thousands of workers for better wages and labour conditions. They are now under attack.

In 2007/2008, we played a role in building the lawyers movement. All of us went to jail again and again. We were there every week with lawyer's demonstrations and rallies, we were part of the long march and we led the famous GPO Chouck rebellion in Lahore with police.

We were one of those who opposed the military takeover of general Musharaf from day one unlike many of those who are now claiming to be champions against military establishment. Almost all LPP leadership was arrested several times during Musharaf period. For example, I was arrested 12 times during the General Musharaf dictatorship.

Building alternative media

LPP had been busy to build an alternative media to counter the influence of commercial media. LPP printed a weekly paper Mazdoor Jeddojuhd from 1997 to 2010 without any advertisement. It is now printed as a monthly magazine because of financial constraints.

Socialist Pakistan News (SPN) started in 2004, is now the largest political email list with over 7500 members. Activists of LPP work every day for over an hour to moderate this list on volunteer basis.

We are also part of the team that is producing View Point On line, one of the best read on line magazine.

Solidarity and Relief Work

LPP supporters and members have been active in 2005 earth quack and 2010 devastating rains and floods to raise funds and help those in difficult times.

We did all this to build mass workers political party to build socialist, democratic, feminist, environmentalist campaigns and movements in Pakistan, in particular, and globally, in general.

Send your donation now

We want to raise at least five hundred thousand (500,000) Rupees before 26th November 2011. On 26th November, LQM plan a protest public meeting in Faisalabad. We are expecting thousands to attend. We need your financial assistance to build this rally and support for the victim families who have no other mean to live on.

Urgent Finance appeal for "Faisalabad 6"

As you all are aware, six labor leaders from Faisalabad have been handed jail sentences of 490 years in total. Their only crime was to lead a peaceful strike for an increase in minimum wages as announced by the government. They are Akbar Ali Kamboh, Babar Shafiq Randhawa, Fazal Elahi, Rana Riaz Ahmed Muhammad Aslam Malik and Asghar Ali Ansari. Four of them were arrested in

July 2010 while the other two were arrested in July 2011 on the same charges.

There are three more workers in jail waiting for trial to begin.

All of them are leaders of a power looms works organization called, Labour Qaumi Movement (LQM) in Faisalabad, the third largest city of Pakistan. LQM is a community based labour organization fighting for the rights of the textile workers since 2004.

An anti-terrorist court judge on November 1, 2011, sentenced six leaders under terrorism charges in Faisalabad. As is frequently observed that Terrorists are set free by these courts and workers leaders are charged under terrorist laws in Pakistan

They were accused of burning down a factory during the strike. This is a fabricated charge. The facts are that on the day of strike, July 20, 2010, gangsters in the pay of the factory owner started shooting at the workers who were leaving the factory to demand better wages. Some workers dared to go inside the factory and forced the gangsters to stop firing. Some of them were beaten up by the angry workers.

During the trial, the workers' advocate asked if the factory had been burned down then how was it able to be operating again three days later.

More than 100,000 power loom workers in Faisalabad district went on strike on July 20, 2010, for an increase of wages that had been announced by the government during the presentation of budget 2010-11. The government announced 17 percent rise in the minimum wage for the private sector workers. The LQM in Faisalabad, Jhang and other districts had been in negotiations with power loom owners for three weeks before the strike.

The long term jail sentences of these workers leaders has been a devastating blow to the workers movement in Faisalabad, and indeed across the country. That the court could hand out such a draconian anti-labor judgment was beyond anyone's expectations, especially since this judiciary itself

had been restored through the support of a powerful people's movement. Yet, the anti-terrorist court chose to give a verdict with the sole aim of damaging the power loom workers movement which was slowly becoming a symbol of working class militancy all over the country.

One of the principal methods of disciplining labor under capitalism is to push them to the point where they are only left with an option of negotiating with the bosses on the latter's terms. This is done either through brute state force or by financially crushing the working class so that they only have the option of compromising in order to survive within the system.

The bosses have used the latter tactic to ensure that these labor leaders become examples for anyone who dares to raise his/her voice against the injustices meted out to the workers. All of our jailed comrades are married and were the primary breadwinners of their families. Their families have been pushed to the brink of a financial catastrophe. The families are contemplating removing children from the schools since they are unable to even buy enough groceries.

Knowing that this is part of the political strategy of the bosses to subjugate the workers, and that it is having severe consequences for the families of the jailed leaders, the Labour Party Pakistan, the Labour Qaumi Movement, the National Trade Union Federation and the Labour Education Foundation are launching a finance appeal to support the families of our jailed comrades.

These families deserve our generous support not only because these comrades are suffering due to their involvement with a working class movement. But also, because the outcome of this movement, and our ability to extend solidarity and support to our comrades in difficult conditions, will dictate whether this particular event will deter working class militancy (as wished by the bosses) or act as a shining example of working class solidarity against the hideous tactics of the ruling classes.

On behalf of the LQM, NTUF, the LPP and the LEF, we urge you to donate generously for the families of these victims of state-terrorism. These families are in dire need of financial support and we can only sustain them with a collective effort. The bank details are as follows.

DIRECT TRANSFER TO PAKISTAN

A/C Title: Labour Education Foundation

A/C Number: 01801876

Route: Please advise and pay to Citi Bank, New York, USA Swift CITI US 33 for onward transfer to BANK ALFALAH LTD., KARACHI, PAKISTAN A/C No. 36087144 and for final transfer to BANK ALFALAH LTD., LDA PLAZA, KASHMIR ROAD, LAHORE, PAKISTAN Swift: ALFHPKKALDA for A/C No. 01801876 OF LABOUR EDUCATION FOUNDATION.

THROUGH ESSF ACCOUNT

It is also possible to send checks in euro or to transfer donations through ESSF account. Specify "Pakistan" on the back of your cheques or transfer orders.

Cheques

Cheques to ESSF in euros only to be sent to:

ESSF

2, rue Richard-Lenoir

93100 Montreuil

France

Bank Account:

Crédit lyonnais

Agence de la Croix-de-Chavaux (00525)

10 boulevard Chanzy

93100 Montreuil

France

ESSF, account number 445757C

International bank account details :

IBAN : FR85 3000 2005 2500 0044 5757 C12

BIC / SWIFT : CRLYFRPP

Account holder : ESSF

16 November 2011

GREECE

Greece: New government and the accelerated march to capitalist barbarism

ANDREAS KLOKE ·

After days of sordid wrangling, intrigues, and backroom conversations, an agreement was reached on November 1 to appoint L. Papadimos, a top banker who enjoys the absolute confidence of the ruling classes of Europe and of the IMF, as the new head of government. The fight over the new government and its prime minister began when the down-and-out PASOK parliamentary group (down from 160 to currently 152 votes) confirmed its "confidence" in the Papandreou government on Nov 4. But then Papandreou announced a coalition government. The whole procedure was unconstitutional (but who cares under today's conditions?), since Papandreou had not even submitted his resignation.

"Democracy" in retreat

With the installation of the new government it becomes clear that even the last remnants of the so-called democracy ("rule by the people"), in the modest and familiar framework of bourgeois parliamentary rule, are about to be eliminated—effectively and ruthlessly. This tendency toward authoritarianism reaches a level no one would ever have predicted. Papandreou's announcement of a referendum on the agreements reached on October 27, as a result of a negotiation process for the payment of the 6th installment of the infamous loans by the troika was quickly called off after the intervention by Merkel, Sarkozy and Co. ND, which has always distanced itself from the memorandum policies, was compelled by the troika to form a coalition government with PASOK under a new prime minister.

Thus the Hellenic Republic becomes, even officially, a government committed exclusively to the profits of national and international bankers. Essentially, no one wanted to accept responsibility for the steamroller measures to be taken by the new government in accordance with ultimatums from Brussels and Berlin. The whole affair is particularly embarrassing for ND, which, as opinion polls show, is at least 7 percentage points ahead of PASOK, expected to get 22%. But it will soon lose this favored position as a result of its government participation.

After a long time and without having been asked, the Greek population is once again confronted with ministers representing the far right-wing (three deputies) plus one overtly fascist minister (by the name of M. Voridis), members of the racist LAOS party. The failed PASOK luminaries, among them the particularly hated Minister of Economy V. Venizelos, keep all important ministerial posts. The ministerial team is expanded to include some already discarded former PASOK and ND-ministers. So it is clear that only a very ordinary cabinet shuffle has been successfully carried out and nothing really new can be expected.

For the first time the three pro-system parties, PASOK, ND and LAOS, are collectively responsible for the memorandum policies, considered by the great majority of the population to be failed and fraudulent. This does not bode well for the future of the Greek bourgeois political system, especially not for its democratic facade. It is also a bad sign that this government is committed to keeping Greece in the euro zone since it is very likely that the euro can no longer be saved. This government will wear out very soon and there is much reason to fear that the

elections will be "postponed" to an undefined point in the future.

The catastrophe of the memorandum policies

The PASOK government plundered the country in less than two years, by means of an unprecedented devastating raid, driving it to the brink of ruin with the co-leadership of the Troika—i.e. the ruling classes of Europe and the United States, and their governments. This monstrous fraud, a theft in the tens of billions at the expense of working people, the socially disadvantaged, but also the previous "middle class," served nobody but the creditors, i.e. the national and international financial oligarchy that shamelessly continues to enrich itself.

At the same time, the rulers and the mainstream media deliberately spread the illusion that the failing global financial system, and thus the global capitalist system, can be saved by this sort of maneuvering. It can already be foreseen that other countries, such as Italy, Spain, Portugal, Ireland, Great Britain and even France, will follow the Greek "model" step by step. But nobody can tell how the Euro will be saved in this situation and how the rest of the EU countries can avoid the general impoverishment process. The next European recession has already begun.

In Greece, the economic decline has reached 15% in the last two years. The loss of wages, salaries and pensions is up to 40% or more. Hundreds of thousands of jobs have been lost, unemployment gallops, workers rights such as collective bargaining have recently been abolished in favor of unrestricted employer arbitrariness. State property, in principle national property, will be privatized and completely liquidated under intolerable conditions. The public health system is dismantled and 50% of the country's hospitals will close. Austerity is imposed on the public school system. Universities are to be sold to big capital.

The material deprivation is accompanied by a mass mental depression. The suicide rate is reaching record highs. Thousands of people try to get psychiatric treatment without being able to pay for it. One

can say about Greece that capitalist society, "successfully" deregulated in recent decades, has once again turned deadly. The young generation has no prospects and the "lucky" ones who get a job are to be offered paltry salaries between 400 to 700 Euros.

Capitalist plunder and social resistance

Since September it is clear to everyone that the memorandum policies, allegedly aimed at the rescue of the euro and the banking system but also at protecting Greece "from bankruptcy" and insolvency etc., is a bottomless pit. It means nothing but endless bloodletting of workers and serves as a kind of grave-robbery of the Greek economy which has been expertly run into the ground. Only the parasites of the ruling system, 10% at most who are beneficiaries of the rapid intensification of exploitation and redistribution from bottom to top, along the rich who hold € 560 billion deposited in foreign accounts, are exempt from the effects of the crisis, manage largely to increase their incomes.

However, the overall situation of Greek capitalism remains hopeless. The austerity policy has proven to be a cycle of evil, as the recession causes falling tax revenues and thus higher national debts. This in turn requires new "measures" at the expense of the Greek population supposedly "living beyond their means," exacerbating the recession and so on—creating a perfect infinite feedback loop, a spiral into the abyss.

In September new taxes, especially on property (flats and houses), were announced making the situation even more unbearable. For an approximately 100-square-meter apartment around 700 € must be paid in order to satisfy the appetites of the creditor-lenders (i.e. the international banks etc.). This poll tax will be assessed along with the electricity bill and in the case of non-payment the current of the household will be switched off! And in February, the next installment of the same tax will become due.

Given the fact that a significant percentage of the population has already reached a point below break due to the various austerity measures, unemployment, debts etc., many people will simply not be able to pay. Greek society as a whole is reaching a breaking point.

In this new situation, the majority of the population has lost the last illusion that despite the memorandum policies there might still be some individual solution or possibility to survive. This is the real reason for the extraordinary success of the general strike of October 19/20 when 500,000 protesters took to the streets in Athens alone, though this success was significantly diminished by counter-productive tactics of Greek Communist Party (KKE) and their union formation PAME on the one hand, along with the Molotov cocktail-throwers of the "black block" on the other. Approval of the new package of measures in parliament could not be prevented.

A few days later, the national holiday (Oct 28) of the "No" (OHI) was marked by mass protests. Nationwide riots dominated the day. This was the last confirmation that the memorandum policies and those in government who carry them out, the Troika—but also those other parliamentary groups who support them indirectly, especially from the ranks of New Democracy (ND) and the far-right LAOS—have lost all credibility, or are nearing that point.

In other words, the vast majority of the population has come to the conclusion that no compromise with the governments and the rulers is possible anymore, that what matters is to prevent the implementation of all measures prescribed from above. This may be possible by legal protests, occupations and demonstrations, or by "illegal" resistance, such as the non-payment of the poll tax on real estate—i.e. through civil disobedience.

A number of mayors and city councils in various parts of the city of Athens, along with the rest of the country, have already decided to support people in this affair and to enable them to resist the payment

and avoid power cut-offs. The developments of last month have shown that the gap which is always present between the rulers, but also the entire political system, on the one side, and the great mass of the governed population on the other, has become an unbridgeable abyss.

The conditions of the Troika

There is no doubt that the governments in Athens, Berlin, Paris and Washington were not without fear or the first signs of panic when they registered this significant hardening of their front. But they also responded immediately. The Troika drastically increased its pressure on all parties that support the system to implement the new measures immediately and to put an end to social resistance by all possible means. The Troika does not hesitate anymore to set blatant ultimatums and to put Greece under a de facto receivership. It also does not take into consideration that the "political elite" in Athens is stripped naked and humiliated. What counts, of course, are very real interests, the "rescue of the euro" etc.

With all this maneuvering, extortion, and other miscellaneous actions, the question of how the basic living standards of the Greek population can be protected no longer enters into their thinking. According to a report of "Capital.gr" the Troika's conditions for the transfer of the 6th installment of its loan to the new Greek government are the following:

- a) the legal institutionalization of the poll tax on real estate as a permanent measure. With this measure, the Troika and the government intend to gather 1.67 billion Euros this year, but ever higher sums in the following years;
- b) the lay-off of tens of thousands of public employees, starting with 30,000 immediately as an emergency step;
- c) a package of measures to close, "merge," and dismantle companies that were previously under public ownership, by way of a bill passed in the summer;

d) the transfer of all companies privatized this year or to be privatized next year into a "fund for the evaluation of private property." This includes the shares of nationwide port facilities, water works, the profit-oriented gaming company OPAP, nationwide airport facilities, the gas center of the district Kavala, the tolls of the national motorways and government buildings. Similarly, "consultants" or overseers of privatization in some of these companies are to be appointed;

e) a new "list of drugs," which means that patients themselves will have to pay in the future for a number of expensive drugs;

f) the reduction of the number of persons who have previously qualified for a disability pension;

g) the measures adopted so far and information regarding their implementation to be added to the state budget for 2012.

It is superfluous to comment on these requirements since they speak for themselves. It should be noted, however, that they mean a death sentence to thousands or tens of thousands of people in the coming months and years.

All this confirms that the main aim of the memorandum policies was not primarily "the reduction of debt" and so on. The main concern of the ruling classes, as several interviews by P. Thompson (IMF), C.-J. Juncker (ECOFIN) and others already showed in the past, is the implementation of the "reforms" in Greece. This means that the living standards of workers and the vast majority of the population have to be reduced by some 50 or 60%, on average, if not more. In fact, the downward spiral has no limits.

It seems that this policy is a strategic decision of the European and perhaps also of the North American capitalist classes. The basic idea obviously is to establish conditions under which "productive investments" are again efficient and profitable. This can be accomplished only by a decisive defeat of the working class and its complete subjugation. Only in this way can a realistic prospect be found

for the global capitalist system to find an exit from the terrible crisis in which it is mired.

On the situation of the Greek Left

The new forms of mass struggle of the workers and oppressed, with square occupations in the summer, then other occupations, strikes, and forms of self-organization from September, directly influence all the forces of the left. The Greek Communist Party (KKE) leadership, which realized that it was increasingly being overtaken by the mass mobilization, tried to gain more strength by various reinforced sectarian actions of their union formation PAME (occupations of ministries, town halls and schools, campaign for non-payment of poll tax). This is a slight shift in the "party line," resulting in an attempt to provide leadership for the mass movement.

The appearance and the general political propaganda of the KKE are oriented to a more radical rhetoric "against capitalism," but still never exceed bureaucratic routine. A deeper understanding of the economic and social reality does not exist. Even if it is true that the statements of the party generally correspond to an anti-capitalist and mechanistic Marxist framework, its sectarian tactics are tragically dangerous as Oct 20 abundantly demonstrated. They do not correspond to the need of the working class for a united front, which is today more necessary and more urgent than ever before.

The left-reformist alliance SYRIZA, which is dominated by the SYN, a reformist party with roots in euro-communism, tries to represent a credible alternative on the parliamentary left. The rapid fall of PASOK in the polls raises the hope that this alliance may enjoy a new boom. The proposal of SYRIZA chairman Tsipras to aim for the installation of a government of the united left to promote the vital need of workers actually contradicts the immediate self-organization of the mass movement and the strengthening of unified militant mobilizations.

It cannot be excluded that this orientation might weaken the emerging dynamics of the resistance movement against the memorandum policies, creating new parliamentary illusions. Adamant in their "pro-European" orientation, the party leadership desperately tries to cling to the straw of eurobonds and the democratization of EU institutions. But all these nice things are solemnly rejected by the German government parties, also by the "opposition parties" of the social-democrats (SPD) and the Greens, and, of course, by their clients in banking and industry, as well as by the EU bureaucracy and the ECB. The radical youth of the party and the radical elements of SYRIZA, which have moved to the left due to the massive resistance movement, clash increasingly with the boundaries set by the SYN leadership.

ANTARSYA undoubtedly gathers the most militant and politicized rank and file activists in the unions, youth, and students. It successfully held its first national congress in late October. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the formation of the alliance has up to now developed at a snail's pace, mainly

due to protracted factional struggles between its component organizations.

The "Political Theses" are certainly an excellent programmatic document. But it became clear in the discussion before and during the congress that a not insignificant minority of ANTARSYA tends to aim at a "unity of the Left" in the sense of a future government project. This would be a strategic concept based on a "popular front" policy in the framework of the existing system, specifically of the bourgeois state.

The debate about the withdrawal from the euro zone and the EU as part of a strategy of transitional demands, as well as the deletion of the so-called "non-acceptable part of the debt," needs to be carried through on a much broader basis. But most important is that in the very near future ANTARSYA must begin functioning with its local units and national leadership as a factor in the political life of the country. This process of building the alliance appears today to be absolutely necessary as a political response of the Greek working class to the capitalist crisis.

Athens, 11 November 2011

The G20, the symptom of impotence

FRANÇOIS CHESNAIS ·

The beginning of a new world social movement and the domino effect in the euro zone

The improvised presentation by experienced showmen of the "Greek drama", which almost entirely occupied the media space in Cannes, speaks volumes in itself about the present moment of the economic and political situation. George Papandreou's announcement of his intention to hold a referendum after the last series of measures of extreme austerity that were imposed on Greece in Brussels on 26-27 October, was a desperate measure by a man at the end of his tether, crushed by the extent and the tenacity of popular resistance to the austerity programmes and also worn down by the behaviour of the French and German leaders towards him. Papandreou was then humiliated again by Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy, forced to annul his decision and to resign. His gesture reflects both the socially untenable austerity programmes imposed on Greece and the politically intolerable decision to send a monitoring team of the "troika" – the European Commission, the ECB, and the IMF – to be permanently based in Athens. This is a consequence of the class struggle. Because the class struggle broke through, at any rate it gate-crashed Cannes in many ways, the most immediate for this meeting of the G20 being the resistance of the Greek population and the emergence in the United States of a movement explicitly directed against finance, OccupyWallStreet.

People tend to underestimate, under the influence of the media, the depth of Greek resistance. The actions by young people in June in Athens and Thessaloniki, in the wake of the movement of the *indignados* in Spain, reinvigorated a popular resistance that expresses itself on all fronts and one of whose forms of organization, whose discussions encourage others, are the committees for the audit and the annulment of the debt [1]. The trade union confederations have been forced to launch two successive general strikes, first in June and then on October 19, making the authority of the government and parliament more and more problematic. On October 28, during ceremonies to commemorate the national holiday, there were serious incidents, demonstrations of course, but also, especially in Thessaloniki, open expressions of insubordination during the military parades [2] which resulted in some generals being sacked.

In the end there was no referendum; Papandreou was ejected from his position as Prime Minister. It remains true that a phase of political instability has opened in Greece, which we can predict will spread elsewhere in the euro zone, but also in the rest of Europe. The mobilization of students in Zagreb is one expression of that in former Yugoslavia. It also indicates that there too, the mobilization of youth is beginning to overcome past traumas [3]. The sudden and unexpected emergence of the OccupyWallStreet movement and the political success, undeniable on a symbolic level and with important echoes in Asian countries, of the World Day of Action on October 15, is encouraging change. With the American activists targeting finance in its Wall Street heartland, the overall world political climate is starting to change.

The announcement of the referendum in Greece immediately pushed up interest rates on the public

debts that were deemed to be most vulnerable. After Greece, Portugal and Spain, Italy became the target of financial investors. The first decision that the new president of the ECB, Mario Draghi, had to take immediately on being installed was to buy Spanish and Italian bonds. Since November 2, the emission of ten-year bonds by Italy is oscillating at a level above 6.5 per cent. The emission the same day of ten-year securities by the European Financial Stability Fund found practically no takers. It will have to be repeated, which places a question mark over the credibility of one of the principal means of support to countries in the euro zone that has been established by the European Union. In Cannes, China and Brazil made it known that they were not going to provide finance for the fund. Any loan from them will be made at the next conference of the IMF. It will transit through the IMF, which further underlines the present dependent status of the euro zone as a whole. This accentuates the hostility off the German press and political class towards countries that traders have charmingly christened the PIGS, all the more so as German growth has slowed abruptly [4]. The implementation of the decisions laboriously taken in Brussels on 26-27 October is becoming increasingly problematic.

The sudden swings in the share prices of big French and Italian banks, but also the fragility of German banks, which has not been overcome, will force governments to try to implement plans to recapitalize banks, plans whose content remained very vague at the end of the Brussels marathon. Behind the crisis of sovereign debt in the euro zone there has lain, since the beginning (in the winter of 2009-2010) a crisis of European banks from which no country is immune. If their recapitalization is based on government finances, as was the case in early October with the Franco-Belgian bank Dexia, it will lead to countries being downgraded by the rating agencies. The rates of France and Belgium have been threatened since 2010. Since the end of October in France Sarkozy and Fillon are making no secret of the fact that they are bound hand and foot by the holders of public debt. They adopt the

following discourse: "The rating agencies are part of globalization, we must adapt to their existence." It is difficult not to see the kind of race to the bottom against which workers and youth are revolting in Greece. The austerity policies carried out to reduce current budget deficits and reassure the rating agencies and financial investors are leading to a contraction of the economy which makes banks more fragile by making the recovery of all forms of debt more difficult.

In 2008, the contagion of the crisis, both financial and economic, started from the United States. Today it is starting from Europe. It affects U.S. banks, which have made loans to other banks, as well as hedge fund financial investors who have speculated on the debt of the euro zone. Some of them have made bad bets. The arrival of Barack Obama in Cannes was preceded by the biggest financial collapse on Wall Street since 2008, the bankruptcy of the MF Global speculative fund, which has brought down in its wake at least one other smaller fund. The balance sheet of the banks is weighed down by a very high amount of debt – private debt even more than public – of which a part is unrecoverable and another part very vulnerable in case of a recession. They have sought to protect themselves by providing loans to small Asian countries who are feeling the effects of turbulence and of the sharp slowdown in Europe in terms of both exports and credit [5].

In the background, a crisis that is rooted in underlying causes

We have to follow the news of the crisis of the countries of the euro zone every day. But it is also essential to place it in its broader context, the context of the world economy as a whole and of the factors that make the world economic and financial crisis so profound.

In 1973-75, capitalism, after the period of the "thirty glorious years", came up once again against what Marx called its "immanent barriers." Capitalism still had room for manoeuvre. To what some authors call its "structural crisis", it gave three an-

swers which have not been substituted for but added to each other.

They were first of all the neo-conservative policies of liberalization and deregulation, whose beginning dates back to 1978-1982, and the globalization of capital that they created. The "third industrial revolution" of information and communications technologies (ICT) is closely associated with this. But the response is first of all political, even though information and communications technologies were an enabling factor that ensured great success for a time. Then from the first half of the 1990s there was established a "mechanism of growth" in which private and to a lesser extent, public debt became the central element of support to accumulation. The third response was the incorporation in stages of China into the mechanisms of world accumulation, of which its entry into the World Trade Organization by cooptation in 2001 was the culmination.

The specific traits, the magnitude and the duration of the great crisis which began already nearly four and a half years ago (August 2007), are the consequence of the exceptional length of the period of accumulation, without a serious break, since 1975, and thus of the three factors that prolonged it.

The first major feature of the crisis is that it is developing in the "world market that has been constituted" [6], to a much greater degree than at any previous period, with potential costs of withdrawal (protectionism) that are much stronger than in the 1930s (countries such as Argentina and Brazil were able at that time to practice it without retaliation and to begin a process of industrialization that they pursued thanks to the war in Europe and the Far East); lastly and above all, in a configuration where very important countries (the big "emerging" countries in particular) have escaped from the political and economic relations associated with the term imperialism. It is only by starting from the world context of valorisation of capital and acute competition, therefore by including in particular China and its suppliers of raw materials in South America and Asia, that the extent and configuration of the

over-accumulation of capital in its form of means of production, of the production capacity that has been installed, of constant capital, can be appreciated, as well as the extent and configuration of the overproduction of commodities that accompanies it. The destruction of installed production capacity in Europe and the United States was "compensated for" by the creation of capacity at least as important in China. The destruction of production capacity in Europe (in the car industry), but also in many countries of which we do not often speak (textiles in Morocco, Egypt and Tunisia, for example), expresses the weight of Chinese production, where the "reorientation" to the domestic market is very, very far from being sufficient for this production not to be unloaded onto the world market and to make impossible any economic recovery in many countries.

The second feature of the present crisis is to have broken out at the end of a process which saw not only a very high accumulation of stocks and shares holding a claim on present and future production, of an accumulation on this basis of assets that are "fictitious to the nth degree", of which no one knows the exact astronomic amount or the circuits (shadow banking). What is called financialisation is the quasi-structural plunge into the situation described by Marx in the first chapter of Volume II of Capital where "the production process appears simply as an unavoidable middle term, a necessary evil for the purpose of money-making" so that "all nations characterized by the capitalist mode of production are periodically seized by fits of giddiness in which they try to accomplish the money-making without the mediation of the production process." [7] This time the "giddiness" has become durable. Finance has established for itself very strong politico-institutional foundations and has made its power rest on the one hand on a degree of financial, but also commercial globalization, that is unprecedented in the history of capitalism, and on the other hand on the fact of having led states both to become heavily indebted themselves and to consider saving the system of indebtedness, and therefore

the banks, as a priority. The "markets" have been able to establish an unprecedented relationship with states, allowing them to dictate the conduct of Western governments. The axis of this conduct is to preserve the power of creditors regardless of the consequences in terms of the possibility of a second recession (double dip), followed by years of quasi-depression with China as the only prop, and course, whatever the consequences are in terms of social suffering.

The third feature of the situation, lastly, is that the crisis is developing while the policies of liberalization and deregulation have destroyed the national framework in which counter-cyclical instruments with a certain effectiveness had been developed. After having experienced only the "good side" of these policies, capital is discovering their "bad side". They made it possible for capitalism to put workers in different countries and continents in competition with each other as never before. They therefore strongly weakened the positions of labour against capital, eliminating up to now the "fear of the masses" as a spur to the conduct of capital. The other side of the coin is this lack of counter-cyclical instruments; no substitutes have been found for those of Keynesianism. There is no institution on a state level, national or international, to remind money capital that it will be confronted at some point with the reality principle, by the fact that uncomfortable and tedious as it is, the passage

through the production cycle, the only source of surplus value and of its realisation, is obligatory. To make it difficult can only lead to ever more acute crises. The other side of the coin, of which we saw muted expressions in Cannes, is also the intense rivalry between the major protagonists of the global capitalist economy, in a phase where the present hegemonic power has lost most of the means of its hegemony, with the exception of military means, of which it can only use a small part and in this case, so far with little success.

An editorial in the *Economist* said that all that all we could expect of governments is that they "muddle through", that they get by as best they can. Because for the reasons which have been explained, they have no strategies for "a way out of the crisis", if only because the almost unimpaired power of finance forbids them to. The challenge confronting workers and young people has never been so great. Overcoming the crisis requires nothing less than breaking the stranglehold of capitalist domination. The struggle against capitalism has always required us to find levers for common action. In the European context, the issue of public debt and its cancellation, and of seizing the banks, are part of these levers. We should therefore not make what is happening Greek, Portuguese or Spanish affairs, but really a European issue.

Paris, November 9, 2011.

CHINA

China cannot save the world from crisis

JEAN SANUK ·

While North America and Europe were hard hit, China has resisted the international crisis of 2008 thanks to a rescue plan which combined huge public spending, a low interest rate and consumption subsidies. China's growth rate reached 9% in 2009 and 10.4% in 2010, dragging in its wake Asia and Latin America out of the crisis. It has also managed to maintain unemployment to a sustainable level. China even overtook Japan, in 2010, as the second largest economy in the world in terms of GDP and it is closing the gap with the US. On the whole, China's rise seems unaffected by the subprime crisis. A closer look shows that real problems lie ahead. Chinese workers don't accept overexploitation any longer. A wave of strikes spread during the summer of 2010. Workers were fighting for wage increases, improvement of working conditions and the right to organize and bargain. Inflation, especially of food products, which accelerated since the middle of 2010, is adding a new problem for workers and a concern for the government which fears a wave of discontent. On top of that, the government is doing its best to prevent any contagion from the democratic revolutions in Arabic countries. Although the overall situation in China is completely different, these democratic revolutions show to Chinese workers that it is indeed possible to topple even the worst and most powerful dictatorships.

China's resistance to the first stage of the recession

The impact of the crisis on China and Asia, so far, has been limited (Sanuk, 2008). Asian banks were not much engaged in subprime loans and toxic products, unlike European banks. With the exception of South Korea, Asian countries did not rely on short-term capital and bank loans to finance their economies. They were not caught in a debt trap like Eastern European countries or Greece. Most of them, in particular China, had accumulated huge amount of currency reserves and were able to cope with capital flights that occurred at the end of 2008. Asian countries were primarily hit by the fall of their exports because of the slump in demand in North America and Europe. As a general rule, the recessive impact has been stronger in the most open Asian countries whose exports were concentrated in manufacturing and where the USA was an important customer. For instance, exports of manufactured products represent around 70% in Malaysia, more than 40% in Thailand and Cambodia, around 30% in China, South Korea, the Philippines and Vietnam, but less than 10% in India and Pakistan. These characteristics explain why the three biggest and most populated countries in Asia, China, India and Indonesia have not experienced a single quarter of recession between 2008 and 2009. The resilience of these three countries and most of all, China, which is among the biggest trade partners of Asian countries, led to a quick rebound in the second quarter of 2009 and a much stronger "V" shape recovery than in the rest of the world.

Firstly, to absorb the shock of the fall of exports, Asian countries have launched unprecedented rescue plans in the region, unlike during the "Asian crisis" of 1997-1999 when IMF sponsored structural adjustment plans worsened the crisis. The Chinese rescue plan draws the attention by its magnitude: US\$ 585 billion amounting to 13.3% of GDP to be

spent on a two-year span. On average, the rescue plans announced by Asian countries amounted to 7.5% of GDP against 2.8% of GDP for the G7 countries. Moreover, Asian rescue plans were more focused on public expenditure than tax cuts. On average, Asian countries dedicated 80% to increases in public spending compared with a 60% average in G20 countries. The only exception is Indonesia where tax cuts dominate. Those public expenses were accompanied by expansionary monetary policy. The median interest rate of Asian central banks has decreased by 2.25 points which is five times more than during the previous crisis. As the banking system continued to work, this had a positive impact on growth. In countries like Vietnam and China the expansionary monetary policy played a dominant role. In China, public spending has increased by a modest 26% in 2008 up from 23% in 2007, but it came back to 21% in 2009 and even 17% in 2010 when the rescue plan officially ended. On the whole, public expenses did not play a crucial role to absorb the shock. It is in fact the expansion of credit which took the lead in 2009 with a spectacular increase of 31% (see figure 2). It too fell in 2010 to -4% when the Chinese government decided to cool down the economy to prevent easy money inducing a new speculative bubble (more on this point below).

Second, household consumption remained steady as employment did not collapse during the crisis. In times of crisis, there are usually no strong increases in the unemployment rate in Asian countries, for there are no unemployment benefits except in a few countries. Workers who lost their jobs in industry try to find one in services or work as self-workers or return to the family farm whenever it is possible and when there is still one. It is especially the case in China where hundreds of thousands migrant workers went back to the interior in the winter of 2008 or stayed there after the end of the new year in February 2009. But because the economy recovered in spring 2009, a lot of them returned to the cities to find an urban job, which pays more.

Thirdly, defying many sombre prognostics, Chinese

exports fell from September 2008 to February 2009 but did not collapse and soon recuperated thanks to recovery in world trade. Given the high import content component of Chinese exports (about 50%) imports fell in the same proportion so that the current account stayed almost always positive although by a smaller magnitude (see figure 3). This reveals both the resilience of China to external shocks and its weakness at the same time.

The myth of Asia decoupling from the rest of the world

China's fast trade success is due to its role as an assembly centre of components made elsewhere in Asia, mostly in Japan and South Korea and to a lesser extent in South-East Asia. The final products assembled in China are in the main destined for the rest of the world, particularly Europe and North America. To be less vulnerable to the crisis stemming from the USA and Europe, East and South-East Asia need to absorb a major and growing part of its production of final products. Although East Asian internal trade has progressed since the crisis, it has not yet reached a stage where it could cushion worldwide trade contraction.

Although China has become the second economy of the world, bypassing Japan in 2010 and catching-up with the USA in terms of the absolute value of its GDP, China and the rest of Asia are still far from supplanting the USA which has the biggest markets in the world. If we take into account total Chinese population, income per capita would catch-up with the US in 25 to 50 years time, based on current assumptions. If we now only take into account the richest regions of China, most of them being located on the coast, representing 42% of the Chinese population in 2005, this catch-up could occur in just 10 to 20 years. The most optimistic hypothesis made by the Asian Development Bank shows that at the present pace, the 22 Asian countries which are classified as 'developing Asia', should outstrip the OECD countries' consumption by 2030. All these predictions rest on optimistic scenarios and are far from certain given the present international crisis.

To be able to decouple from the rest of the world (at least relatively, because there is no such thing as a completely autonomous region in the present global economy) Asia, and most of all China, must re-balance its economy away from export-led growth and in favour of the domestic market. This can only be achieved if three conditions are fulfilled. Firstly, China must revalue in part its exchange rate to lower the price of imports and hence the cost of goods it produces for the internal market and make exports less profitable than they are. Secondly, and most importantly, China must significantly raise the real wages of urban and rural workers so that internal consumption can recover from its present extremely low level (35% of GDP). This is the most sensitive decision because Chinese capitalists and bureaucrats are used to living like fat-cats thanks to the huge profits that state-owned and private enterprises are making on the back of overexploited workers. Thirdly, China must increase the interest rate from its present low level in order to discourage the very high investment in capital intensive industry and reorient the economy in favour of domestic services like education, health, housing, culture and leisure which are needed by the vast majority of Chinese people. These are labour intensive and could generate the millions of jobs that China requires, and they are less energy consuming and less polluting than industry. China has made some progress in this direction but is far from the objective.

Can China resist a new recession?

In 2011, the international crisis entered a second stage. The crisis in Europe is very serious and the USA is not in a much better situation. A second recession is coming and there will be a new slump in world trade. Chinese and Asian exports will be hit again and the question is whether China and Asia

will be able to resist the new trade contraction with a massive rescue plan again?

There are reasons to be pessimistic. China and the Asian countries cannot launch massive public expenditure or massively expand credit every two years. The last rescue plans have already created problems that are not yet resolved: in the Chinese case, a sharp increase of non-performing loans in the banking sector, inflation and speculative bubbles in real estate and in the stock exchange. Like in the USA and Europe, Chinese banks will have to be rescued with public money. And like in the USA and Europe, it is always to the workers that governments present the bill. In China, rescuing the banks and local authorities which are heavily indebted would cost a lot of money and if workers have to pay for it in one way or another, the objective of rebalancing growth in favour of domestic demand would be postponed to the long-term and with it the myth that China could drag the world out the crisis.

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ITALY

Bye Bye Berlusconi; Ciao Super Mario, the banker's friend...

DAVE KELLAWAY ·

Incidentally, recent articles in the British media such as pieces by Tobias Jones (Guardian, 11.11.11) or Maria Rodota (Observer 13.11.11) really do not understand the Berlusconi phenomenon. Instead of understanding how Berlusconi's rise was facilitated by the crisis of bourgeois representation in the implosion of the Christian Democrats and Craxi's Socialist Party and the subsequent support from key, dynamic sectors of Italian capital, they reduce his success to the so-called national characteristics of Italians who see themselves in his shoes or who like the 'lovable' rogue. At the same time, like most international commentators, they ignore Monti's history of active support for the neo-liberal policies which produced the mess in the first place. Jones even lists the possible benefits of tough austerity for strengthening the Italian family and introducing a good dose of meritocracy. Nowhere can you find any analysis of the degradation of social fabric that has already occurred or any acknowledgement of the other Italy — of the ordinary citizens, young people and trade unionists who successfully defeated the government on the privatisation of water without any real assistance from main opposition party.

Paradoxically the way in which Berlusconi had degraded Italian politics with his corruption, buffoonery and womanising provides the ruling class with the opportunity to present a workable ideological narrative. Cheered on by the media and foreign

commentators, 'Super' Mario Monti, ex-EC commissioner with his discreet, catholic persona, is the man to clean up Italian politics and save the nation. People are so angry at the political class and relieved to see the end of Berlusconi that many have illusions in the second technocratic government to be formed in Europe after the Greek one. ISTAT, a respected polling agency, estimated a real unemployment figure of 5 million. Young people are increasingly forced to live off their parents or move abroad. The very depth of the crisis makes people inclined to believe things may change with a 'non-political' new broom. It is conveniently ignored that Monti is one of the same economic masters who led Europe into the crisis in the first place!

The media on its own cannot manufacture this public opinion, the role of ex-Communist and king maker president Napolitano has been crucial. He represents a link to the partisans of 43, to a certain communist morality and is seen as a neutral above the political parties. More importantly the main opposition party, the PD (Democratic party) mainly formed out of the majority faction of the old Italian Communist Party, has been an enthusiastic supporter of the 'Full' Monti solution. Earlier this year the PD had allowed the most vicious austerity programme to go through the Italian parliament without opposition, so this is no surprise. Crucially the PD still wields important influence over the main trade union confederation, the CGIL which had called national one day strikes under pressure against the former government. Even forces to the left of the PD have wavered, Nikki Vendola the governor of Puglia, and leader of Sinistra Ecologia and Libertà (SEL – Left, Ecology and Liberty) issued an early statement where he implied acceptance of a temporary government solution if a degree of pro-

gressive demands were included. Under a howl of protest from his members he tacked back rapidly. The pressure to accept the national emergency rhetoric even forced the Italian Values party leader, Di Pietro (former hero of the Clean Hands anti-political corruption campaign) to flip from opposition to support. For him it was a more moderate membership who jammed the telephones and went online.

Other forces to the left of the PD such as Paulo Ferrero's Refoundation rump, Marco Ferrando's PCL and Sinistra Critica, have called for elections, mobilisations and opposition to the bankers government. These forces played a real role in the recent successful mobilisations on water or nuclear power. However the division of a weakened radical left and the lack of an anti-capitalist party does not help the building an alternative. The electoral massacre of Refoundation at the last elections mean none of these forces have parliamentary representation and hence little access to the media.

On the right Berlusconi's party is overall in support of the new government but there are serious differences which, with the decline in the leader's credibility and authority, will only increase. Exactly what Berlusconi will do is still unclear. While unlikely to lead a new coalition his wealth (9 billion euros) and media empire means he is still a potential player. Indeed Berlusconi played a harder game in opposition to Prodi's left of centre government than Bersani and his PD colleagues ever did in the last few years against his own government. His former ally, the separatist Northern League, under Umberto Bossi, has decided to go into opposition. Bossi is happy to have time to deal with internal opposition and thinks he will regain votes if not a passenger on the pro-European austerity steamroller. He has already re-called his parliament of Padania (the illusory northern nation he espouses).

Monti's government is committed to implementing an austerity package that is on top of cuts announced earlier this year. Public sector pay will be frozen for even longer until 2014. Infrastructure will continue to deteriorate with literally mortal ef-

fects as we saw with the loss of life in recent storms. VAT will increase to 21%. Pension rights and payments will be further attacked. Public property and services will be privatised. Trade union and workers rights will be directly attacked as bosses want to sack people more easily. Make no mistake about it Monti is no friend of working people. Balancing the budget will be written into the constitution while laws protecting workers will be written out. Monti wrote an article in *Corriere delle Sera* at the time of the recent conflict in Fiat over trade union rights in which he fully supported the Marchionne plan that severely limits the right of trade unions such as the more militant FIOM.

The second theme in the ideological narrative being created around the Monti government is that at last Italy is going to deal with all its anachronistic, protectionist and restrictive practices which are holding back economic growth. Trade union rights are lumped into this discourse alongside legitimate issues such as professional associations like notaries or taxi drivers controlling who can practice that trade. Trade union defence of workers interests is presented as protecting special interest groups like older workers against the rights of young people to get jobs.

Italy's state deficit is not fundamentally due to a housing bubble or national banks being as reckless as the UK's. Private debt such as credit card balances is also less significant. The causes of the deficit are much more to do with many years of systematic corruption and substantial tax evasion. It has just been estimated that 'lost' tax is equivalent to about 15% of GDP each year. Any state run service or expenditure for welfare or regional development is inherently inefficient. Political parties have placed their supporters in state institutions like the health service, distributed false pensions or directly pilfered taxpayers money. If you add in organised crime like the camorra or the mafia who take their slice you can see how the deficit reaches 120% of GDP. Anyone who knows Italy will tell you that welfare benefits are much lower than the UK and resources for education are also much worse so the

deficit is not at all due to over-generous payments to 'lazy' Italians whatever commentators from elsewhere will tell you. The political class itself in all its thousands of representatives at local, regional and national level milks the state coffers with their high salaries and myriad benefits.

The class struggle left does not underestimate the difficulty of the present situation. Monti as the anti-Berlusconi non-party figure will have some impact on public opinion, particularly if the main opposition parties actively support him. Banks in Italy did not get involved in the same mess as banks like Northern Rock did in the UK so a banker in power is not necessarily a red rag for people. People are fed up at the corruption and nepotism that blight public and private services so any sign of reform may attract them. It is likely too that Monti will make some measures slightly more 'egalitarian' and give the rich some token hits.

A mass movement independent of the PD does exist and was seen in the successful rank and file victory of the committees in the anti-privatisation and anti-nuclear referendums a few months ago. This movement mobilised for the 15th October with a demonstration of 200,000 in Rome. Unfortunately the violent actions of the Black Bloc minority meant the police could divert the march and prevent an occupy camp being set up. The leadership of the movement is not so structured or as firmly embedded in the communities, schools, colleges and workplaces as it needs to be if it wants to challenge the hegemony of reformist forces like the PD. Much of the anti-Berlusconi or anti-political caste feeling is also at times rather anti-political exemplified by comedians like Beppe Grillo who popularises slogans telling politicians to *Va fa n'culo*. (go f..k yourself). It does not lead to an organised challenge to the PD and for an overall political alternative. This also requires a political analysis and popularisation of the economic issues like the debt or redistribution. Campaigns like *We must stop them – Revolt against the debt* [www.rivoltaildebito.org] are trying to organise a broad campaign. The anger and mobilisation is real enough over the last year or so in

Italy whether you are talking about students, militant trade unionists led by the FIOM, community groups around issues like water or the Val Susa anti-high speed train link. The base of the PD is not immune to pressure and if you follow the web chat on the Unita site it suggests that many are not happy with PD leader Bersani's political line. There is potential for the radical left to have an impact here if it can develop a united, non-sectarian line. The first message for the left has to be to expose the government as one directly led by European finance supported by Italian capitalists that will make things a lot worse for working people. The second has to be a clear class explanation of the debt with understandable alternative proposals such as non-payment of toxic debt and a public audit.

How long the Monti government wants or will be given is another hot issue. The European Troika and Monti himself would prefer it lasting for a year but any combination of forces in parliament could vote it out at any time. The PD is saying it should reform the electoral law as well as implement its economic policies and it is happy to let the technocrats rule for a significant period (see Bersani's statement of 15.11.11). Monti would prefer a few leading figures from the PD and Berlusconi's PDL to be alongside him in the government as political cover given the unpopular measures he will be taking. Although Bersani has stated he is happy to give it more time than currently supported by the PDL he is also wary about being too far identified with the government and is on record as preferring mostly technocrats in power.

What is certain is that the degree of restructuring and the scale of attacks on working people required by European and Italian capital are not easily achieved. Bond costs were still too high even on the Monday after the end of Berlusconi. The markets are still not convinced, Italian bonds were being bought on the 15th November at over 6% which is unsustainable. Will the new government be able to contain struggle from the main trade unions or others to defend pensions, fair labour laws and wages?

Will the radical left be able to play a role in mobilising an opposition? If resistance does emerge Italian working people could yet hold back the offensive. If it does not then it will be facing defeats that will

turn back not just the gains made after 1968/9 but many of the social conquests still enshrined in the 1948 Constitution and post-war settlement.

ITALY

Berlusconi's government is falling... what next?

PIERO MAESTRI ·

This government represented the ferocious and immoral face of neoliberal politics, a government that does not recognize democratic rules and has built up the fortune of friendly firms and individuals through cuts to social spending and to the living standards of millions of women and men. For this reason his downfall is a liberation and an opportunity for working people and for democracy in our country.

But...

We are not the slightest bit interested in the debate about the institutional composition of a crisis government: whether a technical government, a 'transitional' government, a government of national unity or with other labels...

On the other hand we are very interested in understanding what is being prepared for this country's working women and men, youth and those who are unemployed or in temporary or casual work

The government crisis does not come on the heels of mass mobilizations, although these have taken place in Italy, but is the result of both Berlusconi's personal incapacity and of his mendacious majority to fully satisfy the demands of ruling capital in Europe – i.e. the ECB and its French-German bosses, even if the Italian Draghi is at the helm – and the need for the Confindustria (Italian Industry Association) and the banks to obtain fresh capital so they can emerge from the crisis with more profits and power.

To be able to thoroughly carry out these policies the governing centre-right parties cannot act alone: they need to also get a part of the so-called "opposition" to support the programme. That is, the "responsible" opposition made up of the Democratic

Party and the elusive "third pole" (the Casini, Fini, Rutelli trio...). An opposition so responsible that they utterly support the IMF/ ECB solution and when they do criticise Berlusconi on economic policy they do so...from the right. They criticise Berlusconi as a pariah, but do not argue against his basic political positions.

They are so responsible that they allowed the passing of the financial bill (so that they could discuss the vote of non-confidence in December 2010) the budget and the Stability act...

In order to provide an adequate, left response to the government crisis the key to the political choices facing us in the coming months must be clearly and honestly confronted: who pays for the crisis?

It is not enough to say we want more resources for labour, for youth, for social programmes, for culture etc... if it is not specified where these resources must come from.

The clear response we must give is a class response; those who provoked the crisis — who have never paid for it — must pay for it. We do not say "the rich must pay too". Only the "rich" must pay, the others (pensioners, workers, the unemployed, part-time and temporary workers, migrants) have already paid and are still paying.

The fall of the Berlusconi government is an opportunity for the left and social movements to gain the strength to organize and for workers, precarious students and migrants to take part in a mobilization that can put forward a clear platform from below:

- the illegitimate debt must not be paid, useless and harmful expenditure must be cut (military spending and big public works such as the TAV, Expo2015, the Messina Bridge...);

– remove the billions in gifts to businesses as a result of Prodi's still operative tax break along with similar provisions;

– the banks must be nationalized and public management of common goods defended – as 27 million voters demanded in the 12th of June referendums.

With these resources we could build a different economic policy, which could finally respond to the needs of the "99%" – as the Occupy Wall Street demonstrators say – and prioritise the ecological reconversion of production (and of civil protection, so as to prevent other deaths from the next storms or earthquake).

We ask "civil society" ,which is demonstrating against the Berlusconi government and speaking out particularly against the most scandalous and tabloid-worthy aspects, not for opinions on the next government but rather if they are ready to struggle on policy. We call on them to stop supporting

"friendly" governments (or regional or town administrations). We want to convince them not to let anyone in government carry out a war on workers' rights and against the interests of working people.

In short, we want the union, associations and movements to do their job: do not give any more external support to so-called friendly governments, but work independently and autonomously to build the alternative.

We are doing everything to mobilise – starting in the coming weeks: from the 17 November student demonstrations to the 26 November National Demonstration for the defence of water and common goods, in the hope of a real general strike (which will probably be stopped by the Confederal unions taking a "responsible" position in support of a government of national unity).

<http://ilmegafonoquotidiano.it/news...>
November 2011

9

ITALY

Goodbye to Berlusconi – now let's fight the bankers' government

SINISTRA CRITICA (CRITICAL LEFT) ·

Unlike many who are celebrating we are not indifferent to the manner in which Berlusconi fell or over who will succeed him.

Likewise we are not singing the praises of president Napolitano. He helped bring down Berlusconi in response to the demands of capital and the European political leadership. They considered Berlusconi and his government incapable of carrying through the austerity programme and the destruction of social services that are the "only response" to the crisis across Europe.

Nor can we forget that the austerity programme now bears the name of Mario Monti, the man who forbade any state aid, to promote the interests of big banks and to ensure the deregulation of the financial system. This is the same Mario Monti who used the rightwing newspaper *Corriere della sera* to praise the reactionary "reforms" of Gelmini and Marchionne. Can anyone on the left seriously think this man represents anything "better"?

There isn't an "after". What we have is a present with a government that is hostile to the interests of working people. Its only programme is new and crushing economic and financial measures against the working class major privatisations of the public

sector to meet the demands of European capital.

It's a government which is selling the old ideology that we can only get out of the crisis with ever greater attacks on welfare, wages and pensions than those we've had for the last twenty years.

For workers, people in insecure employment, youth and migrants there is only one possible choice – immediate and determined opposition to the Monti-Napolitano government. We have to construct the arguments and the forms of organisation needed to resist the plans they have for us. We have to build a network that poses the questions about the social and political alternatives, obliging the people who caused the crisis to pay for it.

The state institutions don't offer any shortcuts. The only democratic path has to be immediate elections and a contest between political programmes that try to learn from what has happened in the last four years – with an anti-capitalist left that refuses any "national unity" or "technical" compromise and organises political and social opposition.

We invite everyone to build the widest possible unity of those who reject the Monti government in favour of a left exit from the crisis. We will take part in it.

Esecutivo nazionale Sinistra Critica

<http://www.sinistracritica.org/cont...>

MEXICO

The OPT, a proletarian alternative to the crisis of political parties

EDGARD SANCHEZ ·

The OPT Congress was held in the SME's headquarters and was attended by 956 registered delegates on Saturday 27th, 300 of them elected by the electrical workers, rising to more than 1,100 registered delegates on the Sunday at the OPT's launch rally in Mexico City's Zocalo square.

Given that the call for the OPT came from the SME, which only organizes in the central part of the country where its electricity company, Compania Luz y Fuerza del Centro (Central Light and Energy Company), operates, it was remarkable that delegates came from 22 different states, some of them very far from Mexico City. Apart from the Federal District (of Mexico City), there were delegates from Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero, Puebla, Aguascalientes, Michoacán, Sonora, Chihuahua, Zacatecas, Morelos, Jalisco, Sinaloa, San Luis Potosi, Estado de Mexico, Hidalgo, Guanajuato, Durango, Baja California, Querétaro, Tlaxcala and Nayarit.

Towards working class political independence

Many have emphasized the novelty of the OPT, given the crisis of Mexico's party system and the decline of those who liked to present themselves as the sole representatives of the left. Its importance goes beyond just that of a new political organization or a socialist regroupment of the sort some of us were arguing for years ago, after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The real importance of the OPT is that it comes out of a call from the most combative section of the Mexican working class, the electrical workers of the SME, who are struggling against energy privatization and the dismantling of the Central Light and Energy Company. Firstly because

the proposal means moving beyond a purely trade union, labour struggle onto the terrain of political struggle. As the SME leaders frequently say in their speeches, the aim is to fight for power, to fight for the country, and that's why they're proposing to create a political organization. Secondly, it means building a political organization of the workers, based on the trade union strength of the SME, but which also includes other forces from the workers, trade union and popular movement. "Come on, Come on, here we are building the workers' movement", is the electrical workers' favourite slogan at OPT meetings.

This initiative to create a political organization of working people could fill a historic gap in Mexico: the lack of political independence for the working class, given it has never had a party of its own to represent it, but has historically been tied to through the obligatory, mass, corporative affiliation of the trade unions to the PRI, to a bourgeois party that defends the capitalist system. From the beginning we said that the importance of the SME initiative was that it opened the way to the creation of what in the international workers' movement has been known as a "workers' party". [1] Of course there have always been organizations of the socialist left that who defend the interests of the working class, including the PRT and others, but the OPT goes beyond a regroupment of the left and points towards the creation of a broad workers party, a party of the working class that offers workers in other unions tied to the PRI an alternative of their own.

It is true that the OPT has not come about at a time of growing working class struggles and victories, nor does it organize the majority of the class. The

SME, which continues its resistance, now has some 16 thousand members among the 40 thousand electricity workers sacked in October 2009; nonetheless it remains a significant force, an example and a pole of attraction for workers in other unions, as the teachers and miners have already shown. Although it has not been able to reverse fully the blow represented by those mass lay-offs, it is not a movement that has been defeated. The key thing is that the SME's struggle is the reference point and backbone for all the resistance struggles that continue to unfold against the current regime's neoliberal policies and militarization. Although the OPT doesn't come out of an upsurge in struggle, the fact that is born under the leadership of the SME, at the head of resistance struggles and at a time of sharpening class conflict, also has an effect on its political character.

The Brazilian PT, created on the initiative of trade unions like the metal workers, was born in the midst of a number of victorious battles, yet when it reached government its orientation was social liberal, for the administration of neoliberal capitalism. Obviously there are many more political factors that mean the circumstances in which such an organization emerges are not decisive one way or another for its subsequent evolution. But in any case, the process of radicalisation and of confrontation with the most reactionary, privatizing and pro-capitalist policies of Calderon, means there is little scope for the OPT to harbour illusions in the conciliatory policies that dominate the institutional left (for example with the PRD and its alliances with the PAN or the search for coalition governments with the right).

The debates leading up to the OPT

Once the proposal for the OPN was announced, during the months leading up to the Congress a major discussion was undertaken on its content, scope, character, programme and organizational structure. This was possible because the proposal was received favourably by many brothers and sisters beyond the SME, militants in other struggles,

other unions and other social and political organizations. The project has been embraced by activists from various currents of thought on the Mexican left, reflecting both its success and its potential.

As political activists of the current represented by the PRT, we also welcomed and took part in the discussions to define the content and character of the OPN under construction. In fact, the PRT's XII National Congress held in August last year addressed the issue in its resolution entitled "The Road to building a revolutionary party." When Martin Esparza announced the proposal in October 2010 at the Azteca stadium, we also issued declaration welcoming the initiative and presenting our views. When in December the first written texts were presented for the new organization, at that time still seen as the creation of National Political Grouping, comrade Guillermo Almeyra wrote some critical observations shared by us. (The above texts are available on the site of the PRT.).

Organized around four working groups, (Principles, Programme, Statutes and Plan of Action), the Congress saw its discussions enriched with many proposals and observations, but three main themes, I think, stand out:

1. The character of the OPN and whether it relates to a perspective of national liberation or defines itself as an anticapitalist or socialist project.
2. The OPN's approach to elections within the current political system and its political perspectives for the 2012 elections.
3. The right to tendency within the OPN's democratic organization.

In the first texts presented for the founding of the OPN, which were no longer written by comrades of the SME, it was proposed that the OPN's strategic perspective should be guided by the struggle for national liberation, recalling some old debates on the left. There were in the past those who argued this perspective as a first stage of struggle historically separated from the socialist perspective, saying that as the first task was to achieve the national liberation of nations oppressed by imperialism and win

demands that were anti-imperialist and democratic but not yet socialist, there needed to be an alliance with – and programmatic subordination to – a supposed national bourgeoisie that was ready to fight imperialism. In reality, the way in which capitalism has developed means the bourgeoisie in Mexico has grown in alliance with and subordinate to foreign capital and imperialist interests, with no significant sector of the national bourgeoisie willing to oppose and fight against those interests. Therefore it would be a mistake to self-limit the struggle of working people to the bourgeoisie and its programme, and hence the importance and absolute necessity of an independent policy to build the OPN as the working people's own organization.

In Mexico, the consolidation of the oligarchy in power with the development of neo-liberalism in recent decades clearly shows the interrelationship between the interests of imperialism and the oligarchy against which we fighting today.

After months of intense discussion and clarification, the comrades who initially proposed this national liberation strategy say that they are not arguing for two historically separate phases of struggle; they say they do not want to limit the struggle to a merely anti-neoliberal perspective, because they believe that neoliberalism is simply the form assumed by capitalism today, nor are they proposing a subordinate alliance with any sector of the bourgeoisie. If this is the case and it can be made clear in the documents voted by the Congress, then it would seem that thanks to the discussion the differences have reduced and people's positions have drawn closer.

In that case it would still be useful to make clear that although capitalism currently takes the form, model and prescriptions of neoliberalism, opposition to neoliberalism is not necessarily the same thing as anticapitalism. In fact there obviously are political currents who see themselves as antineoliberal without being anticapitalist, and who believe, mistakenly, that it is possible to "humanize" capitalism. The new oligarchy that has emerged under the mantle of neoliberalism, using mafia methods

of plunder and violence, has in fact displaced from power other sectors of the bourgeoisie, and this provides the objective basis for those who, suffering the consequences of neoliberalism, long for the previous phase of capitalism, with its so-called welfare state and statist policies, but also with its corporatism and anti-democratic, populist demagoguery. On occasions no doubt, in the fight against some aspects of neoliberalism, we will coincide with certain current or sectors of the bourgeoisie displaced by the oligarchy, but that does not mean we should limit our perspective to the struggle against neoliberalism, as they do, but rather maintain our anti-capitalist approach, precisely because we know that the current reality of capitalism is neoliberal.

There seems to be a confusion in this debate within the OPN between the tasks of the struggle against the oligarchy and the system, on the one hand, and on the other the character of the new party organization that we are building.

It is true that the oligarchy's submissive governments give some relevance to anti-imperialism and the defence of national sovereignty (the fight against NAFTA, against privatizations that favour imperialist companies, against Plan Merida and Felipe Calderón's "war on drugs" or the presence of foreign agents and police officers, and the defence of the country's oil, are some examples of this). This means that on occasions there will be an overlap with the struggles of other social sectors, because of course neoliberalism benefits a very narrow minority and hurts some business and bourgeois sectors too. But the possibility of fronts or common struggles against neoliberalism, do not eliminate the need for independent workers' organization. This is why we say that the OPN is the organization, the party, of the workers. In the course of the struggle we may form fronts with other social sectors. But these sectors are not in the Workers' Party, nor can the latter limit its own programme as if it were a multi-class party. It is not a party of national liberation which implies a multi-class programme, albeit anti-imperialist, but a workers' party with an anti-capitalist perspective, even though

in the immediate struggle it may coincide with other sectors that are just anti-neoliberal. This is why we make a distinction between anti-imperialist tasks, which we may share with others, and the character of the workers' party. This is the "novelty" of the SME's proposal: it's the workers' own organization. It is not about repeating the experience of other supposedly left-wing parties whose programme is merely neoliberal or partly anti-imperialist, or has a certain vision of national liberation that comes from the revolutionary nationalism of the old PRI and Cardenas. We repeat: what is new in the SME's proposal is a party political organization of the workers themselves, that comes out of the SME's struggle against the neoliberal policies of the oligarchy in power, which favour a capitalist minority, i.e., out of an anti-capitalist struggle.

Some comrades in the discussion in recent months have criticized, correctly, the fact that the programmatic proposals included so many nods and winks to business sectors, as if we wanted to represent their program and interests. It is obvious that no medium business sectors or displaced sections of the bourgeoisie will have the least interest in joining the OPN. So this obsession with including in the programme of a workers' party these nods to business leaders, or saying that, yes it is a left party, but without including any anti-capitalist definition in its programme, is a misplaced self-limitation that will not only fail to appeal to the bourgeoisie, it will give the impression that we are waiting for them, saving them a place just in case, and submitting to the shadow of this absent bourgeoisie, by making concessions in party's programmatic definition. According to this logic, it would indeed be more attractive to define the party as standing of national liberation, rather than as an anti-capitalist party of workers struggling for socialism (although it should undertake imperialist tasks).

People often say we don't want another PRD, but if we define the OPN as an anti-neoliberal or national liberation party, we will maintain the same strategic outlook. We have to stand by the original sense of the SME comrades' proposal. And this does not

mean not making fronts with others whose anti-neoliberal positions we share, even though they're not anti-capitalist. For example, in the past in the fight against the privatization of the electricity industry, the SME gained the support of people like Manuel Bartlett. That was right and helped fight the SME. That does not mean that in the new OPN characters like Bartlett will be comrades in the same party. Similarly, we may coincide with Andrés Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) in the struggle to defend the Mexican oil industry, or indeed in other areas of struggle against the oligarchy, which he calls "The Mafia", but that does not mean that there are any illusions that he will join this new political organization of the workers which is the OPN. We do not need to make programmatic concessions that no one is asking of us, as if we were keeping the chair warm for social sectors that are not representative of the working class and who anyway will not join this party. Multiclass, anti-neoliberal parties, we have seen many times before, and their failure has become apparent. The SME's proposal is different. We should support it.

The right to tendency is not the same as tribalism or the pressure groups of the caudillos.

As we said, the SME's call to build the OPN had a first success with the very widespread favourable response from the left, well beyond the ranks of the SME itself. The need to build an organization with exemplary democratic structures is not just an abstract moral commitment, but an objective necessity to ensure the unity and the effective operation of the new organization. This project brings together activists from different political organizations and currents with very different backgrounds. Nor can this be just a corporate decision; we need membership to be a conscious decision by every militant and not mere obedience to a decision from above. This means that the OPN will be made up of critical individuals and not unthinking recruits. Given this, discussion and critical thought among the members of the organization will be only natural, as the preparatory discussion period has already shown.

In no way should discussion, or the recognition of and respect for differences in our organization, be seen as barriers or as sabotage of the organization; rather they are a natural part of the political organization of the working class and of a radical organization in its critique of bourgeois society and values, among which neoliberalism has only sharpened the claim to a "single truth" and to uniformity in thought and values. On the contrary, we defend the right to difference, to diversity. To achieve this we need a democratic system.

The way to achieve such democracy and respect for diversity cannot be reduced to recognizing majorities and minorities on every issue, but must also include the right to organize political tendencies and to try to convince others of your proposals in a framework of democratic give and take. And that means knowing that if this time you fail to convince the majority, you will not be excluded from the organization nor will your point of view be suppressed. If the right to criticism and self criticism is recognised, that means that if on this occasion your proposal has not convinced others, and then tomorrow the majority proposal proves inadequate, then corrections can be made and it may be worth listening again to the minority proposal.

Right now, in spite of all the discussion that has taken place, everyone accepts that there are some issues that we will have to return to and discuss again after the organization's foundation. Similarly, ideas that have not been accepted now will not be excluded, and nor will those who argued for them.

This is why it is necessary to ensure the right to tendency in the new organization. A tendency is a group of comrades in the organization around a political project or proposal. It is a current of thought that may be temporary, but which can be recognised and respected, without its members having to act in secret, clandestinely, a practice that is likely to produce unprincipled groupings based merely on personal loyalties to particular figures or 'leaders'. It is better to require any current of opinion to express itself openly and tell the organization what it stands for and why it has decided to organize itself.

When some comrades in the OPN hear this proposal about tendencies, they reject it, remembering the experience with "currents" in the PRD. Again they argue, quite reasonably, that the new organization should not be a repeat of the PRD. But while that is right, again there is a confusion here that affects particularly all the comrades who have lived through the experience of the PRD. It is supposed that the main shortcoming of the PRD is the existence of currents, the so-called "tribes". In fact the main problem has nothing to do with the currents, but with the underlying character of the PRD. The "tribes" are a consequence of the character of that organization and not in themselves the cause of its evolution and degeneration. Even those founding members of the PRD who came from the socialist left agreed to abandon that perspective and take up the programme of a party of the "democratic revolution", which translated into a struggle to take turns in government. In the process, they dissolved or abandoned their previous parties. But if the objective is to take turns in government and show that once in office there is no instability or crisis but just a brave and honest administration (although not always quite so honest), then this objective turns into a fight for more votes and more government posts, simply in order to manage the state apparatus and not to transform the current reality. The "tribes" emerge in the struggle for these posts and elected office, and the material benefits they bring, and not for any medium term political project. That is why, even though whole parties with long histories of their own dissolved into the PRD when it was founded, these "tribes" re-emerged as interest groups circling around the elected posts and sinecures of a party seeking to become an electoral alternative.

The other part of the confusion is to see the right to tendency as something peculiar to those PRD-type currents. But in fact those are not political currents at all, in the sense of currents with a political point of view and proposal, but interest groups or unprincipled "tribes". That is not what we want when

we propose the right to tendency in the new organization.

On the eve of the Congress, we said that this right was even more necessary in the case of the OPN. This was not just because the SMEs call for the new OPN had already attracted a variety of historic currents of the Mexican left, some of them joining for the first time in a shared party project. So political tendencies within the OPN are not a proposal for the future, they are a reality now in this process where we are already working together. It would be ingenuous to think that these historic currents are going to disappear overnight, after the weekend of 27 and 28 August, especially after they have shown they can work together in a new project like the OPN, and alongside the SME workers and following their initiative, can create a new organization.

What is more, it should be pointed out that the right to tendency is not just an obsession of the Trotsky, but an idea that is part of the finest traditions of democratic struggle in the Mexican workers' movement. Ever since the consolidation of the old trade union bureaucracy linked to the PRI, the fight for trade union democracy has been a permanent demand of the workers' movement. This has been shown by the emergence of political currents and tendencies in the unions fighting against the monolithic control of the bureaucrats, against the exclusion clause and against the obligatory affiliation to the PRI. Many workers coming to the OPT come from the experience of democratic union currents, like those of the teachers or university students. The best example of this democratic functioning is the SME itself, where it was common, in the annual elections for half the Central Committee, for the General Secretary and the External Relations Secretary to be from different union currents. It is this democratic tradition of the SME that we should keep alive in the OPT and not the monolithic tradition of the bureaucracy. As we know, given their opposition to corporatism of all kinds, the SME leaders who called for the OPT did so as the 11 October current and not officially in the name of the union.

The democratic and inclusive decisions taken by the Congress.

The different opinions were able to express themselves during the founding Congress of the OPT. The work of the Congress and its conclusions demonstrate the validity and utility of a democratic way of functioning that allows all points of view to be expressed and discussed. For decades we have suffered the imposition of an anti-democratic culture by the PRI, which has been inherited by both the leaders of the institutional left and by the trade union bureaucracy. Often this also affects the mindset of grass roots activists and militants who, wrongly, see the democratic discussion of ideas as disputes or divisive conflicts, and who shout their opposition with abstract calls for action or practical activity, even in assemblies that are precisely designed to discuss and agree plans for action and organization. Discussion is not the same as division and the discussion and debate of ideas serves to clarify positions.

The Congress decided to pull together all the different positions in the report backs from the working groups and round tables, and to point out the differences where these seemed, for the time being, to be unresolved (see the OPT website.).

As mentioned above, the discussion over national liberation and anti-capitalism produced some clarification and a lessening of the differences. No doubt practical experience will lead to further clarification.

In the press release following the Congress, comrade Humberto Montes de Oca, External Relations Secretary of the SME, summed up the founding of the OPT in these words: "Given the absence of a left-wing political organization representing working people, it is essential we develop a new organization based directly on the social movements, with a clearly left-wing, popular and class-struggle project, so that we can effectively fight the oligarchic regime and its supporters right now, without waiting for the "political opportunities" that the system itself decides." [2]

Montes de Oca further describes the basis of the OPT: "To achieve its ends, our political movement will not put forward dogmatic ideological definitions, nor will it align itself with any particular current of the left. Nonetheless, all aspects of our national-democratic platform will stress our questioning of the capitalist system and the new forms of colonialism this has created. In this way we will assume our internationalist tasks, linking up with the peoples of Our America and with the peoples and working classes of the world." [3]

On the question of elections, it was decided the organization should take no position at its founding congress in August, but do this at another to be held next March. In any case, the debates suggest that most people believe it is possible to take part in elections to public office, in ways to be decided according to the circumstances – this after those who saw not participating in elections as almost a principle, seem to have decided not to take part in the creation of the OPT.

On the issue that we call the right to tendencies, and which in the discussion is referred to as the right to political currents, the resolution is also interesting. "On the points that attracted much debate, like the right to form internal currents of opinion, it was agreed to continue the discussion and take a decision at the next congress to be held in March next year. This will also discuss our electoral tactics for 2012", says Montes de Oca in the press release already mentioned.

In fact there is more to this, because although the discussion of the Statutes did not adopt our own proposal to recognize explicitly the right to tendency, it did remove from the draft Statutes the article that prohibited the existence of currents and also obliged all organizations wanting to join the OPT to dissolve themselves first. On the contrary, Article 39 of the Statutes now recognizes: "The National Executive Commission is the executive body of the National Council of the Organization, and this will determine its composition, always taking account of the stability of the organization and its plural character, in which there converge various tradi-

tions of struggle that enrich our democratic life and our collective vision".

But this agreement is not confined to the written statutes. It is expressed in practice in the initial shape of the OPT, which ensures that the National Council and subsequently the National Executive Commission have a plural makeup reflecting the various traditions of struggle and of political culture that have responded to the SME's call and come together. In fact, the organizations that have converged in the OPT maintain a public profile at its activities and meetings, some even with banners bearing their own names or pointing out their political origin every time they make a proposal or contribution or give greetings. The leadership bodies established so far include, alongside a decisive presence of comrades from the SME, members from such diverse political traditions as the MLN and the OST, the PRT and the PPS, REDIR-PRD or Rumbo Proletario, among others, as well as comrades from many of the movements and social organizations currently in struggle. [4]

Paraphrasing comrade Guillermo Almeyra, we can say that the OPT is a broad party, an anti-capitalist organization of the workers and their organizations. [5]

In this sense, the OPT is now, with its leadership bodies set up and busy recruiting and organizing its members, operating in relation to political currents just as it did before the Congress. If this continues, it may even be unnecessary to insist on explicit recognition of the right to tendencies at a later congress.

The only disputed votes in the OPT Congress, settled in an inclusive manner, were on the organization's name and motto. As for the name, Martin Esparza's proposal that we call it by its initials, OPT, standing for Political Organization of the People and the Workers, was supported by an overwhelming majority. The vote on the motto or slogan was between "National liberation and socialism" and "National liberation and social emancipation", with 171 votes for the former and 281 for the

latter. In reality, both expressed a combination of the perspectives for national liberation and socialism, since in the debates just before the Congress people began to use the idea of social emancipation as synonymous with the process of a revolutionary rupture leading to socialism. We voted for the "socialist" version because we wanted to call things by their name and not be cowed by the argument that the collapse of the Soviet Union meant we had to hide our name in order not to be tainted by that; we have no responsibility to bear for that particular corpse, nor should we suppose that the socialism we want has anything to do with that supposedly, really existing version. But the idea of social emancipation is obviously not contradictory with our socialist proposal and indeed, as the vote showed, is part of the historic anarchosindicalist and class-struggle union tradition in our country.

Many challenges in the immediate future

With the launch successfully completed, the OPT now has big political challenges ahead. The founding has been very inclusive politically. Now it has to consolidate this among its social base and extend it to activists in new social movements that are in struggle. Recruitment and organization of the rank and file is being driven by the OPT's central coordination and leadership. It could not have been otherwise. Many initiatives are being taken to organise OPT members, not only geographically by areas of struggle, but through trade union initiatives aiming to promote a united workers' confederation, as well as initiatives for the student movement, the peasantry and among women. More broadly, there are unitary attempts to move towards a broad, anti-neoliberal front of struggle and opposition, that can also link up with Mexico's 'indignados'.

In a context where the whole party system in Mexico is in crisis, the OPT emerges as a hugely promising proletarian alternative, but with many challenges and difficulties to overcome, which are linked to what happens to the class-struggle workers' movement and in particular to the SME itself.

Since the Extraordinary Congress of the PRT in July 2009, we have pointed out that a phase of the political crisis had begun that would lead to a re-arrangement of all political forces, "to an imminent readjustment, rearrangement and recomposition of the party, political and electoral landscape, as in 1976 or in 1988". [6] One year later, at the 12th Ordinary Congress, we added that "in this re-arrangement, new political parties or formations may emerge while other disappear – almost or in fact – as in previous crises and rearrangements". The creation of the OPT in August is a confirmation of this crisis that will see parties appear and disappear. For his part, López Obrador has called for MORENA to be turned into a civic association, probably as another step towards the creation of a new political party, as indicated by the calling of the MORENA Congress for November 2012, in other words after the elections. The PRD's collapse, the end of its cycle, continues with this new step by López Obrador. But what may seem interesting as an opposition front or alternative social block, which is what MORENA is today, tomorrow as a party will be just another cross-class, anti-neoliberal party. It is in this context that the arrival of the OPT stands out because of its class identity, as a broad workers' party, which now needs to clarify its position to be part of a broad social block in opposition to the oligarchy, at a critical time that could see the neoliberal mafia removed from office.

But undoubtedly one challenge that will have to be faced by the OPT very soon, possibly earlier than the time scale envisaged by the founding Congress, is the position to adopt in relation to the presidential elections, in a situation characterized by the violence of the Calderón government's policy of militarization and its so-called war on drug trafficking. It will probably be necessary to wait for the current phase of the SME comrades' struggle to be rehired to reach a conclusion, after all their years of resistance, before any clear decisions can be taken. However I do not think abstract calls for a "united candidate" are an adequate substitute. "United" between who? It is not possible to put an equals sign

between the various political options and pre-candidates on offer today and just wait to see who "has the best chances". The OPT's position should not be based on electoral marketing but on political criteria, in terms of what each option represents and what its political possibilities are. For example, Marcelo Ebrard and López Obrador are not the same thing. Nor is it the same thing, in a time of crisis and confrontation, when there is a real perspective of removing from office the neoliberal representatives of the oligarchy who are responsible

for this crisis, whether they be the PAN or the PRI, on the one hand to decide what alliance can achieve this goal, or on the other to stand a non-registered, symbolic or propaganda candidate, even from our own ranks – something that could be useful in other circumstances but not now.

The experience of the founding Congress shows that the OPT will be able both to hold onto to its character as a party of the workers, and to show the flexibility needed to develop a successful, anti-oligarchic front or block

PAKISTAN

Urgent finance appeal for "Faisalabad 6"

FAROOQ TARIQ ·

All of them are leaders of a power looms works organization called, Labour Qaumi Movement (LQM) in Faisalabad, the third largest city of Pakistan. LQM is a community based labour organization fighting for the rights of the textile workers since 2004. It has a mass base among textile workers of the city and surrounding areas.

An anti-terrorist court judge on November 1, 2011, sentenced six leaders under terrorism charges in Faisalabad. As is frequently observed that Terrorists are set free by these courts and workers leaders are charged under terrorist laws in Pakistan

They were accused of burning down a factory during the strike. This is a fabricated charge. The facts are that on the day of strike, July 20, 2010, gangsters in the pay of the factory owner in Thekri Wala started shooting at the workers who were leaving the factory to demand better wages. Some workers dared to go inside the factory and forced the gangsters to stop firing. Some of them were beaten up by the angry workers.

During the trial, the workers' advocate asked if the factory had been burned down then how was it able to be operating again three days later.

More than 100,000 power loom workers in Faisalabad district went on strike on July 20, 2010, for an increase of wages that had been announced by the government during the presentation of budget 2010-11. The government announced 17 percent rise in the minimum wage for the private sector workers. The LQM in Faisalabad, Jhang and other districts had been in negotiations with power loom owners for three weeks before the strike.

The incident happened in Sudhar area, an industrial suburb of Faisalabad where a big number of power loom factories are located. This area had been a battle ground between workers and owners for three years as the workers organised themselves effectively in huge numbers there.

The long term jail sentences of these workers leaders has been a devastating blow to the workers movement in Faisalabad, and indeed across the country. That the court could hand out such a draconian anti-labor judgment was beyond anyone's expectations, especially since this judiciary itself had been restored through the support of a powerful people's movement. Yet, the anti-terrorist court chose to give a verdict with the sole aim of damaging the power loom workers movement which was slowly becoming a symbol of working class militancy all over the country.

One of the principal methods of disciplining labor under capitalism is to push them to the point where they are only left with an option of negotiating with the bosses on the latter's terms. This is done either through brute state force or by financially crushing the working class so that they only have the option of compromising in order to survive within the system.

The bosses have used the latter tactic to ensure that these labor leaders become examples for anyone who dares to raise his/her voice against the injustices meted out to the workers. All of our jailed comrades are married and were the primary breadwinners of their families. Their families have been pushed to the brink of a financial catastrophe. The families are contemplating removing children from the schools since they are unable to even buy enough groceries.

Knowing that this is part of the political strategy of the bosses to subjugate the workers, and that it is having severe consequences for the families of the jailed leaders, the Labour Party Pakistan, the Labour Qaumi Movement, the National Trade Union Federation and the Labour Education Foundation are launching a finance appeal to support the families of our jailed comrades.

These leaders have shown tremendous courage and steadfastness in refusing to compromise with the authorities and instead suffer the consequences of speaking the truth. These families deserve our generous support not only because these comrades are suffering due to their involvement with a working class movement. But also, because the outcome of this movement, and our ability to extend solidarity and support to our comrades in difficult conditions, will dictate whether this particular event will deter working class militancy (as wished by the bosses) or act as a shining example of working class solidarity against the hideous tactics of the ruling classes.

Anti-terrorist laws are frequently used against protesting industrial workers in Punjab. Thirteen trade union leaders are facing such charges of terrorism. Their real crime is fighting for a better life for their members and demanding higher wages. The Punjab government is all out to crush any trade union movement in factories which is challenging their authority.

Please send motions and/or messages of solidarity to the Labour Education Foundation: Ground Floor, 25-A Davis Road, Lahore, Pakistan. Tel: 92-42-36303808 Fax: 92-42-36271149 Email: lef@lef.org.pk Website: www.lef.org.pk

1. Khalid Mehmood, director Labour Education Foundation (kahlid@lef.org.pk) 03219402322
2. Mian Abdul Qayum, Chairman Labour Qaumi Movement (0300 6606306)
3. Nisar Shah, general secretary Labour Party Pakistan (rednisar@hotmail.com) 0300 2147960

4. Niaz Khan, General Secretary National Trade Union Federation (Punjab) 03009414863

On behalf of the LQM, NTUF, the LPP and the LEF, we urge you to donate generously for the families of these victims of state-terrorism. These families are in dire need of financial support and we can only sustain them with a collective effort. The bank details are as follows.

If you wish to transfer funds, below are details of the account for sending money to this finance appeal

A/C Title: Labour Education Foundation

A/C Number: 01801876

Route: Please advise and pay to Citi Bank, New York, USA Swift CITI US 33 for onward transfer to BANK ALFALAH LTD., KARACHI, PAKISTAN A/C No. 36087144 and for final transfer to BANK ALFALAH LTD., LDA PLAZA, KASHMIR ROAD, LAHORE, PAKISTAN Swift: ALFHPKKALDA for A/C No. 01801876 OF LABOUR EDUCATION FOUNDATION.

THROUGH ESSF ACCOUNT

It is also possible to send checks in euro or to transfer donations through ESSF account. Specify "Pakistan" on your cheques or transfer orders.

Cheques

cheques to ESSF in euros only to be sent to:

ESSF

2, rue Richard-Lenoir

93100 Montreuil

France

Bank Account:

Crédit lyonnais

Agence de la Croix-de-Chavaux (00525)

10 boulevard Chanzy

93100 Montreuil

France	IBAN : FR85 3000 2005 2500 0044 5757 C12
ESSF, account number 445757C	BIC / SWIFT : CRLYFRPP
International bank account details :	Account holder : ESSF

USA

Three years after "Yes we can"

AGAINST THE CURRENT EDITORS ·

The much weakened "change you can believe in" President faces a year of daunting challenges: a difficult reelection campaign with high longterm unemployment, a demoralized Democratic base and a far-right-controlled Congress. And the 2012 election is being stolen right now, thanks to reactionary Republican power in critical state legislatures, enacting voter-suppression laws that will strip as many as five million Black, Latino and poor citizens of their voting rights, while Obama's own Justice Department does little or nothing about it.

The Obama presidency also confronts a chain of crises stretching from Israel's intransigence over Palestine, and bloody stalemates in Yemen and Syria, to the near fracturing of the U.S.-Pakistan alliance. Hanging over it all is the real possibility of a new global financial meltdown and recession, or worse. To say that the ruinous wars in Iraq and Afghanistan-Pakistan and the shambles of the U.S. budget were largely inherited from Obama's predecessor is true, but of decreasing political relevance. What's happened — and more important, what next?

To be sure, it was always self-delusion for anyone on the left to imagine that president Obama would attempt to govern on the basis of anything resembling a truly progressive agenda — massive economic stimulus and aggressive public works to confront unemployment; at least temporary nationalization of the banks to restore the flow of credit; a writedown of principal on "underwater" housing mortgages; a rapid end to the disastrous wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the immediate-if-not-sooner closure of the Guantánamo prison; a serious fight for the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA) and

universal single-payer health care reform or, at minimum, the once-promised and quickly-abandoned "strong public option."

As for any truly radical measures — like freeing victims of racist and political repression entombed for decades in federal prison, and commutation for thousands of nonviolent drug offenders; full investigation and disclosure of the criminal abuses committed by the Bush-Cheney gang; banning deportations by executive order until the passage of comprehensive immigration reform — those were never even on the radar screen.

One strength of the movement around OWS is that illusions about Obama have significantly dissipated. There's a serious question to raise about Obama's course, but it's not about whether the left could "influence" him. The left never had "a seat at the table" of the Obama administration, nor frankly even the space to be a fly on the wall, and it was absurd to entertain fantasies of "the left-wing component of the broad progressive bloc" that our Obama-enthusing friends in the movement envisioned as a counterweight to the influence of the bankers and hedge funds.

In reality, president Obama can't properly be faulted for not governing on the basis of "progressive," i.e. liberal to moderate left values — because he doesn't share those values, and for those paying careful attention he never really claimed to. He ran for election with the posture as a charismatic but post-partisan, post-racial and post-ideological "pragmatist," in short as a thoroughly centrist corporate Democrat. If the Obama method of governing is that of his signature move on the basketball court — quick head fake left, then hard drive to the right — well, the Democrats always do that, and experienced activists shouldn't be faked out of the

gym simply because Obama performs it with more style.

There have been a couple of social movements in these three years that have won gains, even if limited ones, which stand as exceptions to the overall pattern. First, the lesbian and gay civil rights struggle, although perhaps not the more encompassing and radical Queer movement, has defeated "Don't Ask/Don't Tell" in the U.S. military and made progress in the fight for same-sex marriage rights. Revolutionary change, no — but significant reforms in a period where the social justice front has mostly been in retreat.

Second, the heroic open defiance of teenage and young adult "illegal" immigrants who have been in this country since very early age hasn't won passage of the federal DREAM Act, but has successfully pressured the administration to announce it would suspend deportations of those who would become eligible for citizenship under its terms. This is a limited victory indeed, at a time when the most vicious anti-immigrant laws since the 1920s are sweeping one state after another; but it has given these exceptional activists space to speak up not only for themselves but for their whole communities.

These reform victories, however welcome they should be, don't touch the heart of economic policy. That brings us to the question that analysts of the Obama era need to confront: it's not why he didn't respond to nonexistent pressure from his left, but why he responded so weakly and so late to the objective reality of a massive U.S. and world crisis. A whole lot of very smart commentators are beating their heads against the wall trying to understand this, and just because we're Marxists doesn't mean we have a definitive answer, but we'll take a shot.

In the Age of Austerity

There are well-explored factors that do provide partial explanations. President Obama, who is firmly committed to the health of U.S. capitalism, really believed that the Republican leadership he soundly

defeated in 2008 would constructively work with him instead of acting exactly as Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell said they would do, "to make sure that this is a one-term president." He chose to surround himself with the likes of Tim Geithner and Lawrence Summers, architects of the disastrous era of financial deregulation, on the theory that they knew best how to fix the mess they helped create. He saved Wall Street's butt by stuffing the banks with cash and bailing out General Motors and Chrysler, expecting that corporate America would be grateful and reinvest its profits instead of fattening already obscene CEO pay packages.

According to this listing, in short, Barack Obama is intellectually brilliant but woefully short of experience in the knife-fighting that U.S. politics has become. This is probably true, but doesn't fully account for some other phenomena — notably, why this president would simultaneously kick his own base in the teeth. Not only did EFCA go down without a whimper, but teachers, Obama's most loyal labor supporters, have been cynically scapegoated and disrespected, chastised and chartered in the name of "Race to the Top" in a truly shocking manner. (The American knife in the back of the Palestinians is another whole discussion elsewhere in this issue.)

We think, however, that there's an underlying factor, which we've attempted to explore in a previous editorial: "The capitalist class in the United States has opted for austerity — not for themselves, of course, but for breaking the remaining power of the working-class and social movements — mainly in the name of 'fiscal discipline and responsibility.'" ("Austerity and U.S. Decline," ATC 153, July-August 2011)

This puts the president in the position of trying to persuade his rightwing enemies — people who literally hate and want to destroy him — to constructively collaborate with him, while also attempting to energize the labor, African American and social movement supporters who love Obama but desperately want him to fight for something. It isn't sur-

prising that the Obama rhetoric that genuinely inspired tens of millions of people, back in 2008, has given way to a rather tinny and hollow-sounding "Pass this Jobs Bill" mantra in the fall of 2011.

It might be different if this "jobs bill" really did aim for achieving full employment as fighting liberals of long ago used to believe in, or if Obama weren't simultaneously putting Medicare and Social Security on the negotiating table (read: chopping block) to pay for more corporate tax cuts and modest infrastructure spending. But what used to be conventional liberalism is now branded as Bolshevism. Much as official discourse denies it, there is class war in America, and it's taking an increasingly vicious form.

Teachers in particular are under attack not because they're overpaid or ineffective or "lack accountability," but because they're organized at a time when capital is determined to gut the unions. (The move to turn public education into a for-private-profit venture is driven by Democratic as much as by Republican operatives.) Not only are teacher benefits and wages to be cut, but even more, their job security is to be wiped out as it already has been for so much of the working class. Auto workers are supposed to be grateful to president Obama for saving their jobs, and there's no doubt that the UAW leadership worships him, but the growing ranks of lower-tier (roughly half-pay) workers may feel less warm and fuzzy about the new dispensation.

Little wonder that Obama's base feels less and less that he really speaks for them. Among the measures that could have been taken to energize people's hopes, consider this: In the face of the state of Georgia's drive to murder Troy Davis, the Justice Department should have launched a federal Civil Rights investigation into several witnesses' highly credible claims that their testimony at trial, identifying Troy Davis as the killer of a police officer, was falsely extracted by police coercion and intimidation. Yet not only was there no such investigation, but the Obama administration maintained absolute silence in the face of this legal lynching despite an outpouring of international outrage.

Cloudy Electoral Prospects

We haven't tried to explore here the other side of the political spectrum, in particular, the monster-raving-loonie spectacle that the Republicans present to a disbelieving and frankly horrified world — climate change, a hoax contrived by a globalist conspiracy; evolution, an unproven theory; Social Security, a ponzi scheme. Is it possible that a presidential election could actually be won by a party carrying those messages?

The answer, we think, is yes it can, especially with voter-suppression laws being put in place in broad daylight, but the odds are still against it. Given the present cast of characters, we assume that most sectors of capital in the United States would generally prefer to see a "moderate Republican" sort of president — fiscally conservative, but pragmatic if a threat of economic slump requires it; socially tolerant, e.g. not fanatically hostile to lesbian/gay rights but not overly committed either; solidly militarist and imperialist without being an international embarrassment. Barack Obama, stripped of a Democratic majority and facing no serious liberal (let alone left) pressure, can fill that moderate-Republican role better than any other available option.

In contrast, among the current crop of GOP candidates, Mitt Romney is the only major one who's not committed to the extreme right (mainly because he's not committed to much of anything except his own ambition). A Republican president along with a Tea-Party driven Congressional majority could be dangerous for capital itself, in the event of severe economic emergency. If such an administration were to believe and act upon its own rhetoric that massive budget-cutting creates jobs, Herbert Hoover style, it really could turn a downturn into a new Great Depression — especially at a moment when the major European countries are following the same consumption-crushing course.

We'll be looking in coming issues of ATC at the 2012 election and potential openings for independent politics, but right now we envision a probable

reelection of president Obama to a second term, but devoid of the hopes and the popular energy — and certainly without the Democratic majorities in Congress — that marked the beginning of the first. There will be those who, as always, will insist on loyally supporting the Democrats yet again to beat back the far right. That argument undoubtedly will gain traction as the election heats up, but it sounds more tired with every repetition — and it's a long and sad road from the change that so many millions so recently believed in.

Until the emergence of a powerful social movement and at least the beginning of a new socialist left, there's a very low ceiling for meaningful reform, for confronting the scandal of child poverty, the destruction of public education or reversing the collapse of working-class standards of living. That's why Occupy Wall Street represents the rebirth of hope for what democracy is supposed to look like.

November/December 2011, ATC 155 <http://www-solidarity-us.org/node/3424>

BANGLADESH

The left and social movement struggles in Bangladesh

DANIELLE SABAI ·

The Bangladeshi Left was profoundly marked by the international division between the Maoist and Stalinist currents. The Communist Party of East Pakistan (Bangladesh since 1971) was itself divided between a pro-Moscow wing and a pro-Beijing wing. These two currents took radically opposed positions during the war of liberation in 1971. The pro-Moscow current, the Bangladeshi Communist Party (CPB), supported the war of liberation and the establishment of socialism in Bangladesh by the parliamentary road. This orientation led it to move closer to the Awami League [1] which came to power after the war of liberation.

The majority of the pro-Beijing wing, following Mao's position of being opposed to the partition of Pakistan, did not support the war of liberation. It denounced it as an "Indo-Soviet machination" designed to favour Indian expansionism in the region and Soviet hegemony. The Maoist current paid a high price for going against the current in a war that was supported massively by the population. After 1971 it split into innumerable factions and was durably weakened.

During the 1970s and 1980s, a succession of military dictatorships accentuated the difficulties of development of revolutionary and radical parties, reinforcing tendencies towards division.

Today the Bangladeshi left is divided into two distinct blocs. Parties like the CPB and the Workers' Party have chosen to collaborate with the Awami League when it is in power [2].

Outside the circles that are close to the government, some left parties sought to overcome their divisions by launching in September 2007 a national coalition, the Democratic Left Alliance, with the objective of fighting for a democratic Bangladesh for the emergence of a credible opposition to the two principal parties which alternate in government [3]. This alliance, which consists of ten parties of the radical Left, is clearly in opposition to the political parties of the Establishment but also in opposition to the left parties which take part in government. Discussions are underway to reinforce the alliance and widen it to other opposition forces [4]. Although the parties forming the coalition can have appreciably different ideas, they agree on a minimum program which enables them to intervene on the political scene on a national level.

On the ground, in spite of its divisions and its numerical weakness, the radical Bangladeshi left remains strong. Thanks to a long tradition of struggle, it has won mass support among workers and peasants. Most of the political parties of the radical left have built mass organizations which have made possible the development of spectacular struggles, with significant results. For example, the CPB-ML leads the Krishok and Kishani Sabha federations, two peasant organizations which represent Via Campesina in Bangladesh and have two million members. Several political parties, such as the Revolutionary Workers' Party and the Revolutionary Democratic Party, have built trade unions in the textile industry. The parties of the radical Left have also developed work and built mass organizations aimed at students and women.

We find those mass organizations and trade unions in many of the struggles which have developed in

recent years and which have met with a certain echo on the international level.

In 2010 several strike waves broke out in the textile industry. This sector accounts for 80 per cent of Bangladesh's exports and employs more than three million people. The workers, mainly women, work for starvation wages in medieval conditions for Western customers, who order large quantities of textiles at low prices.

Between 19 and 23 June, 2010, 800,000 workers stopped work to demand a wage increase. In July and August, nearly 700 factories were affected by strike waves, always on the question of wages. In December, new mobilizations took place to obtain the payment of the wage increase that had been won in August and had still not been paid by November. Mobilizations are severely repressed by the riot police and it is not rare for workers to be killed during them. But in spite of the repression and the intimidation of trade-union activists, the struggles remain very strong.

Other struggles, just as significant, have developed, in particular on environmental questions. For example, in the district of Phulbari, the local communities have mobilized against a project for an open-cast coal mine by a company based in England, GMC Resources plc, supported by pension funds

and private banking. If this project materialised, 500,000 people could be displaced and the effect on the environment would be very damaging. The mobilization has been supported by the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources and Ports (NCPOGMRP), a collective consisting of experts, researchers, political parties and individuals. This collective constitutes "a new form of socio-political movement with its working experience on national interest, especially against bad deals with the MNCs" [5]. The movement in Phulbari is unprecedented, both in the extent of the revolt and the consciousness that it has developed in the local communities. So far, it has succeeded in preventing the implementation of this project.

Peasant struggles are also particularly important. In Bangladesh, 80 per cent of the population works in the agricultural sector and 70 per cent of peasants are landless. The Krishok and Kishani Sabha federations have led big struggles for the peasants to have access to land, in particular by organizing land occupations. Since the 2000 decade, these organizations have also developed the mobilization of peasants on the questions of climate change and food sovereignty, two fundamental questions for Bangladesh, which is already affected by global warming.

G20 SUMMIT

G20 : the Symbol of a System Failure

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT ·

The G20 agenda, that had been very carefully prepared over several months, was completely turned upside down. In pathetic manner, all the state leaders and business captains suddenly became dependent on the Merkel - Sarkozy couple's ability, before the end of the summit, to persuade the Greek authorities to abandon the proposed referendum. If the plan for a referendum had been confirmed, and had it involved asking the Greek people to accept the agreements made at the European summit of the 26th and 27th October 2011, this would have caused a banking and financial panic.

Why? Because all the signs indicated that the plan would be rejected: according to polls carried out after the 27th October, only 12% of the Greeks approved the plan. The danger of rejection would have provoked, during the month of November 2011, a plunge in the value of Greek bonds, obliging the big French banks, among others, to effect a write-down of their Greek assets to the tune of 80% to 90%. These banks' shareholders would have sold their stock, thus causing a collapse in stock prices. Italian and Spanish bonds would have been subject to speculative attacks which the Eurozone would have been incapable of withstanding, the EFSF (the European Financial Stability Facility) not having sufficient means to do so. The French and German banks, along with other holders of Italian and Spanish debt, would have foundered.

It is clear that George Papandreou, faced with renewed popular unrest on 28th October, the national holiday, and criticism within his own coalition, was doing what he could to gain time and to ensure a parliamentary vote of confidence. His U-turn was not motivated by a sudden will to hear the voice of

the people, he who over the last eighteen months has cast aside the most elementary democratic rules and backed down on his electoral commitments. Once his 1st November promise of a referendum was known, it was largely rejected by the Greek population, as well as by left wing political parties and social organizations.

However, it was for totally different reasons that the European leaders were unanimously opposed to any public consultation whatsoever concerning the new austerity plan imposed on Greece in the framework of the October 2011 agreement.

That the EU is in crisis was blatantly obvious at the summit, and it was not the leaders of the European institutions who played the main roles.

J.M. Barroso and H. Van Rompuy, respectively presidents of the European Commission and the European Council, were no more than mere on-lookers, while the presidents of the two strongest countries of the Eurozone led the important negotiations from beginning to end.

George Papandreou has stepped down and it looks likely that a government of national unity would undertake to apply the austerity measures that the Greek majority refuses. Yet even if this provides temporary respite for the plan to save Athens (it would be more accurate to say, for the plan to save the euro and the big private banks), Greek discontent is such that nothing is certain.

Italy is already signaled as the next weak link in the Eurozone, with a sovereign debt six times that of Greece. The G20 has failed the Italian Government abysmally. S. Berlusconi has had to accept that his country be put under the permanent scrutiny of the IMF. Coming out of the meeting, Christine Lagarde, managing director of the IMF, said of the Italian head of government, "we will subject him to

a reality test." She went on to talk about Italy: "I am going to send them a team of probably five or six experts every three months." [2] That a founding member country of the G7 should be subjected to such humiliating treatment illustrates the extent of the damage to the Eurozone and the EU. Not to forget that Mario Draghi, the new president of the European Central Bank, was until last month the director of the Italian Central Bank after having served S. Berlusconi as minister. The announcement by Mario Draghi, ex-director of Goldman Sachs, of a reduction of 0.25% of the ECB prime rate is another concession to bankers having difficulty finding cheap funding.

Another failing of the EU and the Eurozone : the European Financial Stability Facility has not yet entered into its new judicial framework, nor had its means enlarged as agreed at the European summit of 21st July 2011. The BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) have clearly announced their refusal to fund this facility.

Nor is the IMF coming out as well as its managing director would have us believe: the 500 billion promised at the G20 summit in London in 2009 remains unconfirmed.

This is the consequence of the refusal by the G7 to accept one of the demands of the BRIC. They wanted, in return for their aide to the IMF, EU and to the USA, a greater weight in the decision-making of the IMF and the World Bank, along with a new distribution of voting rights and more key positions in those institutions. It's a lose - lose situation: the G7 cannot get the emerging countries to open their purse-strings; and the emerging countries cannot obtain a status in keeping with their economic and political weight in the international institutions.

In spite of having to face a worsening economic crisis and very gloomy prospects for 2012, the governments of the industrialized countries refuse to take the elementary measures needed to put the private financial sector in order and to give a boost to the economy: separating deposit and commercial banks, prohibiting certain speculative transactions,

taxing financial transactions, capping directors' fees with very strict controls on bonuses, reprisals against tax havens, increases in public expenditure to boost employment, protecting the purchasing power of wage earners and claimants... Of all these measures which at one moment or another during the crisis have been suggested by leaders such as Nicolas Sarkozy, the host of the G20 summit, none have been put into practice. Yet such measures constitute the absolute minimum for a programme like the one Franklin F. Roosevelt adopted to get the USA out of the great depression.

B. Obama and the European leaders have chosen otherwise: massive structural support for banks and other financial institutions to avoid massive serial bankruptcy, together with reinforcement of neoliberal policies (reduction of public spending, reduction of household and population purchasing power, the destabilization of salaried employment, a new wave of privatizations, increases in indirect taxation). There is no doubt about the consequences of these choices: pauperism of the majority of the population in the countries concerned, aggravation of the inequality gap, the risk of increasing bankruptcy in the banking sector, as no serious limit has been placed on their speculative activities, slow economic growth with periods of recession for the next ten to fifteen years, the continuation of structural indebtedness on the part of public authorities because of insufficient fiscal revenues, and the continuation of the Eurozone crisis.

The gulf between realpolitik and the ranting speeches against market abuse is obvious in the following passage from the summit's final Declaration : "We will not tolerate a return to the behaviors observed in the financial sector before the crisis, and we will strictly control the application of our commitments regarding banks, the over-the-counter derivatives markets and pay practices."

Particularly lethal in the developing countries, especially in Africa : the nutrition crisis, principally provoked by speculation on agricultural produce, was also on the G20 agenda but gave rise to no particular decisions; the declaration merely mentions

that there must be "a reduction in the effects of price volatility".

After the G20, the European "indignés" and the Occupy Wall Street movement see their convictions reinforced. Those who supposedly pilot the planet are incapable of finding the right solutions and have put their whole weight against the idea that a people may pronounce an opinion on the neoliberal policies they impose. The lesson will not be forgot-

ten. Clearly, the need for a different, truly democratic, international architecture, has become a matter of urgency. Anti-capitalist choices must now be made: the dictatorship of the creditors refused. Banks must be expropriated without indemnity, by the people; there must be repudiation of illegitimate debt and radical redistribution of wealth.

Translated by Mike Krolkowski and Vicki Briault for CADTM.

THAILAND

Thailand: floods and reforms

DANIELLE SABAI ·

A return to normality is likely to take at least 6 weeks. Efforts are now concentrated on avoiding flooding in the centre of the capital, Bangkok, whose economic weight represents more than 40% of Thailand's GDP. The city is completely encircled by water and the authorities face a conjuncture of heavy rains, a high tide preventing the flow of the water towards the sea and the massive arrival of water from the North and centre of the flooded country.

Bangkok has been protected by huge sandbag walls to the detriment of the neighbouring provinces and the modest populations who live there. Inside this belt, the water cannot flow towards the sea. It can reach heights of more than one metre, submerging the surrounding houses. The tensions and resentment are palpable and the army has been deployed to protect the makeshift dykes.

The government has been subject to severe criticism for the tardy implementation of aid deemed to be relatively ineffective. Beyond this crisis, it is the management of water as a whole which has to be reviewed. The department of irrigation of the hydrology and water management office has for several months maintained very high water levels on the dams on the Ping and Nan rivers which flow into the Chao Phraya river which traverses Bangkok. The water contained had to be released at the worst time accentuating the floods upstream and worsening the situation around the capital.

The material damage is very considerable and the economic consequences are already being felt. Houses and infrastructures have been destroyed or damaged in their hundreds of thousands. Large area of the central plain, the rice bowl of Thailand,

have been submerged by flooding, destroying 10 % of the harvest of the world's biggest rice exporter. Several economic zones have also been flooded affecting more than 10,000 factories, some having to close. Hundreds of thousands of jobs are threatened and with them the income of millions of persons.

The Thai economy is not alone in being affected by the floods. Thailand produces raw materials and components supplying the manufacturing production chains of other countries where they are used to manufacture finished products. This is for example the case in micro computing and cars. 60% of hard disks come from Thailand and their scarcity has led to price increases on the international markets. The car industry represents 12% of GDP and employs 300,000 persons. Most of the big constructors, assemblers and parts and components manufacturers are present in Thailand. The halting of production in some factories leads to disruption of the production chains of other countries. Thus Honda has already announced a slowdown of its production in Canada and the USA and Toyota has done the same in Japan. This could also be the case with China, the main destination for Thai exports.

According to the first predictions, which did not include possible damage in the centre of Bangkok, the cost of the floods could be as high as four billion dollars and represent 1 to 1.5 % of GDP. With an economy in downturn, tax income is at its lowest. This natural disaster with huge social and economic consequences could in the long term have an impact on the economic policy and social measures proposed by the Puea Thai in favour of its popular electoral base during the election campaign.

For now, the government has just approved an extension of the budget deficit of 50 billion baths for the new fiscal year which begins on October 1st,

bringing it to 400 billion baths (9.5 billion euros). All state bodies and ministries have also been asked to reduce by 10% their expenditure so as to find 80 billion baths (1.9 billion euros) to finance aid and reconstruction. Finally, the government may turn to multilateral bodies to borrow several hundred billion baths.

Among the key measures of the electoral campaign, the Puea Thai undertook to increase the minimum daily income to 300 baths (7 euros) for everyone as of January 1, 2012. Currently there is no minimum wage on a national scale but rather a minimum wage in each province which oscillates between 159 (3.75 euros) and 221 (5.20 euros) baths per day.

The minimum wage in Thailand is determined and implemented by a tripartite commission made up of 15 members – five representatives each for the state, the employers and employees. In mid - October an agreement was reached between the representatives of the employees and the state, against the wishes of the employers. The minimum wage would be increased by 40% at the national scale as of April 1, which would bring it to around 300 baths in Bangkok and in six provinces where it is already very high. In the other 77 provinces, it will remain then below the level of 300 baths promised during the election campaign but should gradually increase to 300 baths over three or four years.

In imposing a substantial increase in the daily minimum wage against the advice of industrialists already affected by the floods, the government has sent a strong signal to its electoral base, made up mainly of workers and peasants. The small and medium enterprises will be the most affected by the wage increase. But if one looks at the decade as a whole, the minimum wage increase has only exceeded the inflation rate twice, in 2001 and 2007, and globally it has at best stagnated.

The daily minimum wage increase is presented by its detractors as a populist measure. But a substantial increase should help reduce the deep social inequalities which divide Thailand, one of the most inegalitarian countries in Asia. That could be a first step towards reviving Thai internal consumption, which is too low, and thus to counterbalance a dependency on exports which currently represent 60 % of GDP.

During the election campaign the Puea Thai advanced other economic measures favouring the poorest layers who compose the majority of the population, such as allowing borrowers to suspend the repayment of their debt for three years, guaranteeing the price of rice, indexing the repayment of loans granted by the state to students to their incomes, and fixing again at 30 baths the price of universal cover for medical care. The implementation of such measures would in the medium term partially transform the socio-economic structure of Thailand.

The crisis provoked by the floods will be a real political test. If it wishes to keep its campaign promises and engage on a programme of post flood reconstruction benefitting the majority, the government will have to implement a courageous tax policy seeking the money where it is, in the first place among the Thai millionaires and the royal family and by drastically reducing the budget of the army which has exploded since the military coup of 2006. That involves confronting the élites who are not disposed to pay for a policy which would benefit the broad masses.

Finally, even if reconstruction would undoubtedly constitute the main task of the government in the coming months, it must also meet the aspirations to democracy, social justice and the political and social changes that the Red Shirts have forcefully demanded in recent years. Can the government meet these expectations?

On the European Union crisis and the dynamics of resistances

PIERRE ROUSSET ·

There is a strong continuity between the first financial crisis opened by capitalist globalisation (1997-98) and the present one. But we have entered a new stage in the multifaceted and combined global crisis (climate and ecological crisis, food crisis, socio-economic crisis...). One can also underline a continuity from the "other" or "anti" globalisation Global Justice Movement (GJM) initiated more than a decade ago, and the present *Indignad@s* wave. But here too, we have reached a significant turning point in the dynamics of mobilisations.

What I would like to look at here is the new rather than the continuities.

As always, when one speaks of "Europe", one has to remember that European countries are very diverse – it is a sum of exceptions to the rule. And the European Union is not seen the same way from Greece, Germany or Finland.

The dynamics of the EU crisis

I. Europe as the core of the international crisis. What was already new in 2008, with the "subprime" crisis, is that the centre of the international financial crisis was in the North – namely then the US – and not the South or Russia. Nowadays, the European Union proves to be the weaker link.

In addition to the internal contradictions of capitalist globalisation affecting the whole world, the EU crisis has its own structural roots. It is the result of a historical failure: the constitution of a unified European imperialist power. The attempt to build it

began long ago as a strongly state-led process (European Coal and Steel Community). But this was replaced by a market-driven one and later, in the 1990s, straitjacketed by the neoliberal paradigm [1] There was very little chance for such a process to succeed. It did give birth to a common market and to the Euro (which was not necessarily given in advance) but achieved no more. No formation of an organic European bourgeoisie, no creation of a European unified military capacity, no assertion of a real European government and common economic or diplomatic policies, no fully fledged European state. Instead, the process of integration of new countries (East Europe) and extension of the Euro Zone is today very much in question.

It is this failure that appears now in the open, under the pressure of the crisis. What was unthinkable for mainstream economists and politicians two years ago is now openly discussed: the possibility of a breakdown of the Euro Zone and disarticulation of the EU. This is a major turning point in the history of the EU, with a very unpredictable future.

II. Social onslaught. From the start, neoliberal policies aimed at rolling back the collective rights won in the post-war/pre-neoliberal period. This process began earlier in some countries (UK...) and was later expanded to others (France...) under capitalist globalisation. Beyond significant differences depending on countries, it has already deeply changed the European social landscape, with the generalisation of precarious work and the erosion of social protection in all fields (health, education, etc.). For the first time since the Second World War, the new generation faces worse living conditions than its parents.

The social onslaught is now hardening. There are objective reasons for this. Due to the failure in consolidating a unified European imperialism, the EU's capacity to face international powers' competition and to capture super profits from the South is very much weakened – each European bourgeoisie needs to turn against its own population even more. But the financial crisis and the spectre of the debt are also politically instrumentalised and used to legitimise the neoliberal destruction of social and democratic rights. The crisis is seen as an opportunity to decisively break down collective resistances.

Here too, we have reached a major turning point. The trend is to move from the erosion of public services to their destruction. What is happening in Greece illustrates in a dramatic manner how violently the social fabric can be torn apart nowadays in a European country and how brutal massive impoverishment can be. Even in countries where the neoliberal onslaught has been slowed down by social resistances, inequalities are on the rise, with the top 1% (or even more the top 0.1% and 0.01%) is getting wealthier and wealthier while poverty spreads. Successive quantitative reductions in the level of social protections are having qualitative effects: in France, for example, a growing number of people cannot be treated because of the increasing cost of health. And much worse is to come.

III. Political dead end. What is striking about the present crisis is that it does not give way to any alternatives. While austerity policies are announcing economic recession in (parts of) Europe, the EU remedies remain "more of the same". While governments have been obliged to break with the European Treaties' financial obligations, they are still trying to make such rules constitutional duties. From the WTO to the EU, the neoliberal order has been imposed by interdictions – to the extent that governments cannot govern anymore. Most options are forbidden in the name of the sacrosanct "competitive market" and "freedom of capital". One could think that the collective interest of the ruling classes would call for a radical change of course.

But apparently no one can represent such a collective interest of the capitalist class.

Contradictions in the EU are very sharp and it is only able to move from one short-term stop-gap measure to the next. Social Democracy offers no substantial alternative. For sure, in France the Socialist Party is in a winning position for the 2012 presidential and legislative elections, but its candidate (François Hollande) remains firmly within the neoliberal paradigm, as does his party. And in Spain (Zapatero, PSOE) or Greece (Papandreou, PASOK), it is Social Democratic governments that face popular wrath.

Not only is the radical Left too weak to be seen as an alternative, but it has not managed to consolidate itself and strengthen qualitatively more than it had in the previous period. Electoral results can be contradictory: a severe set back for the Portuguese Left Bloc, an unexpectedly big success for the Danish Red-Green Alliance. But for the time being, successes have been followed by setbacks rather than the contrary. The last example to date is the deep crisis of the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) in France. The difficulties of the radical Left are all the more worrying that they leave the political field open to (false) anti-system alternatives from the xenophobic extreme right.

IV. Crisis of decomposition. A protracted crisis with no credible political alternatives or way out could give way to a crisis of decomposition in the European Union. There is already a deep crisis of institutions in the EU, which has been built top-bottom in a clearly non-democratic way. One can say that bourgeois democracy abdicated when national Parliaments voted that regulations adopted by the non-elected WTO would obligatorily be translated into national laws (the same with EU regulations). People feel that yesterday's democratic institutions – whatever their traditional flaws, lies and limits – have been decisively marginalised. Changes of government without substantial changes of policies – the succession of Left/Right governments all fitting within the neoliberal framework – have fed a widespread rejection of politics

and high rates of abstention during elections (reduced when people want to use their ballot to take revenge).

The rise of xenophobic extreme right is not linear, as the recent Danish elections show. Every time there are broad social mobilisations, racism recedes. But one should not underestimate the dangers inherent to the present situation. While it still varies very much from country to country, in some already, radically anti-democratic extreme right forces can win elections and form governments (Hungary).

V. The new centrality of the "divide and rule" policy. Dominant classes have always used "divide and rule" policies, but in the post-war period, in Europe, given the socio-political relationships of forces, they also integrated a wide range of collective solidarities into their system of governance (social security, pension funds, public health and education, protective labour laws...). In the 1990s, the generalisation of neoliberal policies meant an end of this period. Already, the "divide and rule" policies became more central.

These policies have many faces: criminalisation of the poor (the "dangerous classes") described as lazy and profiteers (living on unmerited social benefits); demonisation as "privileged" of workers with stable employment and of civil servants, opposed to those with precarious jobs; an ideological undercurrent hinting that women's place could well be at home; scapegoating of communities defined in an "essentialist" way – often Muslims but also Romas (who are Christians); politicised manhunt (witch hunt) against undocumented migrants...

The politics of stigmatisation operates too at the European Union level. See for example how the acronym "PIGS" is turned against Southerners (supposed to be lazier than the Northerners) – "PIGS" is for Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain as if the financial crisis did not hit other countries (Ireland, Iceland...).

With the deepening of the global crisis of the EU, the dynamics of the "divide and rule" policy can be-

come extremely dangerous and destructive.

VI. World impact. Up to now, the present crisis has hit the "North" and a wide range of countries from the "South" very strongly, but a number of others have escaped its devastating effects. This is especially the case for several of the "emerging powers" as China, India or Brazil.

We may enter a new stage of the crisis, the economic downturn in the US and the EU reducing significantly the export possibilities of the "emerging powers". A "domino effect" could then affect southern economies, as in Africa, depending on exports to the Chinese market. If so, the financial/economic crisis will take a more universal character, which could have radical implications.

The dynamics of resistances

VII. A new cycle of struggles. Important social mobilisations have taken place in several European countries in 2010-2011 (Greece, Spain, France, Britain...). In Greece, there are the most important since the end of the Second World War. They are quite different one from another. In France, for example, one can to a certain extent trace a continuity from the November-December 1995 public service massive strike to the recent massive demonstrations on pension in the autumn of last year, while in Greece, they respond to a radically new situation. In Spain, the "spirit" of the *Indignants* revives something of the "other globalisation" legacy. But, as a whole, it is not "more of the same".

The EU is entering a new phase of the social crisis – and this is happening while previous waves or strikes and demonstrations, or explosions of riots, have gained very little even when broad and sustained. It announces a further hardening of class struggles, Greece being a warning case. The other/anti-globalisation movement crystallised around international summits (WTO, IMF, G7-G8...), while today's mobilisations aim first at national governments (and the EU governance in the background) and summits do not attract big numbers of demonstrators anymore. This trend is not

limited to the EU. Even if the Palestine issue is in the background of the Arab upsurges, each revolt has addressed its own dictatorship and its own socio-economic situation (unemployment...).

This does not mean that the present wave of struggles is less internationalist than the previous (see the last point), but that the patterns are different. For a number of years already, many of the social forum networks formed at the turn of the century lost their efficiency. This is particularly true in Europe as far as the European Social Forum is concerned. From Copenhagen Climate mobilisations to the Greek-Spanish *Indignad@s* international call, initiatives came from outside these "post-Seattle" networks. The numerous and rich international links built during the previous decade are still alive, but new collective frameworks have to shape. AEPF can contribute to it, in the Asia-Europe continent.

VIII. No simple path. There is in (Western) Europe a striking gap between mobilisation and organisation. Many important social movements and struggles have occurred in a range of countries since the turn of the century, but most of the time, it has not translated into a significant strengthening of permanent organisations (TUs and social movements, left and radical political parties...). A new systemic criticism of the neoliberal order has taken shape, often combined nowadays with anti-capitalist rage, but there is also a sense of despair, fear of the future and lack of alternatives. There are many causes to such a contradictory situation. I just would like to mention three of them here.

In Western Europe, it is the first time since the Second World War that the labour and progressive movements have faced such a global social onslaught and crisis. As a whole, its culture, structures and ways of negotiating with governments and bosses are now inadequate. This was shown, for example, already in the 1990s, when massive permanent unemployment reappeared for the first time in four decades. How to organise the long-term unemployed was a new (or too old) question. The same can be said concerning the precarisation

of work and social life. The legacy of the post-WWII period is very difficult to overcome.

For very understandable reasons, there is a rejection of traditional forms of organisation (whether TUs or political parties) among (more or less) young generations of activists. More democratic and less hierarchical relationships between organisations (especially between parties and social movements) have developed, which is quite positive. But the need to organise on a permanent base is still very much underestimated (and this is an understatement!). One can say that it is an Achilles' Heel of the present wave of radicalisation.

The political and generational gap between the pre- and post-1990s experiences is deep. There has been very little transmission of lessons or (even unanswered) questions. To a large extent, political reflection is restarting from scratch – which is a very slow process.

With neoliberal globalisation and the quickly evolving capitalist crisis, social resistance movements are time and again confronted with questions that are new for them (see below the debt issue). Political answers will take time to emerge. With the deepening of the crisis, everything becomes possible – or, to be more sober, nothing is any longer impossible –, but for sure, everything is difficult, very difficult indeed.

IX. Building solidarities. A lot will depend of the capacity to defeat the deadly policy of "divide and rule" already mentioned. "Tolerance" and "dialogue" will not suffice to do so. "Tolerance" is a very ambiguous notion: one "tolerates" what one does not like! As if it was natural to dislike the "other". Even "dialogue" puts the stress on otherness. It is surely necessary to support one another, but to face the violence of the social onslaught, to face rising xenophobia, racism and religious intolerance, we need to go beyond mutual solidarity. We need to engage in common struggles, for common goals on common demands.

The social crisis and the crisis of democracy offer ample foundations for such common struggles.

Within these, it is crucial that the specific needs and "visibility" of the most exploited and oppressed are actually enhanced. Solidarities are all encompassing: anti-sexist, anti-racist and anti-fundamentalist struggles are not to be marginalised by political democratic and social ones, but incorporated. This is easier said than done. Experience shows that progressive forces in Europe find it difficult to combine in such a way all the fields of solidarities. This is another Achilles' Heel.

X. Reclaiming Social Rights and "real democracy". One major characteristic of present broad mobilisations and resistances is the way they combine social and democratic rights together with a criticism of the dominant order: against neoliberal policies, finance/market dictatorship and for "real democracy now!".

This shared will to reclaim social rights and democratic control of one's life constitutes a very hopeful base to rebuild collective progressive alternatives.

XI. Centrality of the issue of the debt. In the present situation in Europe, for the first time since the First World War, the debt has become a central political issue. Until now, the debt was seen as a typical "third world" issue. Great surprise, it has become a "Northern" one too – it looks very much alike.

If the debt is today so central, it is because it is a key aspect of the EU financial crisis AND because it shows how much the EU governance is under the shadow of the financial powers AND because it has become the main argument for justifying destructive anti-people policies AND because the Northern debt is no more legitimate than the Southern one: the financial crisis is the product of capitalist globalisation dynamics and the debt is the product of neoliberal policies (with a sharp reduction of tax revenues because of all the financial gifts given to the richest, stockholders, etc.).

People do not feel responsible for the financial crisis and are enraged at the idea they have to pay for it. There is probably more confusion concerning the public debt, due to massive mainstream propagan-

da and widespread fear (what if all one's saving disappear because of banks' bankruptcies?).

Political and "pedagogical" campaigns on this issue are thus essential. But as a whole, progressive forces in Europe are unprepared in this "new" field too. There are countries where the issue is now better understood (Greece... of course), but others where it is not yet addressed. One key is how to articulate the calls for a citizens' audit, moratorium and cancellation. Very significantly, it is a network rooted in Europe (and elsewhere), but which was specialized on the Third World debt, which is now reinvesting its "Southern" expertise into the European scenery – the CADTM to name it.

To build a European-wide response to the debt crisis is surely a task of the day... but still a bit in limbo.

XII. In defence of all our rights. The financial and debt crisis are also used as excuses to back out of many engagements – ecology in general and climate change in particular, but also alleviation of poverty, etc. – or undermine essential rights – such as the right of abortion which is openly attacked in some countries (Poland...) and undermined in many others through financial cuts and closure of health centres...

Since the 1990s, neoliberal globalisation had become the common issue around which all resistances and the defence of people's rights could converge. While this is still true, this role is now more directly played by the financial and debt crisis. It should add strength to the dynamics of convergence of people's movements, because these issues are more concretely felt than the process of globalisation as a whole.

XIII. Comprehensive alternative. In terms of alternatives, we are not starting from scratch, far from it. In fact, I think that many elements of the progressive programme elaborated in the past are still valid today, have been updated time and again, and that the main problem which which we are confronted is not the lack of ideas or goals! Starting from democratic and human rights, social needs

and ecological constraints, a whole set of demands have been developed and collectivised through international networks. [2] In this framework, the constitution of public financial poles ruled by the logic of public services as opposed to the logic imposed by markets and renters would be an effective answer to the present financial crisis.

There is nevertheless a difficulty in concretely articulating various fields of concern. We have, especially in Europe, to defend democratic and social rights won in the past, but without looking back at the past "governance" and mode of domination ("keynesian") as if it were a model for our future. For example, important labour struggles are underway in the car industry. Most unions will say: "for the defence of employment, long live the European car industry!". Many environment groups will respond: "for the defence of the climate and earth, down with the car industry!". We must of course defend both. In theory, it is not that difficult (it implies a reconversion of the transport system keeping employment and skills). But in practice, the need to combine, articulate, the social and the ecological programmes has not been integrated by most environmental and social movements.

Beyond traditional divides between "radicals" and "moderates" (on the response to the financial crisis...), there are also other issues which we now have to address in a more collective way than before. Should we get out of the European Union or transform it from within? The Left in countries involved since the origin in the building of the EU, like France, tend to answer: "fight from within". In countries that only recently joined the EU, it tends to answer: "first get out, then build anew". With the present crisis, such a question has to be reassessed – and it is quite a complex one. A debate has also begun in parts of Europe on what can be meant by "deglobalisation" and what should be our political answer to this issue – again a complex one. Europe is sometimes seen from Asia as an example of regionalised economy, which is relatively true. Nevertheless, the whole debate on regionalisation

and globalisation/deglobalisation with which Asia is familiar becomes European too.

XIII. Internationalism. As mentioned earlier, the fact that mobilisations turn toward national governments (and maybe the EU governance), does not mean an end to the internationalist spirit of the alter/anti-globalisation wave. The feeling that we are all in the same sinking boat is widespread (except when xenophobic trends gain ground). Cross-continental identification is very much alive, with the "Occupy" movement emigrating from Egypt to Spain, then from Europe to the US – and at least symbolically from the US to the world with the October 15 day of "occupations".

Due to the role played by China in today's world economy (and also, even if less visible, India) and due to China's new direct involvement in relation to the European Union's financial crisis, it should be possible to integrate Asia in European progressive movements internationalist vision more than before, while previously Asian solidarities were rather overlooked (links were developed mostly toward Latin America, the Middle East and parts of Africa). It is all the more important to do so, because anti-Chinese xenophobic sentiments are and will be raised by mainstream politicians to turn social anger against a foreign power. At the same time, as new (capitalist) powers, China and India's states regional interventions have very grave and often destructive implications for Asian people, on their social conditions as well as in military and political fields. In this new and complex situation, the AEPF offers an arena to address these issues from a progressive point of view.

Already since 1996 (anti-G7 mobilisations in France), a new dimension to international solidarity has developed: common resistances in the South and the North, East and West, against common institutions (WTO, IMF-WB, G-8/20...) implementing the same neoliberal policies the world around (that was a first!). As the debt issue illustrates, this is all the more true today: with the emergence in Europe of deep social crisis, European movements have even more than in the past a lot to learn from

the experience of struggles in the South. Many progressive ideas are indeed coming from the South. After the rise of a new internationalism in the 1990s in response to neoliberal globalisation, giving birth to the Seattle generation of activists, one can say that a new "new internationalism" is now taking shape in response to the qualitative aggravation of the social crisis in the North [3].

Concretely, it means that we should be able to create or extend networks involving both European (or Northern) movements and Asian (or Southern) ones around issues as social protection, the debt or energy (against nuclear power in particular). As far as Asia-Europe is concerned, AEPF is in a unique position to facilitate such steps forward.

Posted 2 November 2011 on ESSF.

Anti-capitalists approve electoral programme

– **Retirement at age 60, non-payment of the illegitimate debt, suppression of the Temporary Employment Agency, taxes on large fortunes, no to GMOs, suspension of evictions, for a public EFE agency.**

– Free contraception, an end to discrimination against transsexuals, queers and intersex persons, for a secular state and the removal of public funding for religious denominations.

– Nationalization of banks under social control, a ban on layoffs by profitable companies, less work to create work for all, a 35-hour working day and the suppression of the Temporary Employment Agency and placement agencies that traffic in the labour force.

These are some of the proposals adopted at the Anti-capitalist Programmatic Conference held on October 29th in Madrid.

The Assembly — which was held under the slogan "Ideas for disobeying" — also approved the inclusion in the agenda of the demand for a "citizens' audit of the private and public debt" and supported the breaking of the Euro Pact and repeal of the proposed constitutional reform. On large fortunes, the Anticapitalistas demand the creation of a tax and increased control of SICAVs to prevent capital flight. With regard to a sustainable social and economic model, replacing oil, gas, coal and nuclear power by clean and renewable energy sources democratically managed by society.

They reject GMOs and genetically modified crops and opt for a public, secular and democratic education for all. They demand the repeal of the LOU and the freezing of the 2015 University strategy.

The anti-capitalists call for a legal framework guaranteeing the independence of the EFE agency and sufficient funding to fulfil its public service work. "We want EFE to remain a public agency for all".

In terms of sexual liberation and personal rights, Anticapitalistas demand a "sexual and affective education at all levels of education" and the "absolute depathologization of transsexuality." "We are opposed to any kind of social or employment discrimination against gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex people". "We are committed to a secular state and eliminating public funding of religious faiths and their corresponding associations".

The Anti-capitalists demand "a radical, republican, participatory and deliberative democracy". "Reform of the electoral law and against the professionalization of politics." "We demand the repeal of anti-terrorism legislation, the law on parties and the dissolution of the National Court."

The electoral program of the Anticapitalistas demands the repeal of the Amnesty Act of 1977 and a new law on historical memory. "We call for the recognition of the right of self-determination, including independence, to the peoples of the Spanish State. For the abolition of the foreign debt and the ecological debt. Withdrawal of Spanish troops from Lebanon, Afghanistan, Libya and active boycott and the ending of agreements and relations with Israel".

The Programmatic Conference of the Anticapitalistas ended with a participatory process involving use of the anticapitalist wiki network, hosted at www.anticapitalistas.org/wiki.

For more information: www.anticapitalistas.org

Email: prensa@anticapitalistas.org
for November 20th

An anti-capitalist and disobedient candidacy

From May 15, however, it has become clear that passivity before adjustment measures was coming to an end. A ray of hope has come to the squares and streets of our country. The movement that started on May 15 has managed to combine rage with hope, and has thus given political expression to "another way of doing politics" and symbolic social indignation. The movement of 15 M, and all the networks of resistance and mobilization that can articulate with and around it, is a movement without an owner, self-organizing and representing itself. This is a value that must be maintained above all, because it is essential to its maturation and pluralistic and unified development. The commitment of the organizations of the political left must be not to interfere, not hegemonise, not represent the movement, but participate loyally, provide capacities and proposals, contribute to its strengthening, learn from every day of the actual movement.

Against all attempts to make us pay for the crisis in this system it is necessary to continue strengthening the social struggles, with uniform criteria and seeking convergence. But we think that social resistance is not enough. We also need an anti-capitalist political alternative whose only loyalty is to the social movements, which would never agree to participate in the management of the system and which can listen and learn.

For us what is fundamental to change this system is mobilization in the street and the self-organization of working people and citizens to constitute a real popular power as an alternative to existing run-down institutions. Democracy is much more than a

vote every four years. Very much more! The elections are only one field of struggle. We cannot agree that the parties always have a monopoly on the political landscape in the country. They say they speak for everyone but actually they are working for a privileged minority. We should not enter into the game of the system, or play with their rules. We will use the election to raise a voice which is anti-capitalist, environmentalist, feminist, internationalist... that raises the need to change society and life. Anti-capitalism should be part of the political landscape in the day to day and in the elections.

The existing left does not serve to change the world. It has caved in to business interests or is totally adapted to institutional work and absent from the social struggles.

In a situation like the present, with the PP-PSOE agreeing on reforms such as that of the Constitution the legitimate aspiration to the unity of the entire alternative left appears with force. Izquierda Anticapitalista held a discussion with Izquierda Unida and other groups about the possibility of a broad unified candidacy. Our proposal was clear: defend a candidacy of radical change linked to the struggles and an anti-capitalist programme, in the decision not to govern with the PSOE in the institutions, and formed by activists and citizens, not professional politicians.

This was not the approach of IU. It never made a minimally critical assessment of his entry into governments such as those of Catalonia, Asturias, and the Balearics or of emblematic cities such as Seville and Gijón, where IU co-governed with the PSOE until a few months ago applying social liberal policies. Now the numbers do not allow the recurrence of these governments but what if in the future the PSOE recovers? Without a critical balance sheet, history will be repeated. Neither did IU show any real interest in forming a candidacy without profes-

sional politicians, defending a list consisting of their leaders, who have been deputies for decades and for whom politics is a profession. Or to run a campaign that was not financed by the banks or where parliamentarians rotated for half of the legislature. In these circumstances, IA came to the conclusion that there was no real willingness by the leadership of IU to turn the left in words or deeds.

We have no doubt that there are valuable and honest people committed to the cause of social transformation in IU. But unfortunately this is not the project of the leadership of this formation, trapped between a critical discourse from the left with the PSOE and a very institutional practice, unable to recognize the negative balance sheet of their experiences of co-management with the PSOE in many municipalities and autonomous regions. The same is true with options such as ICV or Equo, focused only on institutional work. This is not the way.

Because of its firm willingness to participate in and actively support initiatives and social mobilization that in the coming months will undoubtedly intensify, Izquierda Anticapitalista has decided to submit anti-capitalist and disobedient nominations to the next general election on November 20th. We are not going to nominate, however, in the Basque country, where we will realise an alternative "other campaign". The candidacy will be "Anti-capitalist" because we want to change the world from below. "Disobedient" because we do not accept the rules of a system tailor-made for the financial powers. Ours is a candidacy in construction ready to add various contributions, all of them committed to the radical transformation of society.

We will wage a combative and alternative campaign, with proposals of radical change and respectful of the social struggles and the movement of 15 M, which nobody represents. During these months of campaign we will be as always present in struggles and the movement if, as we all hope, it is able to challenge and jeopardise the electoral process as it did in the last election, while respecting that within it there are very different views on November 20th.

The candidacy presented faces a scandalously undemocratic electoral law. To the usual problems are added the reform adopted in January which forces all parties and coalitions that have no parliamentary representation to collect the signatures of 0.1% of persons entitled to vote in each of the constituencies for which they want to file... within a period of little more than 15 days. Thus, an application that you want to contest 51 constituencies of the Spanish State requires you to collect more than 35,000 signatures. The electoral law aims to make elections increasingly a private club where the right of admission is reserved. They don't want us there. But we will not make it easy for them.

Izquierda Anticapitalista has begun the process of collecting signatures in order to clearly denounce this undemocratic imposition and submit an application outside of the traditional parties. We look forward to the endorsement of thousands of people with democratic sensibilities that want a candidacy like this to be present in the elections.

To make another world possible, another left is undoubtedly necessary.

Disobey on 20N. Support the anticapitalist@s.

GREECE

The Greek general strike of 19 and 20 October

ANDREAS KLOKE ·

This made it difficult for the Government to maintain "normal" economic life and state administration. It was quite obvious how sharp the conscious breach expressed by the the protesters with the prevailing policy had become, how deep the pent-up anger that erupted. From the square occupations in June the strikers turned to occupations of public administration buildings, thus indicating a qualitatively new situation. However, there was no occupation of firms and workplaces. The mass meeting the next day, October 20, at Syntagma Square was also enormous, with some 100,000 striking workers. Still, it was not sufficient to prevent Parliament from approving the 41 articles in the new bill. This list of measures will have a severe and intolerable impact on the lives of millions of workers, pensioners and unemployed.

Once again the protests were met with a brutal police crackdown. All the militants of the movement should offer their warmest condolences to the family and comrades of Dimitris Kotsaridis who was assassinated by police repression at a demonstration, organized against the government of social cannibalism and blind obedience in the service of national and international capitalism. The overthrow of the existing system and the victory of the workers will be the only effective retaliation for the loss of this fighter, and it will honor his memory.

The leaderships of the two leftist parties represented in Parliament contributed decisively to the inability of the strike mobilizations to keep the aggressive policy of the capitalists from proceeding. The Chairman of the left-reformist alliance

SYRIZA, Alexis Tsipras, denounced the conspiracy of silence on the part of government with which they covered their policy. However, he limited his oppositional stance to the call for elections. Thus, he was not only far behind the needs of the huge majority of the working class, but also behind their willingness to be involved in a radical social upheaval.

Nevertheless, it is beyond doubt that the KPG (KKE) and its trade union front PAME took the worst and most negative political stance during these events. On the day of the planned encirclement of Parliament the leadership of PAME seized the opportunity to make sure its contingent in the demonstration marched in front of Parliament and "encircled" it in such a way that the back of the demonstrators was turned toward the Parliament building. This was intended to protect Parliament from any possible radical and confrontational attitude on the part of other protesters. This goal was clear, though PAME was in contact with the other parts of the movement—unions, associations and political and social organizations—for the first time after many years. This has to be stressed since the PAME contingent is usually kept away from all other demonstrators in a completely sectarian manner. In fact, however, the contact in this particular case was meant to create a buffer, a guarantee for the normal functioning of parliamentary procedures. The KKE and PAME contingents, whose members appeared in full uniform, prevented all of the others from lining up in front of Parliament. Militants of the PAME used physical force and beat up members of several other contingents whom they considered "dangerous." And not satisfied simply with this, KKE and PAME went on to distort the facts in order to accuse those they physically assaulted of being "police agents" in the well-known Stalinist style.

It's undeniable that at this crucial moment the KKE followed its own logic and belief, as if there is no movement except its own. Therefore, everybody who does not support the party is an enemy. At the same time the party gained badges of honor, due to its willingness to compromise and to its loyalty to the government and to the system as a whole. It did everything in its power to ensure that the encirclement of the Parliament was not a real siege, limiting the mobilization to an admittedly massive, but still peaceful—and ultimately, therefore, harmless and ineffective—protest based on traditional patterns. The KKE leadership is entirely fixated on the rules of the parliamentary system and is preparing the party forces for expected developments. It is not unlikely that in the coming weeks elections will be announced. If this is what happens, KKE would like to appear as the responsible party of the Left and as a reliable opposition that consistently refuses subversive and confrontational practices. This attitude will continue regardless of what government is ultimately created, the government organized by single party or a government of "national unity."

Because of such practices, PAME was denounced by thousands of activists who were involved in the mobilization. Nevertheless it has to be emphasized that this legitimate and basically correct political criticism of PAME cannot in any way justify the attack on the PAME contingent which was carried through with stones, boards, smoke bombs and Molotov cocktails by members of some groups that define themselves within the anti-authoritarian and anarchist spectrum. Anything that promotes the use of force within the working class movement is not acceptable, because it is not directed against the forces of repression. It has a destructive impact on the development of the movement itself. The result of these practices was, in fact, that an extraordinary manifestation of workers' anger dissipated inconclusively. The bourgeois propagandists took the opportunity to talk about a kind of civil war, and this deters some workers who are partici-

pating in such protests and demonstrations for the first time.

Some groups of the autonomous-anarchist current referred in their statements to the Stalinism of the KKE and tried to justify the violent attacks as a kind of public anger against the logic of PAME that attempts to hegemonize the entire movement. But these accusations can and should convince no one. In reality, these groups follow a similar logic when they commit acts of violence at every demonstration in a wholly arbitrary and uncontrolled fashion. In this way they inhibit the organized mass contingents from implementing their own plans. On the other hand, it is not correct to hastily denounce these groups as a camouflaged part of the security state apparatus, etc. It is undeniable that the anonymity of the autonomous-anarchist spectrum and the wearing of "hoods" on the street make them more susceptible to infiltration by police agents. Nevertheless, it is unacceptable to simply dismiss all these groups as police agents and quasi-governmental mechanisms. Furthermore, the block of people who started the attack on PAME was totally disorganized, without banners, and therefore its composition is unknown. The explanation presented by KKE and PAME, that disguised police provocateurs had planned the attack beforehand and then carried it out, is insufficient and does not lead to relevant political conclusions.

The real background to the emergence of such behaviors is a fetishism of violence as a means of resolving political conflicts. This fetishism finds fertile soil in a certain milieu, especially among the youth. It is a kind of fixation on violent behavior that is, in the final analysis, far from any political and organized forms of protest that could be really dangerous to the system. The fire of the Marfin Bank on 5 May 2010, when three bank employees were killed, is characteristic in this respect. Just the day before there was an attack on a teachers' contingent and on the following day attacks on KKE members and on district offices of the party in the style of a mafia feud. All this has nothing to do with anticapitalist struggle; quite the opposite.

Regardless of the media reports regarding who should be blamed for the physical altercations at Syntagma Square, there is no question that the logic of the KKE—to organize "reasonable" and "peaceful" demonstrations without any prospect of an escalation, which is clearly against a mood in the movement that is prepared for a massive collision—is deeply flawed. Equally, however, the tactic of uncontrolled violence must be condemned since it amounts to meaningless and purposeless destruction and pushes in a direction which is contrary to the goals of the workers' and popular movement. Even an explicit understanding of the police-style function that the PAME leadership exercised within the movement does not in any way justify the attacks with Molotov cocktails on striking PAME protesters. Such practices can only provoke disgust and outrage. The answer to the tactics of the KKE and PAME must be given by the movement itself in a political way, not by anonymous groups that claim to reflect the popular mood. However, it must also be noted that the orientation of the Communist Party to take over primary responsibility for the defense of civil institutions can only be destructive to the labor movement, in both the short and long term.

Despite all, and for various reasons, there was a lack of mass sentiment that would have seriously projected a storming of the Parliament or its actual encirclement during the two strike days. This was crucial, and ultimately made clear that the decisive spark did not exist. On Wednesday the strikers approached the fence and tore it down, but no large crowds were involved. On Thursday, more radical forms of struggle could barely be noticed. Nevertheless, only through such a radicalization of the mass mood can the logic of PAME, or of some of the anti-authoritarian autonomous groups that want to represent the movement as a whole, be overcome. What is needed in the coming weeks is a continuation of the massive occupation of public

buildings (town halls, ministries, etc.) and the escalation of long-term strikes and mobilizations aimed at paralyzing production by a political general strike calling for the overthrow of the government.

In this sense, neither PAME nor any other group can claim the right to position itself "in the vanguard in front of the Parliament." Any serious proposal for the movement, its stance and tactics, must be based on political criteria and objectives, not on journalistic commentary from the outside. It will be of paramount importance to all anti-capitalist revolutionary forces in the near future to develop a current within the labor movement that attempts to promote the workers united front, attempting to become dominant during the next wave of strikes, demonstrations and occupations. This current will come into an irreconcilable conflict with the miserable policy of compromise and capitulation of the union bureaucracy, the logic of the military-police-in-the-movement as represented by PAME, and the fetishism of violence that characterizes certain groups from the autonomous-anarchist spectrum. What we need is a political workers' movement that will send the government, the bankers, the EU and the IMF to the trash heap, which will eventually overthrow bourgeois society paving the way for the socialist transformation of relations.

Unfortunately the ANTARSYA statement shows a certain lack of understanding regarding the real objectives of the KKE leadership. The united action and the united front of workers' movement must not be formed under conditions projected by PAME. The fighting that preceded the general strike has shown that this united front can and must emerge out of the essential qualitative development of the mass movement itself. The statement of the ANTARSYA Central Coordination Committee, in contrast, represents a retreat in the face of the policy pursued by the KKE leadership, and is therefore inadequate.

Athens, October 29th, 2011

ITALY

The key question is the self-determination of the movements

SINISTRA CRITICA (CRITICAL LEFT) ·

1. The potential impact of the 15th October was clear from the size of the turnout which was largely self-organised but was also built through many political and social organisations. However the contribution of the latter was not as big politically as in the past and therefore the number of those who marched in Rome – 200,000 seems the most credible estimate – represents a powerful force that we need to recognise and value. Opposition to the policies of both centre-left and centre-right governments in this country continues to be significant even if it finds diverse political forms and expression or to some degree does not come together at all. The anomaly of the Italian situation is that there is a critical mass of people who are resisting – it shows a country that has not been domesticated despite 17 years of Berlusconi and, let's not forget, feeble anti-Berlusconi governments. We have to start from this resistance.

2. How do we build on this potential, what could we have done if the 15th October had turned out differently? How do we transform the willingness to struggle into a permanent mobilisation? This is the question we have to ask straightaway because it helps us avoid an impressionistic judgment on the October 15th events. A large part of the demonstration, including with our full support, had proposed ending the demonstration with a big occupation camp – a political tactic that goes beyond the ritual demonstration and does not follow a facile vanguardism. What was the point of an occupation? It would have been a symbolic act in opposition to the

existing regime – whether we are talking about the government, the Bank of Italy or even the Quirinale (Prime minister's official residence). It would set up a public space for debate and self-organisation and thereby set up the first steps for the birth of a real movement – organised from below, self-determined and equipped with an advanced political programme. Today in practice none of those ingredients exist. We have a general mood, widespread anger and the willingness to come to demonstrate in Rome but back in the localities, in the workplaces, schools, colleges, among the unemployed and immigrants we do not yet have the specific influence that defines a mass movement. For us the 15th October was a day when this sort of process could have been set off.

3. The 15th also provided a space for the real actions of all those who should be the true protagonists of a long lasting and effective mass movement – workers, students, temporary and part time workers, women, migrants, committees for the common good and so on. Even here, while today there are important steps in this direction, their protagonist role is too often represented, delegated to the usual organisations such as trade unions, official community bodies or partly to political parties. Ordinary working people are not yet protagonists and this remains a priority in this period so that they can challenge the movement's usual 'parliamentary' leadership style with meetings of all the various groups. While this sort of organisation may have been alright ten years ago at Genova today it fails to meet the demands of the political period. This is a result of the different backgrounds and experiences of the forces involved (which are sometimes counterposed), of the repetition of ineffective actions and of a political framework which aimed to

bring everyone together but which no longer represented all the activists. The 15th was also a defeat for this political framework and we must reflect on this.

4. The actions of those who were involved in the clashes expressed a very clear political perspective and also for this reason attracted a sector of youth who were mostly without permanent work, unemployed or in short term, temporary or casual work. We should not underestimate the significance of this group. Often many young people joined the clashes only to express a frustration bred by the crisis. But the political perspective expressed in these actions is to a large extent the following: to provide a stage to give vent to frustration. Setting up confrontations and a conflict for the TV cameras so that a thousand 'furious' youth can occupy the political stage does not seem to us a perspective that can be maintained without leading to an unforeseen as well as a counter-productive escalation. An escalation that we have already seen which, apart from other deleterious consequences, has brought about the stifling of the mass movements.

5. The decision to force events contradicted what seemed to us to be the fundamental priority – building a movement that is effective and self-organised. The movement was not able to emerge on the streets on Saturday. It will not have a better opportunity. Above all it was constrained by forces that were not accountable to anyone.

6. In reality what we saw was the tired re-running of a film too often seen in recent decades. The birth of a movement is tarnished by this gesture politics, the task of patient and complex self-organisation is sabotaged by short-cuts that can only be taken by a small minority. The difficulty of bringing the dynamic developed on a central national scale to the local level, in the workplace, school or college or elsewhere is absolutely marginalised and underestimated. The democratic process which needs time and extensive local work is bypassed by an elitist, vanguardist, top down (and we should note a basically 'macho') approach.

7. Consequently we think that the events of the 15th October, in which the police bear some serious responsibility for the irresponsible way in which they intervened in San Giovanni square, damage the movement and force it backwards, on to the defensive and more susceptible to the moderate and electoralist political forces. The latter are involved inside the movement and are ready to take advantage of the 15th October. In this context they can win back some support and play a more central role.

8. We do not identify with those moderate left forces but only with the political dynamic expressed by the maturity and understanding of a self-determined mass movement. The means and the ends need to be agreed and the only way of doing this, the only 'morality' that we recognise for political action is that which derives from the democracy of the movement, its self-determination and therefore its self-organisation.

9. This is the key point we wish to put forward in the discussion. It is the only way to get out of this dead end and the frustration we are seeing everywhere. The movement must be able to deal with its own mobilisations, deciding what it is going to do on the streets and in the squares and how to politically, socially and materially defend those choices. To do this we need mechanisms that we rarely see in Italy given that the structure of the movements have largely been dominated by an underestimation of their value and by the bureaucratic methods of the institutional left with its substitutionist methodology of 'antagonistic' forces. It appears that this bankrupt formula is still be offered by those forces.

10. Therefore we propose to start from the indignation of the mass movement – of the students, workers, unemployed, temporary/casual workers, migrants and women. We are committed to build the real movement with these forces. Only in this way can we all make a difference.

11. We should relaunch the idea of occupying an area with a camp although this proposal has to be re-modelled – it cannot just be proclaimed or de-

cided from on high but has to emerge as an expression of real struggle.

12. We think that the struggle against the crisis and its political consequences has to be carried out by:

Strengthening self-organisation, the mass movement and its readiness to fight by developing a real class struggle programme which says we will not pay the debt. We propose another agenda:

- a unilateral moratorium on the public debt;
- establishing a national public bank;
- a highly progressive taxation on income and property;
- a minimum wage;
- citizen's income for young people and those without permanent work;

- reducing the working week;
- drastic cutting of the military budget;
- defend communal resources/property against the big public works like the TAV;
- abolish the link between visas and labour contracts for migrants;
- extend direct democracy.

We went onto the streets with the slogan 'we are not going home'. This slogan is even more relevant after the 15th of October.

National Executive of Sinistra Critica – organisation for the anti-capitalist left.

17th October 2011

Europe: A strategy to break with the Europe of Capital

DANIEL ALBARRACÍN ·

The chosen path of approval, at the end of a moribund legislature of an unrepresentative Parliament under a disoriented government without consultation through a referendum shows once again the compliance of institutional political power with the requirements of European economic power. And as is increasingly clear, that "what is called democracy is not so..."

The social response is an outcry, ever louder as society shows its outrage and until now unarmed actors express their rejection. Also, this social rage materializes in the visualization of horizons of emancipation and solidarity-based alternatives. To sketch these new horizons, we need to explore new divergent paths out of the quagmire that the current European policies are pushing us into. In what follows we are going to try to synthesize some political-economic interpretations given by the left in recent times. We will try and to identify a possible course free of the shackles of the EU model and its oligarchical political management.

1. The EU model and the trend towards the abyss at its periphery.

Different authors like, among others, Costas Lapavistas [1] or Pedro Montes [2] have developed a diagnosis of the existing European model and its consequences. A model which has been established since at least Maastricht and continued in its many successor treaties (Lisbon, Euro Pact, and so on). The EU model has promoted and institutionalized freedom of movement of capital and goods within a single market and a monetary policy at the service of the central countries. All this without observing the heterogeneity of a large and mixed group of countries on which the same policies do not have the same effects. All this without any significant

solidarity balances which could counteract the imbalances inherent to the market economy; or provide for just compensation for the most dependent regions or those with lower productivity; without real convergence projects and shared investments; and, last but not least, with a derisory public budget unable to correct the divergent tendencies which the said model causes. Structural dependency, the practical oligopoly of the Central European economies and capital, the divergence between centre and periphery, seem to have no limits.

The presence of the single currency, with a single interest rate for countries with production capacities of different scope and efficiency, with a chain of value and profitability dominated in its strategic phases by the core countries (Germany, France, United Kingdom and so on) that reinforces this hierarchy, in structurally divergent inflationary contexts, leads to a permanent imbalance in the balance of payments between countries. The financing needs of the peripheral countries become chronic, while the core countries become creditors and, therefore take ownership gradually of the wealth of the economically most vulnerable regions, in collusion with local oligarchic capital that can also take advantage of its space of profitability.

The EU also turned its back the possibility of the development of supportive policies, based on a harmonized, progressive and direct taxation and a public budget much higher than the current one (which does not exceed 1.2% of GDP), harmonization upwards of social models, a system of compensation and social and inter-territorial solidarity counteracting capitalist inequality, or a coordinated advanced and socially and environmentally sustainable plan of investment and international cooperation. Instead it advocates a model of concentration of privileges and benefits for the big banks and

big industrial and energy corporations, by sacrificing the workers, by destroying a part of the less profitable productive tissue, and through relocation in emerging countries and the South.

The European Union's rescue plans, with the Euro Pact as a general outline, are leading the euro area into the abyss. Its austerity policies engender a depressive spiral in the peripheral countries of which draconian conditions are demanded. If Greece is now the first in line, others will soon follow.

The demands of this "competitive model" restrict the room for manoeuvre in public spending and investment policies, and make "fiscal devaluation" the main variable of adjustment, with concomitant reduction of public expenditure, cost-cutting and the degradation of working conditions on a permanent basis.

At the same time, the imposition of a recessionary policy that socializes losses to rescue capital characterizes the guiding orientation of this perverse model. We have successive bank bailouts, and an ECB policy which lends money to financial capital at 1%, but will not lend directly to states or – except in the recent desperate situations and only in secondary markets – buy public debt securities, while banks acquire public securities at considerably higher rates (above 4 per cent). These mechanisms lead to a drying up of credit for investment and consumption which is also explained by the degradation of anticipations of growth and profitability in numerous saturated sectors.

This model is accentuated by the pressures of finance capital which, taking advantage of the permanent blackmail of private risk rating agencies dedicates itself to extorting public debts to blackmail states. In a context of huge private debt, and in a framework of overproduction, financial capital makes the public debt its business, at the same time requiring that public authorities consider policies that make citizens and the working class pay for this crisis (through adjustment plans) and mitigate the situation of insolvency. Big industrial capital also contributes to the hegemonic financialised log-

ic, profiting from the quasi stagnation of the economy to strengthen its oligopolistic positions in basic goods and services (such as energy, food, insurance, health, security, and so on). Thus it succeeds in protecting itself from the crisis to the detriment of the living conditions of the population, by denigrating the public sector and appropriating the sectors privatised by the state.

1.1. Exit from the euro as option and scenario

So, authors such as the aforementioned Lapavistas and Montes envisage no other solution than a break with the euro and a unilateral exit in the Greek or Spanish cases, or other countries that may be in a comparable situation. According to these analysts, this route would recover sovereignty over monetary policy, and would make it easier to get out of a disastrous spiral. The central mechanism they propose involves regaining control over taxation, public investment and social expenditure and, in particular, the devaluation of the new currency. Devaluation would lead to an improvement in the conditions of export and economic recovery, and break with the logic that pushes the weakest nations in Europe towards a constant regression. Which would mean that countries could use their currencies to compete with each other and compete for market shares rather than, as happens now, compete on the basis of low wages.

This line of interpretation is exhausted at this point because we still would not find answers to the questions and scenarios that are, in our view, key. Certainly these authors support further solutions, but if we are left only with the above there would be much unresolved.

First, debt, both public and private, despite the new currency, would be denominated in euros. Devaluation would entail not only a deep impoverishment of purchasing power (due to the cost of imports), but also a worsening of the conditions of borrowing (the value of the debt would soar). So what to do about the debt? And how would people respond to deterioration in their purchasing power which could lead to it falling by half? It is not cer-

tain that proportion would be reached and one can assume a bearable level, but we also should anticipate and deal with such circumstances, particularly in view of the deterioration in the purchasing power already suffered by the population. Maintaining such a situation would require social support from the population to bear the sacrifice.

One might also ask perhaps if European countries that are not in the euro are experiencing crisis. Casuistry requires the introduction of nuances, but the truth is that none of these countries is escaping from the crisis. In this context, the worst situated are the countries of Eastern Europe, if one takes the United Kingdom as point of comparison, or obviously Switzerland, which today serves as a refuge and above all a tax haven. In any case, the evidence shows that being outside the euro, by itself, is not a magic formula in any way.

Either departure or expulsion from the Eurozone requires facing an adverse scenario, and we should not ignore the question of how to face it. This scenario would arise whether there was a voluntary exit from the euro or in the context of an expulsion from the single currency. Exit from the euro would lead to a significant deterioration in the purchasing power of the population. This deterioration would also continue within the euro area in the framework of the European neo-liberal policies in place, but outside it would go further in a faster manner, possibly. It would also be a scenario in which a portion of capital, presumably, would flee the country.

Claudio Katz [3] is currently reflecting on the Argentine experience. In 2001, it ceased to pay 48 per cent of the public debt contracted, within a framework of peso dollar parity, in a situation comparable to that of Greece today. His analysis is certainly enlightening. The default (suspension of payments), was of a partial nature, not voluntary but caused by exhaustion of funds - which suggests that it is better to take to take this decision as quickly as possible. Katz shows that this choice provided the conditions for the economic recovery of the country [4]. The subsequent recovery did not happen without a high social cost, with the extension of un-

employment, poverty and hunger. This analysis leads us to concentrate on measures which can reduce the social cost. The keys are in the need for tight control of capital movements to avoid flight, not to mention some sort of transitional trade protectionism. And, needless to say, a redistributive policy combined with strong public investment to bring about a self-centred economic recovery.

All this is not enough to ensure that an isolated country could exit the euro without serious consequences. It is necessary to examine the place its economy has in the international division of labour, what markets it trades on, what financing it would have access to. In other words: Although remaining in the euro may not be an orientation to follow at all costs, it is not the only question posed, nor even the most important first to be raised. It is essential to anticipate what problems can come later.

2. A strategy to reform the EU

Michel Husson [5] and Ozlem Onaran [6], among others, have been arguing that the first option should not be to ask about whether or not to leave the euro, given the desperate situation of Greece, and what could happen to other countries of the European periphery.

Of course, monetary union, the Euro, multiplies the effects of the economic foundations on which the EU stands. These must alter deeply in a radically different direction. It is not in itself the Euro causing the crisis: the Euro is the vehicle. The fundamental issue is not exit, and neither is staying under any circumstances. It is, in their view, to try to correct the path of the EU, and if that is not possible, to shield against its policies by disobeying the neoliberal schema to build another Europe.

This does not involve waiting for the EU to reform itself, which would be naive. Staying in the euro could protect the economy from financial attacks on the currency and would not prevent in any way a strategy of disobedience of those treaties with a neo-liberal orientation. Among them should be noted, firstly, those which require a permanent adjust-

ment on wage incomes and public policies, opposing this with expansionary measures in the monetary, fiscal, or investment areas and spending on public services and development of social policies. This disobedience might multiply if it was followed by more countries, which could require initiatory exemplary initiatives. This active exercise could be used as an instrument of pressure for a change in the EU, an economic space on a very significant scale, with a wide margin of manoeuvre to circumvent the worst tendencies of capitalist globalisation.

However, although this strategy does not require perfect synchronization between the political practices of the disobedient European countries, in our opinion, nor would it be optimal in itself. It would be more effective to propose the deployment of proactive initiatives for cooperation and supra-national alliances. This option would not occur, presumably without recourse to sanctions and isolation policies and, probably, could end up leading equally to expulsion. And in this case, we must also plan for what to do.

This, any left course of action would only be sustainable socially within the framework of the partnership of several countries able to withstand the shocks of financial and commercial isolation, and with a minimum breadth to start an endogenous development which, to be viable and fair, must be redistributive, and based on radically democratic participation.

3. A supranational proactive strategy to build a solidarity-based economic area.

Saying no to neoliberal EU policies and adopting another model inviting anyone who wants to join is, in our view, a course of action which is both necessary and feasible. Whether inside or outside the Eurozone or the EU. This is the role of the left; through government or through political pressure but, above all, from the street, to shift policies from country to country. Before considering a solution which is qualitatively superior, this is the way to undertake a change.

But once it was possible, in a less unfavourable scenario, to count on governments disobeying the neo-liberal EU, it would immediately be necessary to complement the policies of redistribution and endogenous and sustainable investment with international cooperation policies. Cooperation above all at the levels of complementary commercial, financial and common investment policies; but also integration of the institutional economic apparatus to form an economic area which, while being open to the world, allowed strengthening ties and mutual support among alternative orientation countries.

There is no point waiting for an unlikely EU-wide change (although we should not despise this possibility), or for all countries to agree a turning point. Especially when most if not all of them are under the control of bourgeois governments at the service of finance capital and large private corporations. A state, nationality or region can develop a policy of solidarity, cooperation and convergence, a project of integration between those who take this initiative and it should not be delayed. Before envisaging the appearance of a new "common currency", the first measures of integration should concern investment and preferential cooperative exchanges, redistributive measures, but also the establishment of a financial policy of solidarity-based protection against tax evasion, or attack by hedge funds. Which requires a public bank, expropriating the banks that caused and took advantage of the crisis, and that can begin construction of a central politically directed bank, to implement strong regulation of the financial system, establishing a comparatively expansive monetary policy with other monetary areas but necessarily ending the logic favourable to financial hypertrophy and the massive indebtedness of the economy.

Moreover, we should avoid Eurocentric stereotypes. In this new club we should include all countries committed to the agreed parameters, regardless of continent. It should for example accept the countries of Eastern Europe, the Maghreb or Asia.

In short, we cannot simply be saying no, or stick with developing measures at national level. It is

necessary to devise a proactive, supranational and solidarity based project open to whoever engages with it, without looking at their origin, but with a shared will for common practical solidarity being the sole criterion.

4. A vehicle for popular mobilization: the citizens' audit of the debt

It is necessary to fight for another Europe, another supportive supranational framework, with a profile of solidarity, redistributive and integrative policies to make the capitalists pay for their crisis. It is necessary to fight for an internationalist economic model in which financiers cannot continue blackmailing governments and parliaments, and use European institutions as puppets to pressure government after government.

But so that this can be a project to fight the turn to the right in Europe and the undemocratic kidnapping of European institutions by the financial oligarchies, it is necessary to find a space to open in favour of progressive and innovative policies. A space that only can be built from the bottom up, from the labour and social movements.

A campaign that could lead to this is the development of a citizens' audit of the debt with a participatory, open and educational character, so that citizens can provide information and analysis that identifies the fundamental problems. This audit should clarify, as recently in the case of Ecuador, with effective subsequent success, who are the creditors, the weight of public and private debt, how to decrease that debt, the conditions of payment and schedules, the legitimacy of the latter, as well as the uses of this financing. This campaign seeks transparency in accounts and assessing the situation, addressing the main current threat to the economy and society: debt, particularly private debt. This pedagogical exercise would allow the social majority to understand not only the reason for this obstacle to any progress, but also shed light on possible solutions.

It would clarify the choices which have led to a preference for indebtedness of the public sector rather than a financing based on a fair taxation of income from capital. We would see that many creditors have benefitted from an endless array of privileges and benefits. We would see how monetary policy, particularly unfavourable for the peripheral countries, has led to a completely irresponsible financial policy, in a context of deliberate policies of deregulation. This financial policy chose to stimulate demand via debt and not via wages or services and public investment, granting loans and credits conditioned by assurances and guarantees that made the borrowers bear all the risks of the operations.

The class struggle today takes a unique form: creditors against the indebted. And, therefore, if the capitalists are to pay for the crisis it is necessary to determine how creditors will face it and impose the necessary restructuring, in such a way that they are designated as having provoked this crisis of hyper-financialised overproduction.

Therefore, we need a cancellation of a good part of the debt, first of all that part of the public debt which is odious or used unlawfully. Then, strong regulation on private debt to attribute specific losses according to the responsibility of each party, which implies that the big banks should shoulder much of the cost. There should be a regulation on debts between public and private sector or vice versa, or between companies, normally with asymmetrical relationships that should compensate for monopoly abuses.

In the mortgage chapter, the claim for payment in kind [7] is not enough. It should be completed by a mechanism for control on empty homes, and where appropriate an expropriation of housing which is poorly maintained or not environmentally adapted to a sustainable urban model, as well as the establishment of a public stock of rentable housing, and the regulation of a universal right to housing with rents adjusted to available resources.

We believe that another world is possible, and that we need to start somewhere in building it. What is proposed can be a good start though, of course, it is not exactly a path without major obstacles and con-

flicts. But unless we start on this path, the scenario will certainly be even worse.

First published in "Viento Sur" August 2011

PAKISTAN

490 years of jail sentences for labour leaders in Pakistan

FAROOQ TARIQ ·

The Anti-Terrorist Court's judge Mian Muhammad Anwar Nazir sentenced six Labour Qaumi Movement's leaders: Akbar Ali Kamboh, Babar Shafiq Randhawa, Fazal Elahi, Rana Riaz Ahmed, Muhammad Aslam Malik and Asghar Ali.

Four of them were arrested on 22nd July 2010 by Faisalabad police after a strike call by power-loom workers for a 17% increase in wages as per announcement of the government. Two other leaders Ansari were also arrested under same charges four months back.

They have been accused of burning a factory during the strike. This is a fabricated charge. The facts are that on the day of strike on 20th July 2010, the factory owner in Thekri Wala started firing on the workers who were leaving the factory to demand for better wages. After hearing the firing by the gangsters of the factory owner, some workers dared to go inside the factory and forced the gangsters to stop firing.

After workers went to the city with the main rally, the owner conspired to burn some old cloths and fire in one room, pretending that the workers had burnt the factory. During the trial, the workers' advocate raised the point if the factory was burnt then how was it able to function in two days later.

More than 100,000 power-loom workers in Faisalabad district went on strike on July 20, 2010 for the increase of wages which had been announced by the government during the presentation of budget 2010-11. The government announced a 17 % rise in the minimum wage for the private sector workers. Labour Qaumi Movement (LQM), an organization of the power-loom workers in

Faisalabad, Jhang and other districts, had been in negotiation with power loom owners for three weeks for wage increase.

The local police asked the workers' leaders on the evening of the strike day to come to the police station for negotiations. All four leaders went to police station of Thekri wala themselves and they were arrested. Initially, they were not charged with anti terrorist sections. These were included after a few weeks when the bosses went all out to crush the movement.

It was reported that during the strike the workers remained peaceful but the owners of factories and their henchmen and police remained violent against the striking workers. The owners and their henchmen resorted to violence by throwing stones and bricks at the peaceful march of workers from one side of the protest, while police used tear gas shells on the workers from the other end. 25 workers were injured including Tahir Rana, the president of LQM Faisalabad district, who was critically injured.

On the day, around 100 workers were also arrested. The print and electronic media reported that thousands of workers from different areas of Faisalabad district had marched despite a police ban on public gatherings.

Labour Qaumi Movement leaders are members of Labour Party Pakistan. In January 2010, they organised a massive workers and peasant conference at famous Dhobe Ghat of Faisalabad on the eve of the LPP fifth congress in the city. Over 10,000 participated in this massive gathering.

In April that year, the chairman of LQM contested a bye-election for Punjab assembly seat and got

reasonable votes of around 9 percent.

All this was not accepted by PMLN and the law minister Rana Sana Ullah Khan. They decided to have a go on the movement.

Sudhar is the suburb of Faisalabad where a big number of power loom factories is located. This area had been a scuffle ground between workers and owners for the three years as the workers organized themselves effectively in huge number there. ??

The appointments of Aftab Cheema as DPO and Nasim Sadiq as DCO of Faisalabad last year by Mian Shehbaz Sharif, the chief minister, was mainly to control the rising movement of workers. These two officers played clever shots and tried to pacify the movement while making promises with LQM leadership to re-investigate the case against arrested workers but did not fulfill these promises.

Instead they have supported owners of the power looms in their actions against workers.

It is now clear that the PMLN leadership in Faisalabad alongside with police and judiciary is all out to crush the labour movement. Never in history of Pakistan such harsh sentences were announced to labour leaders for an incident where they were not involved.

Every one here in Pakistan from the labour movement is shocked on these harsh jail sentences.

Anti-terrorist laws are frequently used against protesting industrial workers in Punjab. over 13 trade unions leaders are facing such charges of terrorism in Punjab. their real crime is fight for better life and demanding higher wages. The Punjab gov-

ernment is all out to crush any trade union movement in factories which is challenging their authority. Police is very often used in such cases.

The Faisalabad workers are singled out by the Punjab government because they are political and they are members of Labour Party Pakistan. We are not giving in.

Today, I spoke to Asma Jehanghir the former chairperson of Supreme Court Bar association and she promised to look into the file to take up the case for bail in Lahore High Court. She participated in one the protest rally on 1st march 2011, for the release of the four labour leaders. She was also shocked to hear the news.

Four of us will be leaving for Faisalabad tomorrow to participate in the meeting of LQM and chalk out the future course of action.

Please protest where ever you are, Please take up the case with your organisation and pass a resolution to condemn the jail sentences and issue press releases to the newspapers.

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1 November 2011

ISRAELI STATE

Prisoner Exchange, Symmetry and Israel's Siege of Gaza

MICHEL WARSCHAWSKI ·

In two days we can celebrate the return home of 1037 Palestinian political prisoners and the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. For the thousands of Palestinian families who will soon meet their loved ones I'm happy, and for the Shalit family I'm also happy. However, beyond happiness over the release, there exists no symmetry: The Palestinian political prisoners, women and men, who will be freed are all freedom fighters who fulfilled their political and moral duty in the struggle against the Israeli colonial occupation. Gilad Shalit, on the other hand, was a soldier, and a soldier in Israel's colonial occupation army which violates international law on a daily basis and regularly commits war crimes. As was done by hundreds of Israelis before him, Shalit should have refused to take part in this war, which he did not do.

Those in Israel dubbed the "kidnappers" of Gilad Shalit actually took a prisoner of war and according to all testimonies at our disposal, he was treated as such. The Palestinian political prisoners, on the other hand, do not even dare dream of receiving treatment similar to that received by Shalit.

Just as an injured soldier is not left on the battlefield, the state is obligated to do everything in its power to return its prisoners of war, whatever the price may be. There is no "particularly special Jewish humanism" here, as related by the Israeli media, which is nourished by the office of Benjamin Netanyahu, but a regular and accepted act in a situation of war. What is not usual, and is in fact scandalous, is the intentional foot-dragging which char-

acterized the governments responsible for the Shalit file. The agreement reached with the assistance of the German negotiator and the Egyptian and Turkish governments was closed already three years ago', but the Israeli government chose to ignore it and fantasise about a commando operation, which undoubtedly would have resulted in the death of the soldier.

It is easy to assume that if a child of Netanyahu or Lieberman was in captivity, the government would have moved much faster and accepted the agreement placed on its table. No! The government did not demonstrate any "Jewish humanism" but actually a true lack of humanity. Only the quiet determination of the Shalit family and their public support moved this immoral and heartless government.

And another thing: A government that transformed national dignity into a substitute for policy must now retreat from all of its arrogant declarations, such as in the cases of Turkey and Egypt. Here too it had to swallow its pride and to do exactly the opposite of what it promised: To free "terrorists with blood on their hands", while the relation of freedom (1:1037) is even higher than the relation of 3:1050 in the Rajub prisoner exchange of 1985.

One question remains open: what about ending Israel's siege on Gaza? It is said that this is part of the agreement with the Hamas, but Netanyahu has no difficulties in violating agreements; already now it is apparent that not all the women prisoners will be freed, despite an Israeli promise. Moreover, the excuse for the siege on Gaza was the captivity of Gilad Shalit. What new excuse will Israel come up with now?

Translated to English by the Alternative
Information Center (AIC)

Why demonstrating in Nice against the G20 on 1-3 November 2011 is essential

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT ·

The crisis is worsening, especially for the most industrialized countries. The governments of the so called "emerging" countries such as Brazil, China, India and Russia wish to gain greater hearing in international institutions like the IMF and the World Bank. The G20 is an illegitimate club created in 2008 by the G7 (equally illegitimate club made up of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, UK and USA) to convince these emerging countries to bring their help to resolving the crisis, without success. This G20 reunion is first international reunion since the enormous success of the 'Indignés' movement of the 15 th October 2011. [1] Although it had little echo in France, this movement mobilized a million demonstrators all over the planet, principally in Spain, Italy and Portugal, not to forget the Occupy Wall Street movement. [2]

So this is an important event for all anti-liberal globalization activists. It is important either to demonstrate in the streets of Nice or to attend the People's forum in Mali [3], to clamour our opposition to the policies adopted by those who claim to be the world rulers.

In what way has the European crisis become a global issue? What roles are the United States and the emerging countries to play?

The very important economic slowdown that is affecting Europe, the bankruptcy of banking institutions like Dexia could have a knock on effect on the world's economy [4] : a domino effect on the financial and banking institutions of the United States

on the one hand, and a reduction of exports of China and other countries exporting to Europe on the other hand.

The European Union and in particularly the euro-zone is effectively the central element of the current world crisis, the way these winds blow in the next few months will have an impact on the whole of the world's economy.

So much are European and North American banks and institutions interconnected on both sides of the Atlantic, the United States is very concerned over possible chain reactions beginning with the bankruptcies of European banks going on to touch their banks. These concerns are not strictly political; they are first and foremost economical.

What are the converging campaigns organized in Europe on public debt issues? What is the role of the Greek campaign?

Everywhere in Europe, debt repayments are the pretext used to harden the austerity policies that rain down on the working people and the majority of the population. Making progress in the creation of a European campaign for the suspension of debt repayments and the realization of a citizen controlled audit, is the step to be accomplished in the coming weeks and months. Greece has started this process during the month of May 2011, with the constitution of a citizen's commission for a Greek debt audit. This process has spread to Ireland, Spain and recently to France where a citizen's committee for a debt audit has been created. It will soon exist in Belgium, Italy and Portugal.

There is here a real solid possibility to assemble the social forces which question the neo-liberal order as well as the capitalist system itself, to gather them around a uniting theme. If we manage, by street

demonstrations, to obtain a debt repayment suspension for several countries, the balance of power will radically shift in favour of the social majority. This justifies the effort of struggle.

From an interview by Flavia Verri and Gilles Pagaille

Published in "Tout est à nous"?! No 121 27th October 2011.

Translated by Mike Krolikowski for CADTM.

TUNISIA

After the elections in Tunisia

MAGHREB COMMISSION OF THE NPA ·

Nine months after the outbreak of the Tunisian revolutionary process and the departure of Ben Ali, the aspiration for democracy motivated Tunisians to take part in these elections. As this article is being written, the final results are not yet known and there are all sorts of rumours. One thing is certain, the Constituent Assembly will have very few women among its members: in fact, only seven per cent of the lists had put a woman in the number one spot, including among the parties which make long speeches about equal rights between men and women!

Success for Ennahdha

This election especially benefitted the Islamist movement Ennahdha, which has come out largely in the lead. Even though this party did not take part in the mobilizations that brought down Ben Ali, it drew respect because of its militants who had given their lives and the thousands of others who had been imprisoned and tortured under the dictatorship. Furthermore, it benefitted from colossal financial resources, coming in particular from wealthy former leaders of the RCD (Ben Ali's party) enabling it to undertake charitable work, ensuring support from the poorest layers in society.

Ennahdha also benefitted from official propaganda which oriented the campaign towards its favourite theme: Arab-Muslim identity.

And if Ennahdha allies with the CPR of Moncef Marzouki, these two formations could have an absolute majority in the Constituent Assembly.

It should be noted that Ennahdha furthermore benefits today from the support of the imperialist powers. There is nothing surprising about that, for a party whose economic programme is closely

aligned with the solutions recommended by the IMF and the World Bank, with their succession of privatizations, lay-offs and dismantling of public services. So there is nothing surprising about the fact that Barack Obama was the first to congratulate the Tunisians on the result of these elections. In addition to the retreat into identity-based attitudes and the serious threats which now endanger women's rights in particular, and which are in the programme of Ennahdha, will the workers who revolted with cries of "a job is a right, gang of thieves!" have confidence for long in such a party, which will represent and guarantee imperialist interests in Tunisia ?

Setback for the radical Left

What also emerges is that the organizations of the radical Left are the big losers in this election. They stood divided, each organization thinking that only it incarnated the essence of radicality. Some, like the League for a Workers' Left (LGO), finally decided to boycott it. As a result, the radical Left has only four people elected (three from the Workers' Communist Party of Tunisia, one from the Movement of Democratic Patriots).

Development of struggles?

After the elections, the situation of the workers has not changed, and that will be the principal disillusion for many of them. The role of revolutionary militants will then be more decisive than ever. Indeed, it will be necessary to struggle against the continuation of the neoliberal policies which Ennahdha intends to implement, as well as the foreseeable attacks against women's rights. The many trade-union and political activists and who had more or less deserted the terrain of struggle since the beginning of the summer in order to en-

gage in the electoral campaign will have the heavy task of helping the mobilizations which will not fail to develop.

This is an updated (October 31st) version of an article published in the October 27th issue of Tout est à nous, weekly paper of the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) in France.

FEATURES

In-depth analysis from International Viewpoint's Features section



USA

Occupy Movement Goals: Socialist Revolution or Capitalist Reforms?

JEFF MACKLER · 21 November 2011

"The Americans are fighting back at last," cried one European demonstrator, echoing the pride and solidarity felt by people the world over, who understand that they too are the 99 percent—the working masses everywhere who create the wealth and yet are increasingly trampled on by the banking and corporate elite and their ever-distrusted political representatives or dictators.

When New York City's Mayor Bloomberg threatened to close down the OWS encampment at Zuccotti Park, he was confronted with an unexpected threat from the AFL-CIO and its constituent unions, including the Communication Workers of America. The local union officialdom called on its ranks to "defend" the occupiers. "Defend" is a special word in working-class circles. It signifies a massive mobilization against those agents of a repressive society who would employ force and violence against peaceful protesters demanding fundamental change.

Bloomberg backed down when he and his cohorts judged that removing several hundred youthful occupiers would be quite a different proposition from challenging a mobilization of the organized labor movement.

Despite that victory, we can expect that the authorities will attempt to beat back the Occupy movement by repression, if they think they can get away with it. This was seen when, without warning, Oakland's repressive apparatus was unleashed on Oct. 25, at 4 a.m. About 900 cops fired rubber bullets and beanbag missiles at close range at some 100 occupiers in Oakland's Frank Ogawa Plaza, adjacent to City

Hall. The attack included tear-gas and clubbing the non-violent occupiers.

In the name of sanitation concerns, the police destroyed the encampment, trashing some 100 tents and arresting scores of Oakland's peaceful protesters. A police-fired missile sent 22-year-old Iraq War veteran Scott Olsen to the hospital with a severe skull fracture.

The next day, the Occupy Oakland General Assembly reclaimed the now renamed Oscar Grant Plaza, with some 2000 supporters mobilizing to protest the police attack.

In response to the attack, 1607 participants debated a resolution calling for an Oakland general strike on Wednesday, Nov. 2. The resolution passed by a 96.9% margin. The resolution stated, "Instead of workers going to work and students going to school, the people will converge on downtown Oakland to shut down the city. ... All banks and corporations should close down for the day or we will march on them. ... The whole world is watching Oakland. Let's show them what is possible."

Indeed, the whole world was watching the events in Oakland, and solidarity events took place in a number of cities. Occupy Wall Street in New York issued a call for a nationwide show of support on Nov. 2. And a planned march from Tahrir Square to the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, Egypt, included a statement of solidarity with the beleaguered Oakland protesters. It read in part: "The moment that we find ourselves in is nothing new, as we in Egypt and others have been fighting against systems of repression, disenfranchisement and the unchecked ravages of global capitalism (yes, we said it, capitalism): a system that has made a world that is dangerous and cruel to its inhabitants."

Most participants understand that the dramatic call for an Oakland general strike, without mass support from the labor movement, will likely not materialize. Nevertheless, it is encouraging that several unions have called on their members to take part. The expected outpouring of working people and youth in solidarity with Occupy Oakland will represent yet another powerful step toward their mobilization in critical class battles to come.

In 1946, as part of the post-World War II strike wave of industrial workers that engulfed the country in the largest multi-million-member labor mobilization in U.S. history, there was indeed a general strike in Oakland, one of the few in the nation's history. The strike began with the solidarity of local trade unionists who had witnessed the bosses herding scab workers through union picket lines at a department store. But the labor bureaucracy, as today, largely stood aside from what developed, virtually spontaneously, into a 54-hour general strike that closed down the city.

Then as now, there was a giant gap between the desire of labor's ranks to struggle and the willingness of labor's blustering misleaders to lead. But once again, the question of labor's leadership will be posed as rank-and-filers embark on the road to recapturing their unions from the current crop of pro-capitalist bureaucrats.

In the process, as in 1946, they will take their struggles into the political arena and contemplate the formation of a mass labor party to compliment labor's struggle at the point of production with a political fight against the policies of the twin parties of capital.

With each passing day the Occupy movement gathers momentum as it reflects the deep-seated anger at the incursions on the quality of life, standard of living, and basic security of the broad working class and its allies among the oppressed and youth everywhere. This is a movement that in the main rejects the very essence of capitalist functioning worldwide, including its imperial wars and occupations and its outright domination by the billionaire

and trillionaire ruling class—the one percent—whose interests are defended without question by the twin capitalist parties that govern in the interests of their corporate and banking overlords.

An October New York Times article tells the story well. Entitled, "New Poll Finds A Deep Distrust of Government," The Times poll found that "almost half of the public [a large plurality] thinks that the sentiment at the root of the Occupy Movement generally reflects the views of all Americans." This stands in sharp contrast to an earlier Times poll that found that the reactionary Tea Party's views reflects the opinion of some 27 percent.

The recent poll found that an astounding "89 percent distrust the government to do the right thing." The article asserted that "a remarkable sense of pessimism and skepticism was apparent in question after question in the survey, which found that Congressional approval had reached a new low of 9 percent."

Despite the mass sentiment and impressive and growing mobilizations against capitalist austerity, however, the official labor movement, as well as the organizations that purport to represent the interests of oppressed nationalities, have yet to exercise their still potent power to challenge and reverse the deepening capitalist offensive.

Today's labor officialdom, compelled now by rank-and-file pressure to at least posture with a modicum of identification with the Occupy movement, remains, with virtually no exceptions, bound in a deadly alliance with the Democratic Party and the Obama administration. This is despite the fact that the latter has proven to be capitalism's most fervent representative in imposing a level of austerity and war that the previous Bush administration never dreamed of.

For the ruling-class rich, and their twin political parties in the United States, there is no alternative to saving their degenerating social system other than continued austerity, cutbacks of every sort, imperialist wars of plunder and occupation, catastrophic assaults of the environment and the pro-

motion of racist, sexist, and anti-immigrant hysteria aimed at dividing the working class to pit one sector against another.

Increasing numbers of Occupation activists are learning from bitter experience that the prospect of reforming capitalism is futile and that the system itself, at its roots, must be challenged, defeated, and replaced. In an ongoing process that combines mass actions, political discussion, and debate, socialist solutions are being considered to a degree not seen in a generation or more.

Socialism is a new social order where for the first time in human history the working masses rule in their own name, as opposed to the elite capitalist property owners and the governments they select to advance their own interests at the expense of us all.

This is not the bureaucratic caricature of socialism that existed in the Stalin era and that prevailed in the former USSR and Eastern Europe before it was challenged and overthrown by its victims, but the dynamic, democratic, and revolutionary socialism pioneered by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels—as well as by Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky and other early leaders of the historic 1917 Russian Revolution.

The socialist revolution in Russia was one in which the working-class majority ruled society in their own interests, and through their own institutions, in order to prioritize human needs in every social arena. The revolutionary government was based on the political and economic rule of mass working-class assemblies or councils of workers and the oppressed ("soviets" in the Russian language). This was a deep-going revolution that abolished the capitalist system of private ownership of society's productive machinery, banks, and resources that had been previously organized to extract the wealth created by the people in the interests of the vast profits of the few.

No ruling-class minority in human history, from the time of the ancient slave societies of the Greeks and Romans thousands of years ago, to the centuries of feudal monarchies, and to today's capital-

ist property-owning elite, has ever relinquished its power voluntarily. Socialist revolution, in the only true sense of the term, is the conscious organization and mobilization of the vast majority to challenge the rulers for power. To envision such a massive social transformation is impossible without the direct involvement of working people acting as a conscious class alternative to the present reactionary and minority social order.

It is no coincidence that the Egyptian people's removal of the hated Hosni Mubarak dictatorship, beginning with the massive assemblies at Tahrir Square, served to inspire the original OWS activists in the U.S. But Mubarak's forced departure was only the beginning of an ongoing revolutionary process. Egyptian capitalism, however discredited, remains in place and along with it a military regime that still rules with terror and has failed in virtually every respect to substantially change the lives of the Egyptian people.

The dictatorship of capital also remains in Tunisia and ever more so in Libya, where U.S./NATO military forces exchanged their previously favored Gadhafi dictatorship with another, even more intimately tied to imperialism. None of the deep social problems plaguing those countries will be solved short of a socialist revolution.

History has demonstrated that the construction of a mass revolutionary socialist party, rooted in the struggles of the masses everywhere and dedicated to the total re-organization of society to establish working-class power, is a prerequisite to any successful challenge to the capitalist order.

In the United States, Socialist Action strives to be part of the critical process of building such a revolutionary socialist party. Socialist Action's "Workers' Action Program to Fight the Crisis" is aimed at mobilizing millions around specific and realistic demands to challenge the capitalist offensive and, in time, the capitalist order itself.

From the November 2011 issue of Socialist Action newspaper USA.

SYRIA

Militarization, military intervention and the absence of strategy

GILBERT ACHCAR · 21 November 2011

The organizers of the conference had invited me to speak on the subject of foreign military intervention in the current situation in Syria. My talk was met with interest and I was asked to write it down (I had delivered it verbally relying only on bullet points). I promised to do so, but a busy schedule prevented me from making good on that promise until now.

Then came the rush of events on the Syrian scene in the past days and a rise in the tone of the discussion surrounding military intervention and the militarization of the crisis, which were the two subjects of my talk in Sweden. These developments prompted me to carry out my promise before it becomes too late. I will therefore elaborate here the views that I expressed in Sweden, updated with commentary on the most recent developments pertaining to the topic.

My talk at the October conference was preceded by one of the attendees directing a question to Burhan Ghalioun about his stance, or the stance of the SNC, on requests for military intervention in Syria. Ghalioun answered that this subject is not discussed presently because there is no country that wants to intervene militarily in Syria at the moment, and so "when we are faced with such willingness, we will adopt the appropriate position."

I began my talk by stressing that the Syrian opposition must define a clear stance on the issue of foreign military intervention, since it is clear that its position has a major influence on whether or not intervention might take place. The reluctance regarding direct intervention that we see today on the part of Western and regional states might change

tomorrow if intervention requests made on behalf of the Syrian opposition were to increase.

It was the Libyan National Council's request for international military intervention at the beginning of March that paved the way for the similar request issued by the Arab league, and the subsequent resolution of the UN Security Council. Had the Libyan opposition opposed direct military intervention in all its forms (instead of just opposing intervention on the ground and requesting air support as it did), the Arab League would not have sought intervention nor would such action have been sanctioned by the UN.

Libya and the Costs of Foreign Military Intervention

In my talk, I dwelled on lessons from the Libyan experience as someone who had participated in the discussions about it. Like the vast majority of the Arab public, I had expressed my understanding for the fact that the Libyan rebels were compelled to appeal to foreign support in order to avert the wholesale massacre that could have occurred had Gaddafi's forces managed to storm the uprising's strongholds in Benghazi, Misrata, and other areas, since the rebels lacked military means to repel such an attack at that time.

We placed all of the blame on Gaddafi for creating the conditions of foreign intervention, while warning the Libyan rebels against any illusion regarding the intentions of the Western forces that were intervening ostensibly on their behalf. Indeed, foreign military intervention in the Libyan state came with a high price that can be summarized as follows:

– The immediate political price of foreign intervention was that it allowed Gaddafi to pretend that he somehow represented national sovereignty and to label the rebels as agents of Western imperialism. This influenced a segment of Libyan society, albeit a limited one.

A no-fly zone over Syria will either have a very limited benefit if it is to remain a no-fly zone in the strictest sense, or it will have devastating consequences in killing and destruction if it is to take the form of an all-out air war against the regime.—The more serious political price was that the intervening powers strove to hijack decision-making from the Libyan rebels. They did not stop at ending the attack on the uprising's strongholds and preventing Gaddafi from using his air power. They went much further, destroying the Libyan air force (Western states, especially France and Britain, are eagerly looking forward to selling weapons to post-Gaddafi Libya) as well as a significant portion of Libya's infrastructure and official buildings (Western states along with Turkey started to compete over the Libyan reconstruction market even before Gaddafi's regime had fallen). Western powers refused to provide the Libyan rebels with the weapons that they had urgently and insistently requested in order to enable them to carry on liberating their country without direct foreign intervention. Weapons were only delivered (by Qatar and France) during the late stages of the battle. These limited infusions of weapons hastened the fall of Gaddafi's regime after a military stalemate had long been in place.

– The goal of Western powers was to impose themselves as major participants in the war against Gaddafi's regime so that they might steer it. They wanted to draw a roadmap for post-Gaddafi Libya and they even set up an international committee for this purpose. They also tried for a while to reach an agreement with the Gaddafi family behind the backs of the Libyan National Council. As a result, Libya's fate was being drawn up in Washington, London, Paris and Doha more so than in Libya itself prior to the liberation of Tripoli. To be sure, the

Western states' desire to control the situation in Libya after Gaddafi was extremely delusional, just as we expected. However, this comes along with great chaos in Libya today, aggravated by foreign meddling be it Western or regional.

Syria: Between Libya and Egypt

And yet, the impression that prevails at present is that foreign intervention prevented the crushing of the Libyan uprising, which, had it occurred, would have terminated the revolutionary process throughout the Arab region. Intervention enabled the Libyan rebels to liberate their country from the clutches of their brutal dictator at a cost that pales in comparison to the price paid by Iraqis in their liberation from Saddam Hussein's tyrannical regime by way of a foreign invasion. The occupation of Iraq is finally coming to an end after eight miserable years, during the course of which the country reached a low point and paid an exorbitant human and material price, only to face now an obscure and menacing future.

The result of this contrast between Libya and Iraq is that, while the latter example was quite repulsive in the eyes of Syrians, the Libyan example has instilled within many a desire to emulate it. This is reflected in the increased requests for international military intervention following the liberation of Tripoli, to the point of calling the mobilization day on October 28 "No-Fly Zone Friday."

Yet, whoever imagines that the Libyan scenario could be replicated in Syria is sorely mistaken. The Syrian opposition must be aware that the cost of allowing direct foreign military intervention (as opposed to indirect intervention such as providing arms) in Syria will be much higher than in the Libyan case for several reasons, the most important of which may be summarized as follows:

The national opposition must not allow the regime to outbid it in the defense of the national cause, and it must realize that since Syria's territory is partially occupied by Israel with the support of Western states, it must not seek help from the enemies of Syria and its oppressors.—The military situation in

Syrian is very different from what it was in Libya. The latter country is characterized by the presence of urban centers separated by often vast stretches of quasi desert territory. In such circumstances, air power becomes essential, especially since the areas controlled by the Libyan rebels were almost devoid of supporters of the regime. Thus, the regime resorted to air power in its counter-revolutionary offensive, and foreign air support was therefore highly effective in protecting the rebel areas and limiting the movement of regime forces outside of inhabited areas, all this at a relatively limited cost to civilian life. By contrast, Syria's population density is much greater than Libya's, and so is the mix of opponents and supporters of the regime, preventing the Syrian regime from making extensive use of air strikes. Therefore, a no-fly zone over Syria will either have a very limited benefit if it is to remain a no-fly zone in the strictest sense, or it will have devastating consequences in killing and destruction if it is to take the form of an all-out air war against the regime as happened in Libya. Since the Syrian army's defensive capabilities are much more significant than those of Gaddafi's forces, the scale and intensity of the combat would be much greater in Syria, not to mention that the Syrian regime is not isolated as Gaddafi was and any foreign military intervention in Syria would thereby ignite the entire region, which is but a set of powder kegs.

Meanwhile, no Syrian city currently faces the danger of a large-scale massacre in the way Benghazi did, or even a fate comparable to that of the Syrian city of Hama in 1982, when the Assad regime was able to isolate it from the rest of the country.

The strength of the Syrian uprising lies in that it acquired a very broad extension, and the fact that the rebels did not make the mistake of taking up arms, which, had it happened, would have greatly weakened the momentum of the popular uprising and allowed the regime to eliminate it more easily.

The Syrian rebels have thus far relied upon forms of struggle such as night-time protests and Friday demonstrations (not for religious reasons, but because Fridays are official vacation days and it is dif-

ficult for the regime to prevent gathering in mosques), so that most of the participants do not get exposed. This style of guerilla-like demonstration is the appropriate method when a popular uprising faces brutal suppression by an overwhelming military force.

Unlike Gaddafi's caricatural regime, which years ago turned towards establishing strong economic, security, and intelligence cooperation with various Western states, the Syrian regime in the eyes of the US is still a stumbling block to its projects in the region, since it is allied with Iran and Hezbollah and sustains a range of Palestinian forces opposed to US-sponsored capitulation.

Acknowledging this reality does not in any way suggest that one must therefore refrain from supporting people's demands for democracy and human rights, whether in Syria or Iran. It requires, however, to be taken into account in the way the Iranian opposition does, which completely rejects foreign military intervention in the affairs of its country and defends its country's right to develop nuclear power in the face of Israeli-American threats that attempt to prevent it from doing so by claiming that Iran is developing nuclear weapons.

One of the principal focuses of the Syrian revolution's strategy must be to win the Syrian army's ranks over to the revolution's side. The Syrian opposition correctly criticizes the regime for its opportunism, citing its intervention in Lebanon in 1976 against the Palestinian resistance and the Lebanese National Movement, as well as its joining with the US-led coalition in the 1991 war against Iraq. Those who criticize the Syrian regime's duplicity with regard to the national cause must not accredit its claim that it is currently fighting Western powers' "agents," by requesting military intervention from those same Western powers. The national opposition must not allow the regime to outbid it in the defense of the national cause, and it must realize that since Syria's territory is partially occupied by Israel with the support of Western states, it must not seek help from the enemies of Syria and its oppressors. Were they to intervene, these powers

would surely strive to weaken Syria strategically just as they weakened Iraq.

Toppling a regime, no matter what the regime, is a strategic goal for which the means differ according to case and country. The strategy depends on the makeup of the regime that the revolutionaries are trying to bring down.

Let us consider the difference between the cases of Egypt and Libya for example. In Egypt the regular army as an institution was and remains the backbone of the regime. Mubarak's power emanated from and relied upon the army, but he did not "own" it. This made the popular uprising keen on keeping the army neutral in order to topple the despot. This strategy succeeded, although it fostered illusions among the masses that the army as an institution with its top brass could be a selfless servant of the people. Instead of honing the critical awareness of the people and the soldiers and warning them that the army's top brass would strive to preserve its privileges and control over the state, the principal forces of the opposition movement actually contributed to spreading illusions among the masses. The result is that the Egyptian revolution has remained incomplete; in fact, there are as much elements of continuity in the Egyptian regime as elements of change, if not more indeed.

In Libya, on the other hand, Gaddafi had dissolved the military institution and restructured it in the form of brigades bound to his person through tribal, familial and financial ties. Thus, it was impossible to rely on the neutrality of the military, let alone draw them to the side of the revolution; rather, it was inevitable that the way to topple the Libyan regime was through defeating its armed forces, in other words through war. Since the balance of military force between Gaddafi's forces and the virtually unarmed rebels was overwhelming, the entrance of an external factor into the equation was inevitable, whether in the form of arming the uprising (the best-case scenario) or through direct participation in the war between the rebels and the regime either by occupying the country (the worst-case scenario) or through bombing from a distance

without invasion, as happened in Libya. The result is that the change in Libya is much deeper than in Egypt because of the general collapse of the Gaddafi regime's institutions. Today, Libya is a country without a state, i.e. without an apparatus that monopolizes armed force, and nobody knows when a state will be rebuilt there, or what it will look like.

So where does Syria fit into this strategic equation? Actually, it falls somewhere in between the Egyptian and Libyan cases. In Syria, just as in Libya, the regime has surrounded itself with Special Forces bound to it by family, religious sect, and privilege. They need to be defeated if the regime is to fall. In this regard, the commander of the Syrian Free Army, Colonel Riyad al-As'ad, was right when he told *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* (5 November 2011) that "anyone who thinks that the Syrian regime will fall peacefully is dreaming."

However, because Israel occupies a piece of its territory, Syria, unlike Libya, has also a regular army based on universal conscription of young men, and whose soldiers and low-ranking officers reflect the makeup of the Syrian people from which their ranks are derived. Therefore, one of the principal focuses of the Syrian revolution's strategy must be to win the Syrian army's ranks over to the revolution's side.

The Role of the Army in the Opposition's Strategy

Direct military intervention in Syria, would convince the soldiers that what the regime kept claiming since the beginning of the uprising, i.e. that it is facing a "foreign conspiracy" that wants to subjugate Syria, has been true all along. Had the Syrian uprising been headed by a leadership with a strategic mindset (and here we see the limits of "Facebook revolutions"), it would have tried to extend opposition networks within the army while insisting that soldiers should not defect individually or in small groups but rather in the largest numbers possible. In the absence of leadership and strategy, soldiers and officers have begun to defect on their own

in an unorganized manner. The scope of defections has expanded in the past two months and continues to expand. These defections have embarrassed the political opposition, with some criticizing the defectors for threatening to divert the uprising from its peaceful path and others greeting the defectors while calling upon them not to turn their weapons on the regime. The latter is a suicidal proposition that defecting soldiers are right to scoff at.

The strategic task of winning the Syrian soldiers over to the side of the revolution should not contradict the popular demonstrations and their non-violent nature. Here again, the Syrian case combines elements of the Egyptian and Libyan experiences, i.e. crowds of peaceful demonstrators alongside military confrontations. The non-violence of popular demonstrations was, and still is, a basic component of the movement's momentum and of its massive character, including female participation. This momentum is itself a decisive factor in inciting the soldiers to rebel against the regime.

Thus, the greatest strategic predicament in Syria is how to combine the peaceful mass mobilization with the expansion of the military opposition and the armed confrontation without which the regime's forces will never be defeated and it will never fall. That is, unless one counts on some high-ranking officers from the top of the regime's hierarchy stepping out and forcing the ruling family to flee the country to Iran. If this were to happen, Syria would end up in a position similar to the Egyptian case, where a piece fell off the top of the pyramid without it collapsing entirely.

As for direct military intervention in Syria, whether in the form of an invasion or limited to bombing from afar, it would bring the trend of defections from the Syrian army to an end and unite its ranks in a confrontation that would convince the soldiers that what the regime kept claiming since the beginning of the uprising, i.e. that it is facing a "foreign conspiracy" that wants to subjugate Syria, has been true all along. The requests made by Riyad al-As'ad, the leader of the Syrian Free Army (in the above-quoted interview), for international intervention in order to "implement a no-fly zone or no-sail zone in Syria," and create a "secure zone in northern Syria that the Syrian Free Army can administrate" are at best further evidence of the lack of strategic vision among the leadership of the Syrian uprising. They are also a product of that blend of short-sightedness and emotional reaction to the viciousness of the regime that leads some of its opponents to hope for what could lead to a major historical catastrophe in Syria and the region as a whole.

Those who wish the victory of the Syrian people's uprising for freedom and democracy in a way that makes it possible to strengthen the homeland rather than undermine it, must formulate a position of utmost clarity on these fateful issues. It is not possible to simply ignore them in the name of unity against the regime, because the fate of the struggle and indeed the entire country hangs on these very questions.

First published Friday, November 18, 2011 on <http://english.al-akhbar.com/conten....>